

USING APPLIED THEATRE TO CURB GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN CALABAR MUNICIPALITY

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ABSTRACT

This study is set out to evaluate the use of Applied Theatre to curb gender based violence in Calabar Municipality. As objectives, this research set out to identify the nature of Gender based violence existent in Calabar Municipality, as well as employing the use of theatre to bring about change in behaviour. This study adopted Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory as the framework that backed the research. To gather data, this study adopted Descriptive Qualitative research design through focus group discussion to gather data. The Findings revealed that Gender based violence is existent within Ikot Ansa community. Results also revealed that Theatre is a viable strategy in the campaign against Gender based violence. Results also revealed that the residents of Ikot Ansa community are enthusiastic about the use of

performances to reflect the issues ongoing in the community; however there are limitations such as language barriers and lack of intervention programme for victims. The study research recommends that government of Calabar municipality should adopt Theatre as a major tool in consistently creating awareness within Ikot Ansa. This should be backed up by intervention programme and support from the State Government and non-governmental organisation to expressly assist victims.

Keywords: *Applied Theatre; Gender-Based Violence; Social Learning Theory; Participatory Communication;*

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, theatre is known to be built on the premise of entertainment. According to *Oxford Languages Dictionary* (2023), “to entertain” is to provide someone or a group of people with something enjoyable, or pleasurable that holds their attention for the period of time the entertaining object or occasion is perceived. Theatre comes from the Greek root of the word “to see.” The Forestburgh Playhouse, in an article that discusses what separates Theatre from other art forms, maintained that it is an art form that allows for the planned performance to be displayed on a stage for the entertainment of others. It is also a chance to tell a story through acting (Forestburgh Playhouse, 2024.). Also maintained that as entertainment, people derive pleasure and their feelings are aroused when they watch theatrical productions that comprise the synergy of music, dance, drama and so on. It uniquely helps in creating fun and relaxation (Forestburgh Playhouse, 2024).

However, Theatre does not only act as entertainment; it holds up a mirror to society and influences introspection. As an audience or a viewer, there are tendencies of discovering something new personally also relating to the world in general as they unfold in front of you. Theatre through performances teaches the society about itself, hoping to point out the attitudes and mindsets of current society. According to Igbe (2021) Participatory communication gives room for collective contribution, gather ideas and input of many people to solve a problem. Some scholars once said that participatory communication “is a tool of mobilisation which many researchers have used to get attention of their participants. Participatory Communication is concerned with the dissemination of relevant information that increases people's stock of knowledge and change their attitudes and values to enable them undertake and participate in the development process

The nature of theatre that goes beyond mere entertainment is enhanced with the concept of Applied Theatre. Applied theatre is an umbrella term for the use of

theatrical practices and creativity that take participants and audience members further than mainstream theatre. It is often in response to conventional people with real-life stories. John O'Toole and Margaret Lepp (2022) opined that Applied Theatre is the marriage of theatrical forms in non-traditional theatre spaces to explore issues of interest and concern to communities. It is used extensively in countering racism, AIDS awareness campaigns, gender equity issues, anti-homophobia campaigns and in many health promotion arenas (O'Toole & Lepp, 2022). To buttress this, Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston concurred that Applied Theatre is a practice which is designed to use theatre-based techniques as tools to discover and learn as well as to explore issues of concern to communities, to identify problems and actively rehearse solutions, and to provoke and shape social change (Prentki & Preston, 2009). Both maintained that Applied Theatre uses the elements of theatre performance to structure participatory theatre experiences for people. It eschews both functional role plays and simulations and also drama therapy to use theatre as a democratic process for the sharing of stories in safe and structured processes (Prentki & Preston, 2009).

The concept of Gender-based violence is violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately. It refers to any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can include violence against women such as domestic violence, men or children living in the same domestic unit. Although women and girls are the main victims of gender-based violence, it also causes severe harm to families and communities. Gender-based violence is one of many forms of violence. Violence is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as: "...the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation" (World Health Organization, 2002, p. 2).

