

## Review of Selected Newspaper Coverage of Domestic Violence in Nigeria

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### Abstract

The general objective of the study was to investigate Nigerian newspaper reportage of domestic violence in Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined: volume of coverage of domestic violence stories; story sources; frames used in reportage; and themes employed in the articles. Three daily Nigerian newspapers were purposively selected for the research, namely, *Daily Sun*, *the Guardian*, and *Vanguard* newspapers. A total of 252 editions of these newspapers were analysed using composite week sampling technique from January to December 2017. Coverage for each newspaper includes Daily Sun 7 (21%), The Guardian 14(42%), and Vanguard 12(36%). These show that 33 stories on domestic violence were covered from the 252 editions sampled, indicating a low volume of coverage. This illustrates that domestic violence is an under-reported crime in Nigeria. This further indicates that the depth of coverage was substandard with zero emphases made on educating the audience on the dangers of domestic violence to society. Other findings include nine stories sources reportage of domestic violence. These including; neighbours 8(24%), victim's families/friends 5(15%), police 5(15%), victims 4(12%), perpetrators 3(9%), government agencies 3(9%), court 3(9%), NGOs 1(3%) and unspecified sources 1(3%). Furthermore, five types of frame are used for reportage domestic violence in Nigeria newspapers. These include among others, human interest frame 17(52%), conflict frame 9(27%), responsibility frame 4(12%), consequence frame 2(6%) and morality frame 1(3%). Based on the findings, five remmendations were made, including that the content and language adopted inthe reportage should call out domestic violence for what it is, placing the blame where it belongs.

**Keywords:** Domestic, Violence, Sexual, Psychological, Trauma, Content, Analysis, Newspaper

### Introduction

Domestic violence is abuse against someone sharing the same house with an abuser. It does not always come as physical assault but could also be sexual, financial, digital, religious and psychological. Domestic violence has become a trendy discourse in Nigerian society. It is so predominant that the stories are often circulating on social

media. This vice has claimed numerous lives and has destroyed countless marriages.

Globally, the victims of domestic violence are principally women. Many African and Asian countries justify domestic violence based on infidelity, cooking flaws, lack of respect, or disobedience to the husband and his people. Nwajiuba (2011), cited in

Adebayo and Kolawole (2013), concurs by stating that there appears to be a natural gender role disparity, which has resulted in inequality in opportunities between men and women in the world.

Uzoma (2017) affirms domestic violence occurs in all settings and among varied socioeconomic, religious and cultural groups. The overwhelming global burden of domestic violence is borne by women. It is a universal burden with serious public health and social implications. Comparably, Agbese's (2021) study shows that the episodic framing utilised by the newspapers validated men's behaviour and blamed the women for the abuse they suffered. Similarly, according to the World Health Organization (2021), 641 million and up to 753 million married/partnered women aged 15 years and older had been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence at least once since the age of 15.

Adebayo (2014) reported that while it is a fact that women suffer as victims of domestic violence, it is also a fact that men suffer as victims of domestic violence. While the majority of domestic violence victims are women, male-oriented abuse occurs more often than many think. Naturally, men are stronger than women, but that does not necessarily make it easier for them to have their way all the time.

In Nigeria, there are insufficient data on domestic violence. This is often due to the victim's silence because of fear, shame, stigmatization, and lack of proper documentation. This silence is universal. The available report indicates that the under-reporting of domestic violence is almost universal and may be due to the sensitive nature of the subject (Adebayo, 2014).

Nevertheless, research conducted by the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (2019) indicates that 31 per cent of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence, and 9 per cent have experienced sexual violence, 6 per cent of women have experienced physical violence during pregnancy. Furthermore, 36 per cent of ever-married women have experienced spousal physical, sexual, or emotional violence. The prevalence of one or more of these forms of spousal violence was higher in 2018 than in 2008 (31%) and 2013 (25%) (National Population Commission and International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, 2019).

The problem lies in the social structure. In a patriarchal society like Nigeria, men are "demigods," while women are expected to worship them. These men supremacy orientation is not developed spontaneously, rather they are visual images inculcated in women as they grow and are often passed down from one generation to another. Most Nigerian women, especially the uneducated ones, are influenced into accepting this injustice as the norm. Similarly, Ishola (2016) stated that erroneously, wife battering is considered a "private affair" of the home and "culturally" acceptable; it is considered a "normal way of life" and even a "sign of love".

All the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, have strong patriarchal structures that justify domestic violence and injustice against women. In a male-dominated society like Nigeria, women are expected to be submissive at all times, with no right to challenge their spouses. It can often lead to a "mental reboot," as has been described by some abusers.

