A 2023 Research Report on:

The status of Media Coverage of Violence against Women and Girls in Nigeria: A Review of the Policy Guidelines.

2023

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ABOUT THE STUDY

The first report Review of the News coverage of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) examined the frequency, framing, and extent of VAWG reporting by analysing online news stories in major papers from January to June 2022. Despite some coverage, under-reporting of certain issues persisted along with insensitive language use. In this second report, Review of the Media Policy Guidelines, we examine the regulatory framework for media coverage on violence against women and girls in Nigeria. This study pinpoints strategies for improving local and national policies for media outlets that cover reports on violence against women and girls. The study is navigated through the following questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What policies or guidelines do media organisations adhere to when covering violence against women and girls, and are they suitable?

2. How do media practitioners in Nigeria communicate the issue of violence against women and girls?

3. In what ways can the current policies be improved?

This report reviews a range of scholarship and industry reports. Using surveys and secondary data, this study examines media coverage of violence against women and girls. Additionally, it gives a brief overview of the crucial regulatory matters encompassing media organisations. This report provides key recommendations for decision-making bodies.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATIONS

African Women in Media (AWiM) is an international Non-governmental Organisation dedicated to making media industries more favourable for African women and transforming the depiction of African women in media.

AWiM's approach includes training, research, advocacy, and partnerships. Our approach yields benefits such as knowledge sharing and networking for women in media. The "Reporting Violence Against Women and Girls in Nigeria" project was created by AWiM to tackle the problem of reporting on this issue. The objective of the project, spanning three years, is to cultivate the capabilities of women journalists, and implement investigative initiatives. This project also includes conducting research on how media reports on violence against women and girls, and violence against women journalists while on the job.

The project is designed to increase awareness of ethical and sensitive reporting principles for violence against women and girls. This research on violence against women and girls in Nigeria will support the advocacy for a gender policy framework that requires improved media coverage and investigative measures for such cases.

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

AViM   Africa Women in Media

GBV   Gender Based Violence

NBC   National Broadcasting Commision

NITDA   National Information Technology Development Agency

NPC   Nigerian Press Council

UN   United Nations

UNDP   United Nations Development

UN Women   United Nations Women

SDGs   Sustainable Development Goals

VAWG   Violence Against Women and Girls

WHO   World Health Organisation

KEY DEFINITIONS

Violence against women and girls is defined as any act that is based on gender and can cause physical, sexual, or mental harm to them (UN Women 2023 and UN women Africa)[12]

RESOURCES:

✳ https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence#:~:text=Violence%20against%20women%20and%20girls%20is%20defined%20as%20any%20act,public%20or%20in%20private%20life.

✳ https://africa.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/faqs/types-of-violence-1

THE PROBLEM STATEMENT
Introduction

Globally, violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains the most widespread human rights violation, affecting one-third of all women (an estimated 736 million) during their lives (WHO 2021). Article 2 of the UN Declaration (1993) defines violence against women as encompassing different manifestations, like domestic violence, rape, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation (FGM) and more. These acts involve physical, sexual, or psychological harm targeting women and girls specifically because of their gender.

A distinct form under the violence against women and girls' umbrella is female genital mutilation, which over 200 million women and girls aged 15-49 have undergone the practice, especially in 31 African/Middle Eastern countries (UNDESA, 2020). Though sometimes mislabelled as gender-based violence, female genital mutilation only targets females. Other prevalent violence against women and girls acts include intimate partner violence, online harassment, forced marriage, and commercial sexual exploitation through trafficking.

This far-reaching crisis highlights the need to combat all manifestations of violence against women and girls through comprehensive prevention and response efforts. Several countries have taken action to stop violence against women and girls; as an illustration, at least 158 countries have passed laws on domestic violence, and 141 countries have laws on sexual harassment in employment (UNWomen, 2023). Women who experience violence seek assistance in less than 40% of cases, as per UNDESA 2015.

In Nigeria, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs' National Gender-Based Violence dashboard documented 23,499 cases of violence against women and girls in since 2020, and only 297 perpetrators were convicted, which is a worrisome trend (see Figure 1 below).