This study is situated in Calabar, specifically Calabar Municipality in Cross River State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Calabar lies along the coastal region of southeastern Nigeria and serves as a major administrative, commercial, and tourism hub in the state. The people of Calabar are predominantly from the Efik ethnic group, though the municipality is cosmopolitan, hosting diverse ethnic groups due to migration, education, and commerce. The culture of Calabar is rich in festivals, traditional rites, music, dance, and storytelling traditions, which reflect a strong communal lifestyle. The famous Carnival Calabar exemplifies the city's vibrant performative and artistic culture.

Despite its cultural vibrancy and reputation as a peaceful city, Calabar Municipality

faces social challenges, including incidents of gender-based violence such as domestic abuse, sexual assault, and harmful gender norms rooted in patriarchal traditions. Cultural expectations surrounding gender roles sometimes silence victims and discourage reporting. Thus, using Applied Theatre to curb gender-based violence in Calabar Municipality aligns with the principles of participatory communication and social transformation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The crux of this study generally is to utilize Applied Theatre in curbing gender based violence in the society today. Specifically, the objectives include:

- i. To identify the various nature and types of Gender Based Violence that is existent in Calabar Municipality.
- ii. To ascertain the efficiency of theatre as a medium through which change can be communicated to victims of Gender Based Violence in Calabar Municipality.
- iii. To evaluate the perception of individuals on the existence of gender based violence in Calabar Municipality.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objectives of the study have been converted into the following research questions:

- i. What are the various nature and types of Gender-Based Violence existing in Calabar Municipality?
- ii. How efficient is Applied Theatre as a medium for communicating change to victims of Gender-Based Violence in Calabar Municipality?
- iii. What are the perceptions of individuals on the existence of Gender-Based Violence in Calabar Municipality?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conceptual Review of Gender based violence and Applied Theatre

Several scholarly works have been put forward towards understanding the concept of Gender-based violence. According to Cotter and Savage (2019), Gender-based violence (GBV) is a particular form of violence that is committed against someone based on their gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender. Similarly, the European Commission's *Gender Equality in Sport: Proposal for Strategic Actions 2014–2020* provides the following definition on the concept of Gender-based violence: “violence directed against a person because of that person's gender (including gender identity/expression) or as violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately” (European Commission, 2014). According to Bradbury-Jones et al. (2014), it is important to note that gender-based violence is a

separate and distinct category of violence because it recognises gender inequality, specifically the historical domination of men and women's and girls' subordinate status in society that serves to maintain an unequal balance of power.

To Russo (2020), the most commonly cited forms of GBV are physical, psychological, and sexual. It is worthy to note that these forms of GBV may occur individually or may be overlapping and occur together. For example, psychological violence is inherent in neglect and physical and sexual violence but can also be a stand-alone form of violence. Russo (2020) also maintains that in addition, economic violence is a separate form of gender-based violence which may include taking away or hiding money, underpaying, or preventing a partner from earning money. Others include cyber violence, which includes such acts as making threatening or degrading comments, sharing sexually explicit pictures without consent, and stalking in online environments (Al-Alosi, 2021).

According to Strunk and Locke (2019), gender-based violence includes micro-aggressions or those frequent experiences and behaviours that reinforce stereotypes, biases, and structural violence. Some examples of micro-aggressions include teasing, name-calling, and sexist or racist comments or jokes. Miller-Perrin and Perrin (2018) opined that these behaviours, which in isolation may be viewed as relatively minor and subtle, are included because they are not inconsequential. The concept of gender-based violence is an imbalance of power and is carried out with the intention to humiliate and make a person or group of people feel inferior and/or subordinate.

According to Bradbury-Jones et al. (2014), gender-based violence is recognised as a global human rights concern given its prevalence across developed and developing countries. This type of violence is deeply rooted in the social and cultural structures, norms and values that govern society and is often perpetuated by a culture of denial and silence. Gender-based violence can happen in both the private and public spheres and it affects women disproportionately. According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA, 2021), one in three women in Nigeria has experienced gender-based violence at some point in their lives. Gender-based violence remains a significant concern in many parts of Nigeria, and Cross River State is no exception. In 2020, at the UN–European Union Spotlight Initiative workshop organised in Calabar, Dr. Joy Ada-Onyechoh identified Calabar South, Calabar Municipality and Obanliku Local Government Areas as areas with high reported cases of gender-related violence, especially against women and girls (Christian, 2020).