Bakare, Asuquo, and Agomoh (2010) emphasize the relevance of the media to society and its importance as a tool for social change. They stress the use of television, radio, and newspaper to curb violence against women through continuous public education to raise awareness among the Nigerian populace. Owusu-Addo et al. (2018) indicate that 92 per cent of the articles framed violence against women as incident-based (Episodic), and 8 per cent framed these stories with a broader social context of the incident (Thematic).

Mwai (2016) discovered that just 28.0 percent of the data came from news analysis, while 72.0 percent was gathered from the news category. According to the data, 12.0 percent of the items were placed on pages 2 and 3, 76.0 percent were placed inside the pages, while lead articles made up 8.0 percent of the total. Additionally, most of the stories were reported on less than a quarter of pages (36.0%). The findings show that the stories on gender-based violence were given comparatively little size and space.

Various frames are used in newspaper coverage. These include: *Human interest Frame* - This is when a story provides a human example or human face and their testimonies. *Responsibility Frame* - This is when the story suggests that an individual or group should take action on the issue. *Morality Frame* - This is when the story involves cultural, religious, or human-interest perspectives, often offering social prescriptions on how to behave towards the problem. *Consequences Frame* - This is when the story mentions the impact of domestic violence on the individual, society, economy, or country, which may include health, economic, or political consequences. *Conflict Frame* -

This is when the story provides two or more opposing views or statements.

Nzuma (2015) found a total of 136 news articles from *The Namibian* and 130 from the *New Era*. The study used the general frames developed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). The Morality frame (58.6%); Responsibility frame (14.2%); Consequence frame (13.2%); Human-interest frame (12.8%); and Conflict frame (3.0%), were regularly utilised in both newspapers.

According to Sutherland, Eastaerl, Holland, and Vaughan's (2019) study, the police were the most frequently used external source of information, accounting for close to a third of all quotes or paraphrases in the news. The major frame of news items was categorised according to whether it was episodic (61%), thematic (21%), or a mixture approach (18%).

Onyebuchi, Nwagbara, Peter David, and Eze-Weluche found that domestic violence received only infrequent coverage, with 52 (22%) stories on the topic and 188 (78%) stories on non-domestic violence. Further investigation revealed that 45 (87%) of the stories were hidden on the interior pages of the coded newspapers, while just 7 (13%) made it to the cover page. Additionally, an examination of assaulted men and women revealed that 3 (6%) of the victims were male and 49 (94%) were female.

Akarika, Ikon, and Kierian (2019) on Uyo residents' perception of selected newspaper coverage of gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria uncover that respondents' level of satisfaction with *DailySun* and *Vanguard* newspaper's coverage of gender-based violence stories in Nigeria was under par. This was evident from the data, as (65%) were

unsatisfied, (34%) were satisfied and (1%) were indecisive.

According to Ekweonu (2020), the majority of the stories (57.3%) were found inside the sampled newspapers, while the remaining stories (42.7%) were found on the front, back, and centre spread pages. The survey also reveals that NGOs were the source for 32.4% of the stories, followed by human rights (30.1%), the Ministry of Women's Affairs (20%), and government interventions (17.3%). The study concludes that domestic abuse against women received less coverage from the Nigerian media during the lockdown.

Overall, the studies reviewed show low reportage, a lack of extensive analysis, and inadequate page placement. Thus, it becomes essential for newspaper outlets to implement the agenda-setting media theory and framing media theory in their reportage, especially on topics of public concern.

McCombs (2011) deliberates on the agenda-setting theory as he posits that the power of the news media to set a nation's agenda, and direct public attention to a few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence. The audience, based on the emphasis placed on the news, invariably considers this information gained from the media newsworthy.

Similarly, framing media theory provides the context for understanding communication by including and centring on certain topics (Bowen, 2008). News framing explains the practice of thinking about news and story content within a familiar context (Arowolo, 2017). Framing could make a greater emphasis on the topic. The patterns and slants employed to present these messages would make them more relatable.

The purpose of the study was to ascertain the level of coverage given to domestic violence stories by the sampled newspapers in 2017, tagged "a year of deadly domestic violence cases" (Punch newspaper online, 2017). More so, *The Guardian* newspaper affirms that Lagos state recorded a 100 per cent increase in domestic and sexual violence by October 2017 (Salau, Awodipe, & Celestine, 2017).