RESOURCES:

❄ National Population Commission NPC/Nigeria and ICF. 2019.
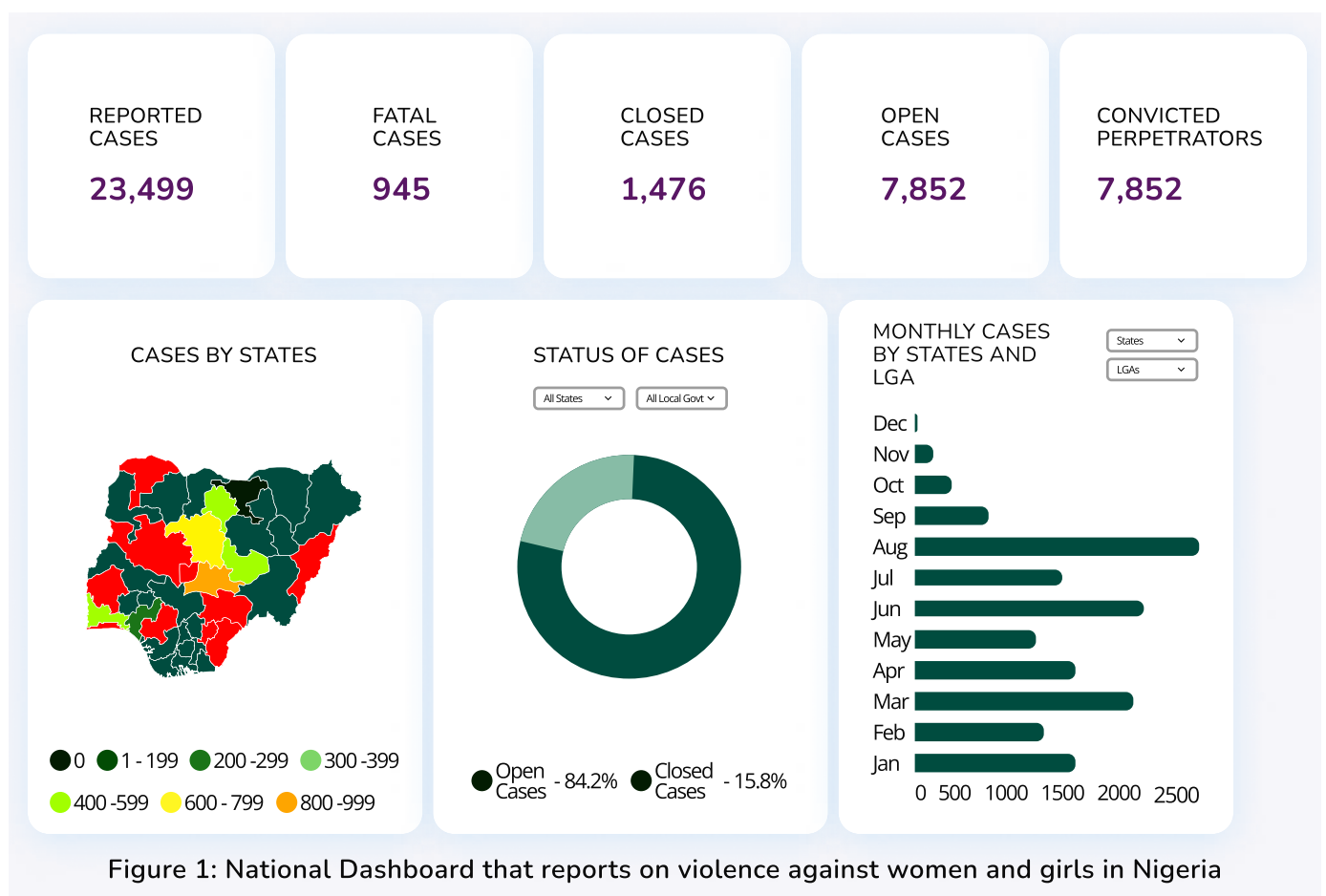
❄ ROLAC 2021, Sexual Assault Reference Centre (SARCs)

❄ https://www.nigeriarights.gov.ng/focus-areas/child-rights.html#:~:text=Child's%20Right%20Act%20(2003)%20is,36%20states%20of%20the%20federation.