Cross River State has been grappling with various forms of gender-based violence for many years. These acts of violence are evident in many forms, including domestic, verbal, and physical abuse, rape and sexual assault, incest, and female genital cutting. While gender-based violence has been prevalent in Calabar

Municipality despite measures taken by the State Government and private bodies, it continues to worsen as the underlying factors contributing to its spread are marginally ignored.

As an issue to be addressed, the effects of gender-based violence are overwhelming, from individual to community levels. Victims often suffer physical and psychological trauma leading to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Gender-based violence perpetuates cycles of violence among younger generations. Therefore, gender-based violence should be treated as a serious violation of human rights and a life-threatening health and protection issue. This research is therefore designed to address these issues using the concept of Applied Theatre.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Learning Theory

The study adopted Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory propounded in 1977, the theory states that most behaviour patterns are learned through modeling. According to the theory, a person observes other people and uses their behaviour as a model for future behaviour. This theory draws attention to vital aspect of the change processes and provides audience members with examples of socially accepted behaviour and those that are not socially acceptable through the projection of positive and negative role models. The process of change is facilitated when people shares stories about how to respond to commonly experienced problems. To achieve this however, playwright actively involve the target audience in the process of problem diagnosis to arrive at a workable solution which he in turn now projected through performance medium to show the generally acceptable behaviour based on the problem diagnosis jointly conducted with the target audience and also shows necessary actions needed to facilitate the desired behaviour change which will ultimately guarantee effective solution to the identified problem.

Research Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to examine the use of Applied Theatre in curbing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Calabar Municipality, with particular focus on the Ikot Ansa community. Data were gathered through two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) comprising 20 participants (10 in each group), held at Ikot Ansa Town Hall on 12 June 2025 and at Asim Ita Hall on 14 June 2025. Although the sample size may appear small, it is appropriate within qualitative research, which prioritises depth of insight rather than statistical generalisation. The size of the groups encouraged active participation, meaningful interaction and the attainment of data saturation within the community setting.

To enhance the robustness of the study, the FGDs were complemented by five key informant interviews conducted between 18 and 22 June 2025. The interviewees

included a community leader, a women's rights advocate, a youth representative, a religious leader and a representative of a local non-governmental organisation. In addition, relevant secondary sources such as books, scholarly journals and institutional reports were reviewed, including perspectives from Tim Prentki and Sheila Preston, as well as definitions provided by the World Health Organization. The data were analysed thematically and presented in descriptive form, ensuring triangulation, credibility and overall methodological rigour.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1: Age Distribution of Participants (N = 25)

Age Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–25	4	16%
26–35	8	32%
36–45	7	28%
46–55	4	16%
56 and above	2	8%
Total	25	100%

The table shows that the majority of participants (60%) fall within the 26–45 age bracket, representing the economically and socially active population. Youths aged 18–25 account for 16%, while participants aged 46 and above constitute 24%. This distribution ensures representation across different life stages and generational perspectives.

Table 2: Educational Background of Participants (N = 25)
Educational Level Frequency Percentage (%)

Primary Education	2	8%
Secondary Education	8	32%
Tertiary Education	15	60%
Total	25	100%

The table indicates that a significant proportion of participants (60%) possess tertiary education, while 32% have secondary education and 8% have primary education. The predominance of tertiary-educated respondents suggests that participants were sufficiently informed to engage critically with discussions on Gender-Based Violence and Applied Theatre.