Countless domestic violence cases involving regular Nigerians, politicians, and celebrities characterized the year 2017. The internet was swamped with varied domestic violence cases, resulting in 2017 being tagged by punch newspaper online (2017) as the year of deadly domestic violence cases. The traditional media, especially the newspaper, has been gravely criticized as being passive and acting more like a lapdog on issues of public concern, such as domestic violence (Ekweonu, 2020). Hence, it becomes pertinent to analyse how the sampled newspapers reported and framed domestic violence stories during this period when domestic violence was at its apex in Nigeria.

### **Objectives of the study**

The general objective of this study was to investigate how selected newspapers covered domestic violence stories (DVS) in Nigeria from January to December 2017. Specifically, the study determined:

1. volume of coverage of DVS in terms of the number of times DVS appeared in the sampled newspapers.
2. sources of DVS covered by the newspapers.
3. frames used in reportage of DVS in the newspapers.
4. themes used in reporting DVS in the newspapers.

5. level of prominence accorded to DVS in terms of depth of coverage and page placement

### **Methodology**

**Area of Study:** The Area of the study was Nigeria. According to Adewuyi (2023), Nigeria currently has over 100 newspapers that inform the public about the daily events in the country.

**Design of the study:** The study adopted the content analysis method of research for examining the manifest and semiotic contents of publications. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) defined content analysis as any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information.

**Population for the study:** The population of this study included all the editions published by the three sampled newspapers: *Daily Sun*, *The Guardian* and *Vanguard* newspapers for the period of one year (January 2017 to December 2017). These amounted to 1095 editions. The figure was arrived at by multiplying the study period of one year (365 days) by the number of newspapers under study (three newspapers). Therefore,  $365 \times 3 = (1095)$ . Hence, a total number of 1095 of editions of the selected newspapers constituted the population for the study.

**Sample for the study:** Three newspapers were purposively selected (*Daily Sun*, *The Guardian*, and *Vanguard*) for the study. The sample size includes all the editions published by the three selected newspapers from January 2017 to December 2017. The newspapers selected are among the top ten newspapers in the country.

However, they are the top ten newspapers, which have been selected based on their news content credibility and their circulation within the country.

The choice of the three sampled newspapers was because they made it to the first five out of the ten newspapers selected based on news content credibility and wide circulation by Adewuyi (2023).

In determining the sample size, the researchers adopted the composite week approach. According to Riffe, Aust, and Lacy (1993) cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p. 163) "a composite week sampling technique was superior to both random and consecutive day sample when dealing with newspaper or magazine contents". This study analysed 84 editions per newspaper for one-year (seven days in a week multiplied by 12 months =  $84 \times 3$  newspapers) amounting, to 252 editions for the three sampled newspapers.

**Instrument for data collection:** Instrument for data collection was code sheet. It is the most appropriate tool for analysing the contents of the selected newspapers. The code sheet contained the prepared content categories used in gathering data from the newspapers. The validated code sheet containing the prepared content categories was employed to objectively record and organise the relevant data available in the articles and place them accordingly.

**Data collection method:** Quantitative research method, which involves quantifying data, was utilised to retrieve recorded communication (hard copies of the newspapers) from the newspaper archives of the Nnamdi Azikiwe Library, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

**Data analysis techniques:** Data were analysed using frequencies and percentages. These were presented in tables. The Tables comprise data from the domestic violence stories collected

from the selected newspapers for this study. **Findings of the study**

**Table 1: Frequency (F) and Percentage (%) of Volume of Coverage given to Domestic Violence Stories as compared to stories on politics in the Selected Dailies**

Newspapers	Domestic Violence stories (F %)
<i>Daily Sun</i>	7 (21%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	14(42%)
<i>Vanguard</i>	12(36%)
	<b>33 (100%)</b>

Table 1 shows that 33 stories were retrieved on domestic violence from the 252 editions studied. The year 2017 was tagged the year of deadly domestic violence cases. Regardless of its prevalence on social media, what exist in the newspapers were snippets of information about the issue. This indicates that coverage of domestic violence was under par.

**Table 2: Frequency (F) and Percentage (%) of Story Sources Identified by the Newspapers in the Reportage of Domestic Violence**

Story sources	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Frequency /Percentage (F %)
Government agencies	1	1	1	3 (9%)
Police	1	2	2	5 (15%)
Victims	-	2	2	4 (12%)
Perpetrators	1	1	1	3 (9%)
Victim's families/friends	1	2	2	5 (15%)
Neighbours	2	3	3	8 (24%)
NGOs	-	1	-	1 (3%)
Court	1	1	1	3 (9%)
Unspecified sources	-	1	-	1 (3%)
	7	14	12	<b>33 (100)</b>

Table 2 shows major source of information reported by the newspapers studied were the neighbours (24%); these reports were their testimonies while being interrogated by the police or journalists after a domestic violence incident. This implies that domestic violence is highly under-reported

because if the victims of domestic violence were bold enough to report this crime to the police, government agencies or even their Non-Governmental counterparts these three groups could have been the highest sources of domestic violence stories.