❄ https://naptip.gov.ng/violence-against-persons-prohibition-department/

Data from the Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) 2018[3] shows that nearly one-third (31%) of women aged 15-49 have been victims of physical violence. The Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) 2021 report[4] highlights that females (88%) and young people under 18 years old (80%) are primarily affected by sexual offences. In addition, children aged 0-14 account for 60% of rape victims in Nigeria.

The fact remains that violence against women and girls still obstructs poverty reduction, violates their human rights, and can harm long-term peace and stability, which was acknowledged by the UN Secretary-General in 2006. There are policies by the Nigerian Government to fight against sexual abuse, violence, and exploitation of women and girls. The policies include The Child Rights Act[5] and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act[6]. Unfortunately, not all Nigerian states have endorsed both acts (Commonwealth Foundation 2020).

REPORTED CASES	FATAL CASES	CLOSED CASES	OPEN CASES	CONVICTED PERPETRATORS
23,499	945	1,476	7,852	7,852

CASES BY STATES

● 0 ● 1 - 199 ● 200 -299 ● 300 -399
● 400 -599 ● 600 - 799 ● 800 -999

STATUS OF CASES

All States ⌄   All Local Govt ⌄

● Open Cases - 84.2%   ● Closed Cases - 15.8%

MONTHLY CASES BY STATES AND LGA

States ⌄
LGAs ⌄

Figure 1: National Dashboard that reports on violence against women and girls in Nigeria

The Nigerian media has a constitutional responsibility to assist in effective gender policymaking and keep the Government accountable by sharing information, which will aid in accomplishing development goals. Section 22 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution7 states:

> *The press, radio, television, and other agencies of mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.*

Articles published by the media and a strong civic stance can counteract violence which in fact makes them change agents. As argued by Fawole and Asekun-Olarimoye (2005), the media's function has broadened to reflect society and promote social awareness and impact. The media has the power to promote a shift in public opinion and behaviour by prioritising the fight against violence against women and girls.

Media professionals, such as journalists, who do not have policy guidelines, sensitivity, and appropriate training may unknowingly contribute to perpetuating violence against women and girls. According to recent reports (UNICEF and UNWomen, 2022), discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes are perpetuated by news media reporting, which in turn contributes to the normalisation of gender-based violence. The media's stereotyping and objectification of women and security agencies' abuse, shaming and victimisation can perpetuate this issue. Media narratives that normalise gender discrimination or elicit public sympathy for perpetrators serve to condone violence against women and girls. As a result, some media reporting propagates harmful misconceptions that blame victims for the violence perpetrated against them (Ajibola 2022).

RESOURCES:

❈ http://www.nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm (Chapter 2)

Section 1

This study investigates the regulatory framework for media practitioners who create content about violence against women and girls. The data was compiled through a survey of 41 core media practitioners. We enhanced the survey with secondary data, such as industry reports and policies, which we used as a reference. This research report is founded on the following questions:

1. What policies or guidelines do media organisations adhere to when covering violence against women and girls, and are they suitable?

2. How do media practitioners in Nigeria communicate the issue of violence against women and girls?

3. In what ways can the current policies be improved?

THE EFFICACY AND COMPLIANCE WITH POLICIES OR GUIDELINES WHEN DEVELOPING MEDIA CONTENT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

This section examines some codes of practice and ethical principles that Nigeria's media regulatory agencies established for print, broadcast, and online media. By merging the survey responses, we can determine some policies implemented at the media organisations where the respondents are employed. We investigate if they are followed by the respondents we surveyed.

Most survey respondents reside in Lagos, Plateau, Federal Capital Territory, and Kaduna States. Figure 2 also shows representation from Kano, Rivers, North Central, Niger, Kwara, Oyo, Imo, Anambra, North East, Ekiti, and Ogun States. The respondents' positions span multimedia, television, radio, and print. Below, figure 3 indicates that some individuals work in more than one sector.

When asked about their media organisation's policies for reporting violence against women and girls, 41% of respondents said such internal policies exist, while 59% did not, according to Figure 4. One of the survey respondents stated: "We do report on women's issues generally but not because there are set rules and guidelines" (Radio Employee from North Central). The lack of internal guidelines among the survey respondents is a worrying issue. Instead of internal guidelines, 8most media practitioners surveyed are willing to adhere to the Nigerian Broadcast Code: "We stick to Nigerian Broadcast Code for reporting violence against women and girls, so we don't have any issue with this kind of report" (Radio Employee from Kano). However, as the report outlines later, the Nigerian Broadcast Code lacks comprehensive guidance to support sensitive, ethical coverage of violence against women and girls specifically.