Table 3: Occupational Distribution of Participants (N = 25)

Occupation Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Students	3	12%
Traders/Business (Traders, Entrepreneurs, Business Owners)	7	28%
Civil/Public Servants (including Retired Officer)	5	20%
Artisans/Farmers	3	12%
Professionals (Banker, Nurse, Teacher)	3	12%
NGO/Community/Religious Leaders	4	16%
Total	25	100%

The occupational distribution reflects diversity across economic and social sectors. Participants include students (12%), business actors (28%), public servants (20%), artisans and farmers (12%), professionals (12%), and NGO/community or religious leaders (16%). This wide occupational representation enhances the credibility of the study by incorporating varied socio-economic perspectives within the community.

COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING AND LIVED REALITIES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

One of the most dominant and recurring issues raised across the two focus group panels the Ikot Ansa Town Panel and the Asim Ita Hall Panel was the shared understanding of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) as a lived and familiar reality, rather than a distant or theoretical concept. All ten participants, made up of women and youths, demonstrated varying but complementary levels of awareness of what constitutes gender-based violence, often grounding their definitions in everyday experiences within the community.

During the Ikot Ansa Town Panel discussion, participants initially framed GBV as violence that is directed at a person because of their gender, with women identified as the most affected group. Participant 4 clearly stated that *“gender-based violence is a type of violence directed against a person because of that person's gender, and it is mostly common amongst women, especially domestic violence.”* Her view resonated strongly with other participants, prompting nods of agreement and follow-up comments that reinforced domestic and intimate partner violence as the most visible form of GBV in the community. Expanding on this definition during the Asim Ita Hall Panel, Participant 3 provided a more structural interpretation, stating that *“gender-based violence is an umbrella term for harmful acts of abuse perpetrated against a person's will and rooted in unequal power between men and women.”* This contribution shifted the discussion from individual acts of violence to the power dynamics and social structures that sustain such acts. Other participants built on this explanation, collectively acknowledging that GBV is not accidental but often reinforced by cultural expectations and gender norms.

As the discussion progressed, participants from both panels identified specific forms of gender-based violence they were familiar with or had witnessed. Participant 2, speaking during the Ikot Ansa Town Panel, emphasized physical violence, explaining that it includes *“kicking, slapping, beating, and threatening to attack someone physically, whether in public or private life.”* Her description sparked further interaction, as participants from the Asim Ita Hall Panel added that such acts often occur within homes and are rarely reported. Verbal and emotional abuse also featured prominently in the discussion. One participant described verbal violence as a form of GBV where *“words are used to invoke fear and gain control,”* including constant criticism, name-calling, and threats. This contribution led to a broader conversation on how verbal abuse is often minimized because it leaves no physical

marks, yet participants agreed that its psychological impact is profound.

Sexual violence was another critical issue raised, particularly during the Asim Ita Hall Panel. Participant 4 described it as *“any attempt to obtain a sexual act using force, regardless of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.”* She further explained that such violence often begins with unwanted comments and advances before escalating into assault. This prompted reflective silence among participants, after which Participant 1 added that sexual and other forms of GBV within intimate relationships are frequently overlooked because they are seen as marital obligations rather than violations.

The theme of intimate partner violence emerged strongly when Participant 1 asserted that many forms of GBV are hidden under marriage and family life. She stated that *“this kind of violence goes unnoticed because people believe what happens in marriage should stay in marriage.”* Participants from both panels agreed that this belief contributes to the invisibility of abuse and allows perpetrators to act without consequence. When participants were asked about personal experiences, responses became more cautious and emotionally charged. While some participants stated they had not personally experienced GBV, others acknowledged being victims but chose to remain guarded. Participant 10, speaking during the Asim Ita Hall Panel, shared a particularly poignant account, noting that *“gender-based violence has existed in my marriage, and I also grew up in a family where my mother was a victim of domestic violence.”* Her disclosure shifted the tone of the discussion, as participants recognized how GBV can be intergenerational, learned, and normalized over time.

Across both panels, there was a shared understanding that GBV is not only something that happens “elsewhere” but is deeply embedded in everyday community life. The interaction between participants revealed a collective realization that gender-based violence in Ikot Ansa is sustained by silence, cultural acceptance, and unequal power relations. Through their exchanges, the participants constructed a rich, community-based understanding of GBV, one that acknowledges its many forms, its personal and social dimensions, and its persistent presence within both public and private spaces.