**Table 3: Frequency (F) and Percentage (%) on Types of Frames Used for Reportage of Domestic Violence in Nigerian Newspapers**

Frames	<i>Daily sun</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Frequency/Percentage (F %)
Human Interest Frame	3	6	8	17(52%)
Responsibility Frame	1	1	2	4(12%)
Morality Frame	-	1	-	1(3%)
Consequence Frame	-	2	-	2(6%)
Conflict Frame	3	4	2	9(27%)
	7	14	12	33(100%)

Table 3 shows that the dominant frame employed in the reportage was the human-interest frame. The Table also shows conflict frame has 9(27%). This is second highest frame used. The data

from this Table illustrate that the story was drafted to ignite empathy and not to educate the public on the dangers of domestic violence to society.

**Table 4: Frequency (F) and Percentage (%) on Themes used for Reportage of Domestic Violence in Nigerian Newspapers**

Themes	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>The Guardians</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Frequency/Percentage (F %)
Episodic	6	13	12	31 (94%)
Thematic	1	1	-	2 (6%)
	7	14	12	33 (100%)

Table 4 shows that almost all the articles (94%) were reported using the episodic theme. Episodic themes are usually straight news stories and are often reported as the story unfolds. They lack wide-angle coverage of the issue reported. Thematic themes are detailed and approach stories following an in-

depth lens, therefore, stories like features, editorial, and opinion articles are some articles that employ the thematic approach. The data shows that a vast majority of the articles were news stories and only two articles were holistically analysed.

**Table 5: Frequency (F) and Percentage (%) on the Level of Prominence Accorded to Stories on Domestic Violence in Terms of Depth of Coverage and Page Placement**

Depth of Coverage	<i>Daily Sun</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Vanguard</i>	Frequency/Percentage (F %)
Full page	-	-	-	-
Half page	1	4	1	6 (18%)
Quarter page	6	9	10	25 (76%)
Below quarter	-	1	1	2 (6%)
	7	14	12	33 (100%)

**Page Placement**

*Continue in the next page*

Front Page	-	-	-	-
Back Page	-	-	-	-
Centre Spread	-	-	-	-
Inside Page	7	13	12	33 (100%)
	7	13	12	<b>33 (100%)</b>

Table 5 shows the depth and page placement of the analysed articles on domestic violence. It was measured by the column/inches; the stories fit into and the positions in the article were placed. It clearly shows that none of the stories was recorded on a full page and more than half of the stories were reported on a quarter page (76%). Furthermore, all the stories (100%) were placed on the inside pages of the three selected Nigerian newspapers, indicating incomprehensive and shallow reportage.

### Discussions

The purpose of this study was to review the coverage of domestic violence in selected newspapers in Nigeria. This study spans from January to December 2017. The aim was to verify if 2017 was a year of deadly domestic violence cases in Nigeria, as alleged by several online articles. Out of the thirty-three articles gotten from the 252 editions of the three sampled newspapers, it was apparent that the Nigerian press gave the menace little attention. There were countless reports on social media and the internet on domestic abuse across the nation. However, they are scarcely enough stories on this subject in the mainstream media to portray 2017 as a year of deadly domestic violence cases. A study by Onyebuchi, Nwagbara, Peter David, and Eze Weluche (2021) revealed that domestic violence received a low frequency of coverage as stories about domestic violence were 52 (22%) and non-domestic violence stories 188 (78%).

Akarika, Ikon, and Kierian (2019) added that the respondents' level of satisfaction with *the Daily Sun and Vanguard* newspaper's coverage of gender-based violence stories in Nigeria was under par. Similarly, Nkwam-Uwaoma, Ojiakor-Umenze, and Nwamadu (2020) averred that the coverage of female domestic violence was quite low.