The absence of control measures for ensuring compliance was reported by 61% of respondents. We classified the responses of the 49% of participants who reported that their media organisations had measures in place to ensure ethical coverage of violence against women and girls. The checks and balances comprise script approval by management, compliance training, ethical procedures, stringent measures, and factual and balanced storytelling. Figure 5 illustrates that additional measures encompass risk assessment, safeguarding victims/survivors, reporting to authorities, and mentoring and monitoring.

We then ask, what regulatory frameworks govern media organisations at a national level? Radio and television broadcast media are regulated by the Nigerian Broadcast Code ('NBC Code'). The Nigerian Press Council has a Code of Ethics that regulates print journalism, while the National Information Technology Development Agency regulates new and digital media. According to the Nigerian Press Council's website, it serves as a buffer between the media and the public9, ensuring that the media upholds the highest standards of ethics and professionalism.

RESOURCES:

- ❖ https://www.nta.ng/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/1494416213-NBC-Code-6TH-EDITION.pdf

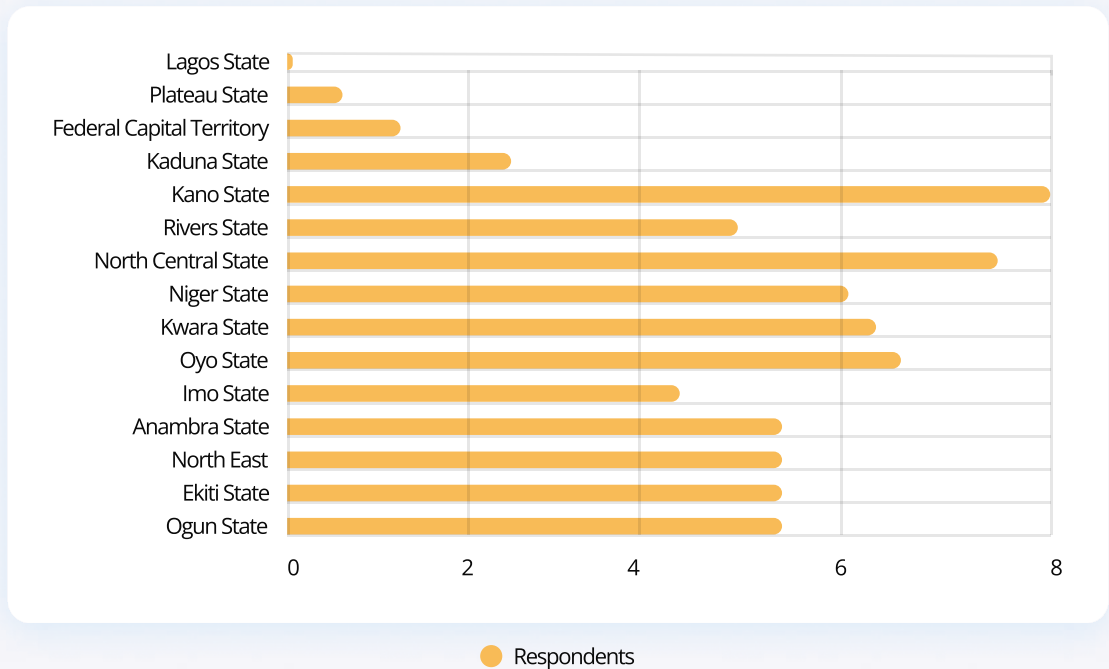- ❖ http://www.presscouncil.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/npc_law.pdf