THEATRE AS AN EFFECTIVE, ENGAGING, AND PARTICIPATORY MEDIUM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

A key theme that emerged from the focus group discussions was the perception of theatre as a highly effective and engaging medium for communicating social **change**, particularly for victims of gender-based violence (GBV). Participants, despite initially having limited exposure to live theatre performances, collectively acknowledged the potential of theatre to convey sensitive issues in ways that are emotionally resonant and culturally relatable. Several participants emphasised that

dramatized storytelling allows individuals to connect with the experiences portrayed, making complex issues like GBV more understandable. Participant 1 noted: *“when you watch people act out things that are happening in real life, it touches you more than when someone is just talking.”* This sentiment aligns with Prentki and Preston (2009), who argue that applied theatre combines performance and participation to create spaces where communities can explore social issues, reflect on behavior, and rehearse solutions without feeling threatened.

Participant 4 further highlighted theatre's dual function as both educational and entertaining, explaining: *theatre passes messages in a way that people enjoy, so they listen more and understand better.* This mirrors the concept of participatory communication, which emphasises engaging communities through culturally relevant, dialogic, and non-hierarchical methods to foster awareness and empowerment (Igbe, 2021). The idea is that participatory mediums like theatre are particularly effective for topics that are socially sensitive or stigmatized, such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, and other forms of GBV. Another important dimension identified was audience identification and validation. Participants noted that seeing scenarios reflective of their own realities through familiar settings, local language, and cultural expressions could empower victims by showing them that they are not alone. Participant 8 shared: *“when drama shows what women are passing through, some people will realize that what they are facing is not normal and that they can speak out.”* This finding is supported by O'Toole and Lepp (2013), who emphasize that applied theatre creates safe spaces for participants to recognize, discuss, and collectively respond to issues affecting them, fostering both awareness and action. The non-threatening nature of theatre was another advantage identified by participants. Unlike lectures, admonishments, or public awareness campaigns, theatre was perceived as less accusatory and more reflective, providing a platform for learning without fear of judgment. Participant 3 remarked: *“people don't feel attacked when watching drama; instead, they think about their actions.”* Such qualities align with participatory communication principles, which encourage engagement that is inclusive, empathetic, and community-driven (Igbe, 2021; Prentki& Preston, 2009).

The collective insights from participants demonstrate that theatre has several features that enhance its efficiency as a medium for communicating change: it is visual, emotionally engaging, culturally grounded, participatory, and non-confrontational. The findings suggest that applied theatre can function as a powerful participatory communication tool for raising awareness about GBV, stimulating community dialogue, validating victims' experiences, and encouraging behavioral and social change within Calabar Municipality.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AS A PREVALENT, NORMALIZED, AND UNDERREPORTED ISSUE

The focus group discussions revealed a strong consensus among participants that gender-based violence (GBV) is a prevalent and ongoing challenge within Calabar Municipality. Participants described GBV as occurring in multiple spaces, including homes, workplaces, markets, and streets, affecting women disproportionately but also impacting children and men in some cases.

Participant 1 emphasized the daily nature of GBV, stating: *“gender-based violence is something that happens almost every day, whether in homes, markets, or on the streets.”* Similarly, Participant 8 argued that the constant exposure to GBV has led to societal normalization: *“people have seen it so much that they don't even react again; it has become normal.”* These views indicate that while residents recognize the existence of GBV, its prevalence has become embedded in the community's perception of everyday life, reflecting what Bradbury-Jones et al. (2015) describe as the deeply entrenched structural and cultural roots of GBV that often lead to acceptance and underreporting.

