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IMPACT OF FARMERS-HERDSMEN CONFLICT ON THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF GIRLS AND WOMEN IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Statement of the problem: Violence in Benue State between farmers and herdsmen has assumed an intractable phenomenon. This conflict has a high level of adverse effect on health and well-being of inhabitants of the state especially rural dwellers who are the main victims of violent attacks. While every member of the affected community suffers directly or indirectly as a result of this violence, women and girls seem to be the most vulnerable group aside children. Consequently, conscious efforts aimed at meeting real and perceived health and safety needs of vulnerable groups in the conflict areas of Benue State Nigeria, transcends governance to human right. The objective of this study is to have a better understanding of the impact of this conflict on the health of girls and women and insight into the epidemiological impact and to document the traditional methods of coping with the impact of the conflict.

Methodology: the phenomenological research method was utilized with in- depth interviews and focus groups group discussions.

Findings: All the girls interviewed were afraid of going back to school due to the fear of abduction and sexual harassment with an overall sense of helplessness and the inability of men to improve safety and security. Some of the health problems mentioned by women were: physical injuries due to gun shots, hours of migration and relocation or injuries sustained during flight from the herdsmen. Hunger and malnutrition and psychological disturbances such as nightmares and trauma were mentioned frequently especially by widows.

Conclusion and Recommendation: Women and girls feel traumatized and want help and support however their symptoms of distress are not recognized. Recommendations are made for the development of short, medium and long term measures with deep understanding for building on traditional mechanisms and related coping techniques that existed in the conflict community.