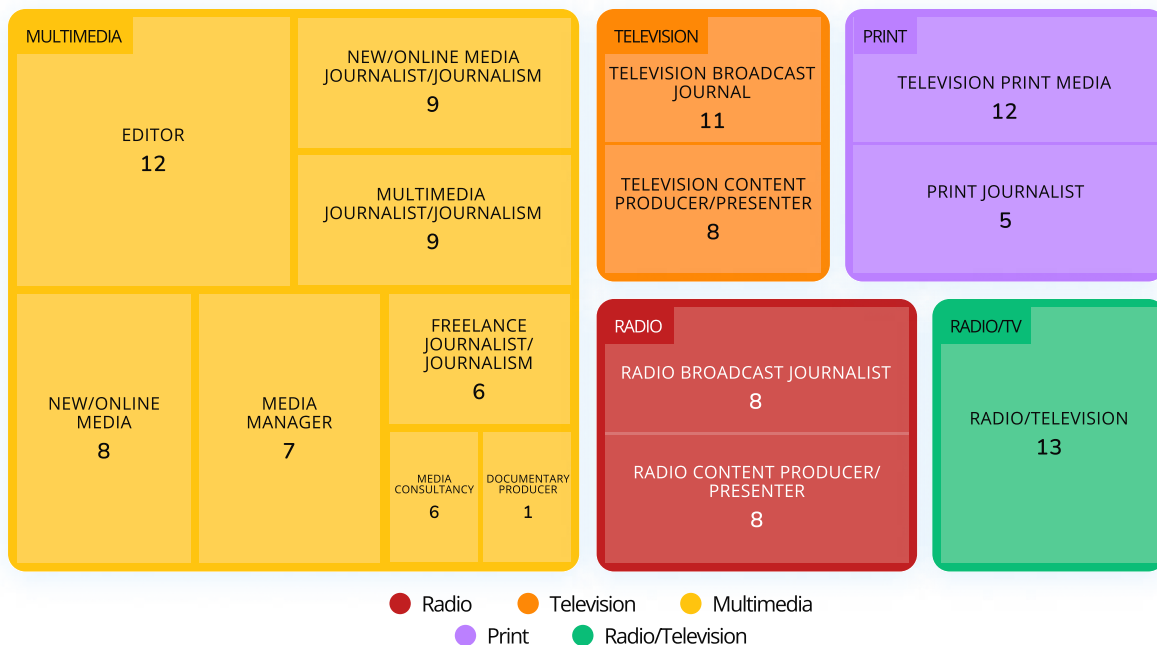Figure 2: Geographical location of survey respondents

Figure 3: Careers of Respondents

No
59%
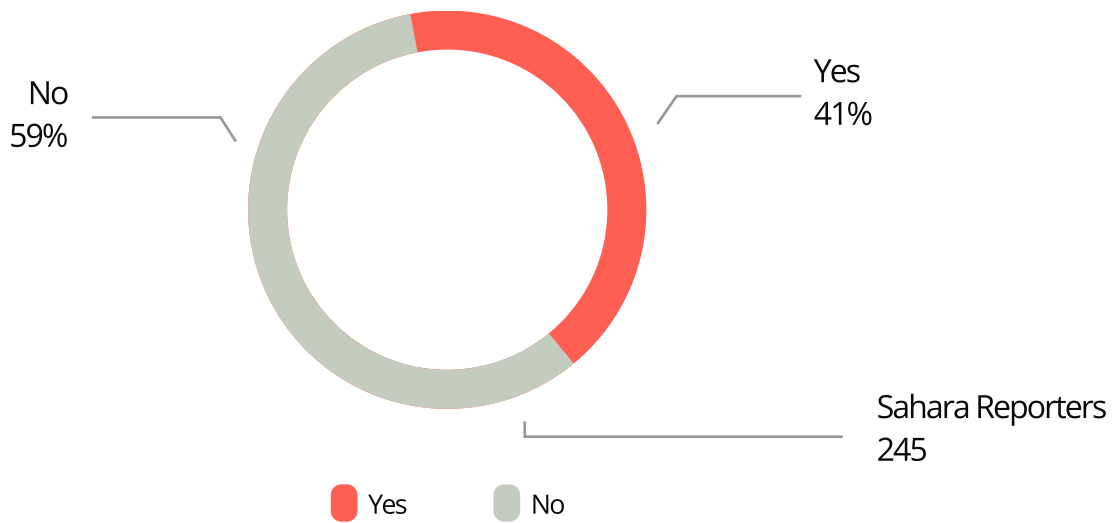
Yes
41%

Sahara Reporters
245

Yes   No

Figure 4: Percentage of Respondents Working For Media Organizations With a Policy/Guideline
For Reporting Violence Against Women and Girls