Participants identified intimate and marital relationships as major sites where GBV occurs, often silenced under the guise of privacy or tradition. Participant 5 noted: *“when it happens between husband and wife, people say it is family issue and nobody wants to interfere.”* This aligns with Miller-Perrin and Perrin (2013), who highlight that domestic and intimate partner violence is often concealed due to social norms that prioritize family privacy over victim protection. Participant 3 further observed that fear of social stigma prevents victims from speaking out: *“even when people know it is wrong, they still keep quiet because they don't want to be blamed.”*

The focus group also illustrated that community awareness does not always translate into action, a challenge well-documented in participatory communication literature. Igbe (2021) notes that participatory communication aims to empower communities to critically engage with local issues rather than passively accepting them. In the context of GBV, this suggests that while residents may acknowledge the existence of violence, they are often not provided with platforms, tools, or encouragement to respond proactively. Participant 4 captured this point, stating: *“we know it is happening, but nobody talks about it openly, and even victims think they must endure it silently.”*

Importantly, participants reflected that cultural norms and traditional beliefs reinforce the invisibility of GBV. Participant 6 explained: *“some people say it is how women are supposed to be treated, or that men have the right to punish their wives, so women keep quiet.”* This resonates with the findings of Bradbury-Jones et al. (2015) and Russo (2006), who argue that GBV is sustained by unequal power dynamics and societal structures that normalize violence and limit victims' agency. The discussion also highlighted the intergenerational consequences of GBV, with participants noting that children who witness or experience violence may perpetuate it in

adulthood. Participant 10 observed: “*children see these things happen at home and think it is normal, and then they repeat it when they grow up.*” This is supported by WHO (2013), which underscores that exposure to GBV in childhood increases the risk of both victimization and perpetration later in life.

DATAANALYSIS

Community Understanding and Lived Realities of Gender-Based Violence

The data indicate that Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is not perceived as an abstract concept but as an embedded social reality within everyday life. However, participants' definitions reveal layered consciousness. At the surface level, GBV is framed as physical abuse directed mainly at women. At a deeper level, some participants articulated its structural roots in unequal power relations between men and women. This shift from behavioural descriptions (beating, slapping, coercion) to structural explanations (power imbalance, cultural norms) suggests emerging critical awareness within the community.

Importantly, the discussions reveal that knowledge of GBV is experiential rather than theoretical. Participants draw from lived encounters either personal or observed which gives their understanding emotional authenticity. Yet this experiential knowledge is paradoxical: while participants clearly identify various forms of violence, many simultaneously accept them as part of marital or domestic life. This tension exposes a cognitive dissonance recognition without full rejection. The internalisation of norms such as “what happens in marriage should stay in marriage” demonstrates how patriarchy operates not merely through force but through consent and social conditioning.

The study indicates that GBV is not episodic but cyclical. Violence is reproduced across generations through observation and normalisation. The fact that some participants became guarded when asked about personal experiences reflects fear, stigma and possibly trauma. This guardedness itself is data: it confirms that GBV remains a sensitive and potentially dangerous subject within the community. Furthermore, the hierarchy of violence implicit in participants' narratives deserves attention. Physical violence is universally condemned, but emotional and sexual violence within marriage are ambiguously treated. Sexual coercion in marriage being reframed as “obligation” exposes how cultural constructions of marital rights obscure consent. Therefore, GBV in Ikot Ansa is sustained not only by perpetrators but by embedded cultural scripts that redefine abuse as duty, discipline or privacy. The analysis demonstrates that GBV is simultaneously recognised, rationalised and normalised. It is embedded within social relations, reinforced by silence and legitimised by cultural expectations. Awareness exists, but it is constrained by structural power and social pressure.

THEATRE AS AN EFFECTIVE, ENGAGING, AND PARTICIPATORY MEDIUM FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Participants' responses reveal that theatre operates at both emotional and cognitive levels. Unlike lectures or awareness campaigns, theatre was described as “touching” and relatable. This indicates that emotional engagement precedes reflection. The participants' emphasis on feeling suggests that Applied Theatre activates empathy before intellectual judgement, making it particularly effective for sensitive issues such as GBV. Analytically, theatre functions as a mediating space between denial and confrontation. In contexts where direct accusations may provoke defensiveness, dramatized representation allows individuals to observe problematic behaviour at a symbolic distance. This symbolic distance reduces resistance and enables self-reflection. Participants' remarks that people “think about their actions” rather than feel attacked confirm theatre's non-threatening communicative power.