The sources category determines the primary source of domestic violence stories. These results show the neighbours as the key sources of the stories, implying that the issue is highly under-reported. The victims were not bold enough to report this crime to the police, government agencies, or NGOs. These three groups could have been the highest sources of domestic violence stories, not the neighbours. The following authors found results contrary to the finding of the study. Nzuma (2015) avers that the result gotten shows that the newspapers relied heavily on the police for VAW information for their publications. Furthermore, Sutherland, Eastaer, Holland, and Vaughan (2019) reveal that the police were the most commonly used external source of information, with close to a third of all the news quoting or paraphrasing the police. Ekweonu (2020) avers that NGOs (32.4%) were the source with the highest number, followed by (30.1%) from human rights, (20%) from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and (17.3%) from government interventions.

The dominant frame employed was the human-interest frame. These stories provided a human example or human



face and their testimonies in the reportage. It implies that the stories aimed at attracting empathy rather than proffering solutions that would mitigate the situation.

Nzuma (2015) study disagrees with this finding as it states that the frequently utilised frame was the Morality frame (58.6%), which showed the cultural, religious and human-interest perspectives. Comparably, Agbese (2021) stated that the research made use of episodic framing, which validated the men's behaviour and blamed the victims for the abuse they suffered.

The dominant theme was the episodic theme (new stories). The episodic theme is usually straight to the point, as opposed to the thematic theme (editorial, feature article, opinion article, etc.), which deals with the subject in greater depth and is written in an inventive and detailed manner. The finding implies that the media keep the public abreast of the latest stories on domestic violence without diverging into the causes, effects, challenges, consequences, and preventive measures of domestic violence. The result aligns with the study conducted by Owusu-Addo et al. (2018), which reported that (92%) of the articles framed violence against women as incident-based (Episodic), and (8%) framed these stories with the broader social context of the incident (Thematic). The research finding of Mwai (2016) is also in line with this finding as the result shows that most of the stories available on gender-based violence had news as the majority (72%), suggesting that gender-based reports were not paramount to the respective newspapers sampled. Additionally, Sutherland, Eastaer, Holland and Vaughan (2019) show that the News

reports were coded using the episodic theme (61%).

The study on page placement found that the three sampled dailies placed all the stories on domestic violence on the inside pages. There were no stories on the cover page, back page, or centre spread, indicating a deficiency in prominence. Front pages are cardinal in drawing the reader's attention to a particular story. The information on the front page determines if the reader would proceed to the inside pages. The finding concurs with that of Onyebuchi, Nwagbara, Peter David, and Eze Weluche (2021), which uncovered that only 7 (13%) stories made it to the cover page, and (87%) stories stashed on the inside pages of the coded newspapers. Mwai (2016) also found similar results as the study discloses that a majority of (76.0%) were placed inside the pages of the newspapers. Ekweonu (2020) affirms that (57.3%) of the stories were inside the pages of the sampled newspapers, and the remaining (42.7%) fell under the back, front, and centre spread pages. Additionally, Nzuma's finding on the level of prominence concurs with the finding as it shows that the analysed newspapers failed to give precedence to stories on violence against women. Nkwam-Uwaoma, Ojiakor-Umenze, and Nwamadu (2020) state that the study demonstrates that female domestic violence stories received inadequate attention.

The column/inches the stories fit into measured the depth of coverage of domestic violence stories in the selected newspapers. The data also showed that (76%) of the stories were reported on quarter pages. Relegating most of the stories to quarter pages suggests that domestic violence is not a topical issue. The research finding of Mwai (2016) and

Nzuma (2015) support this research question. They aver that in terms of size and space allocation, the sampled newspapers failed to give foremost priority to gender-based violence, as the largest size and space occupied by any of the stories was three-quarters of a page. Many of them were merely brief or round-ups.

### Conclusion

This study concludes that domestic violence was under-reported by the three Nigerian Newspapers sampled as they failed woefully in giving adequate coverage, preference, in-depth analysis, and the prominence required for such a story. Meanwhile, social media and blogs were awash with domestic violence stories which happened across the country and beyond during the year under study. Therefore, the media should ensure DVS are prioritized by attaching relevance to these stories, thus, making it a public discourse.

### Recommendations

Considering the findings of this research, the researcher recommends the following;

1. The content and language adopted in the reportage should call out domestic violence for what it is, placing the blame where it belongs.
2. Active language should be employed in addressing gender-based violence to expunge the societal beliefs and stereotypes surrounding this crime.
3. Extensive coverage of the issue is crucial, as capturing and conveying a detailed analysis will be vital in eliciting the intended response and reaction from the public.
4. The print media should ensure trendy stories are reported as they unfold to cater for the elites who do not

consider stories on social media credible.

5. The traditional media should lead and not follow, hence, the need to establish and sustain a powerful online presence that provides credible and verifiable reports.

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