The validation dimension is equally significant. When participants noted that victims realise they are not alone, this points to theatre's role in breaking isolation. GBV thrives in silence and secrecy; theatre transforms private suffering into public dialogue. By staging familiar settings, language and cultural expressions, the performance anchors abstract discussions in recognisable reality. This localisation enhances credibility and relevance. Critically, theatre appears to bridge the awareness–action gap identified in the data. While residents acknowledge GBV, many feel powerless to challenge it. Theatre provides a participatory platform where issues can be collectively examined and alternative behaviours imagined. In this sense, it is not merely communicative but performative, it rehearses social change. Participants' responses suggest that Applied Theatre may disrupt entrenched norms by enabling communal reflection rather than imposing external judgement.

However, the data also imply limitations. Theatre alone cannot dismantle structural inequalities such as economic dependency or patriarchal authority. Its effectiveness depends on sustained engagement, follow-up dialogue and institutional support. Thus, while theatre is perceived as efficient and transformative, it must operate within broader socio-political frameworks to achieve lasting change.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AS A PREVALENT, NORMALISED, AND UNDERREPORTED ISSUE

The data strongly indicate that GBV is perceived as widespread and routine. Statements such as “it happens almost every day” reflect normalisation. This normalisation is not synonymous with acceptance, but rather habituation. Repetition has dulled collective outrage. When participants state that people “don't even react again,” it signals moral fatigue, a community desensitised by constant exposure. The concealment of violence under “family privacy” reveals how cultural norms protect perpetrators. Domestic violence is reframed as a private matter, thereby restricting external intervention. This demonstrates how social boundaries around marriage

shield abuse from scrutiny. Fear of stigma further compounds under-reporting. Participants' acknowledgment that victims remain silent to avoid blame indicates that accountability is often reversed victims, rather than perpetrators, risk social sanction. The data also expose structural barriers between awareness and action. Although participants recognise GBV as harmful, few mechanisms appear available for reporting or support. This gap suggests institutional weaknesses or lack of trust in formal systems. Silence therefore becomes both a coping strategy and a survival mechanism.

Inter-generational transmission further complicates the issue. When children witness violence and later reproduce it, GBV becomes culturally embedded. This cyclical pattern indicates that intervention must target not only current victims but also socialisation processes within families. Analytically, the persistence of GBV in Ikot Ansa reflects a convergence of factors: patriarchal ideology, economic dependency, stigma, cultural silence and weak enforcement mechanisms. The data show that GBV is not accidental but structurally maintained. It is socially tolerated through reinterpretation “discipline”, minimised through hierarchy “verbal abuse is not serious”, and hidden through privacy norms.

CONCLUSION

This research has given the light and emphasis on the existence of gender based violence in IkotAnsa community, and presented the use of theatre and drama as an effective strategy to address these issues. Therefore, the following conclusions can be drawn to the issues raised, data gathered and analysed as well as the summary given. This research concludes that drama can be seen and used as an effective tool in the communication of good moral values bringing about change in the social, psychological and behavioural state of individuals today, in the case of the residents of IkotAnsa, the use of drama is effective in addressing the issue of gender based violence.

This research also concludes that with conscious representation of the society, drama is essentially effectively in send important messages across the audience while entertaining them as well. In the case of the residents of IkotAnsa, drama experimented in this research sought to reflect the issues of the study area which included domestic, sexual, physical and verbal violence. The performance created a form of awareness by highlighting some of the issues, as well as recommending ways to solve these issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study made the following recommendations

- i. This study recommends that parents should make efforts which will be directed at addressing the issue of gender based violence within the Ikot Ansa.

- ii. Government of Cross River state should make the necessary step to address the issue of Gender based violence in IkotAnsa, there should be the adoption of Theatre as a major tool in consistently creating awareness on the issue.
- iii. This research recommends that the ministry of culture and information should adopt theatrical events to educate, inform and create awareness on gender based violence.
- iv. This research also recommends that the Government of Cross River State and non-governmental organisations should make attempts to organize events with the sole aim of helping victims of gender based violence.

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