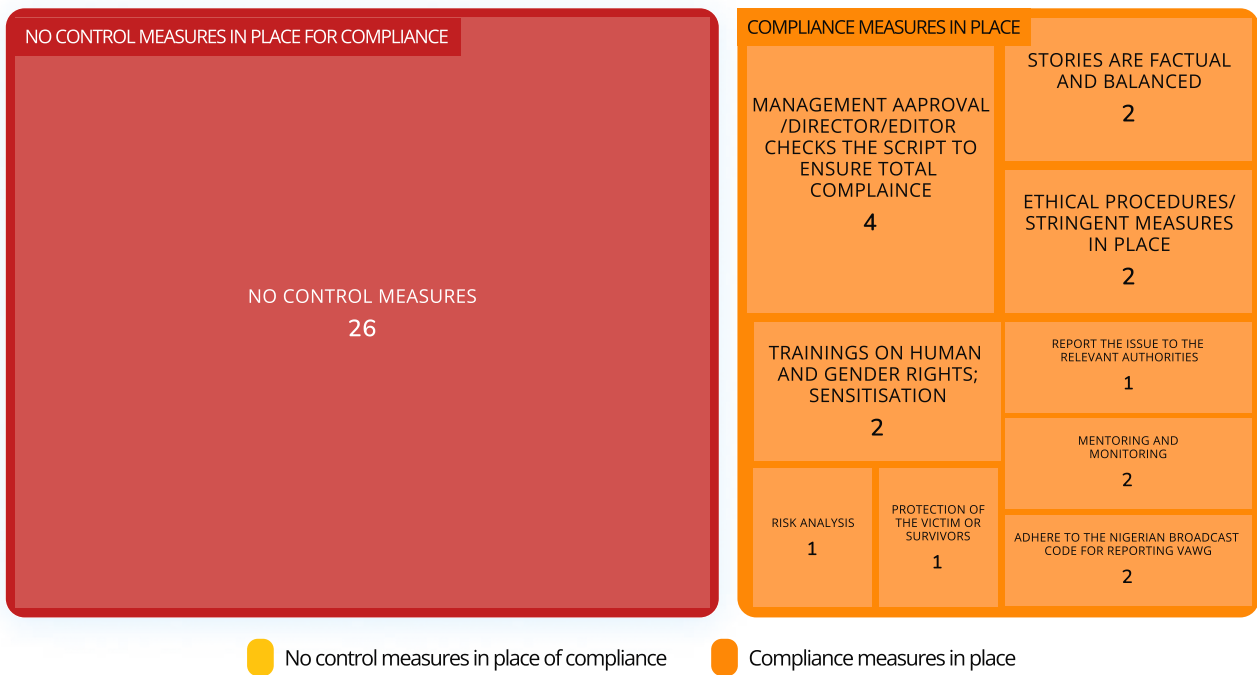
NO CONTROL MEASURES IN PLACE FOR COMPLIANCE

NO CONTROL MEASURES
26

COMPLIANCE MEASURES IN PLACE

MANAGEMENT AAPROVAL
/DIRECTOR/EDITOR
CHECKS THE SCRIPT TO
ENSURE TOTAL
COMPLAINCE
4

STORIES ARE FACTUAL
AND BALANCED
2

ETHICAL PROCEDURES/
STRINGENT MEASURES
IN PLACE
2

TRAININGS ON HUMAN
AND GENDER RIGHTS;
SENSITISATION
2

REPORT THE ISSUE TO THE
RELEVANT AUTHORITIES
1

MENTORING AND
MONITORING
2

RISK ANALYSIS
1

PROTECTION OF
THE VICTIM OR
SURVIVORS
1

ADHERE TO THE NIGERIAN BROADCAST
CODE FOR REPORTING VAWG
2

No control measures in place of compliance   Compliance measures in place

Figure 5: Control Measures used by media organisations

The Nigerian Press Council Code of Ethics does not mention covering violence against women and girls, gender-based violence, gender, or women and girls in general, upon closer examination. The closest inferences to violence against women and girls are found in Article 9:

> *A journalist should not identify, either by name or picture, or interview children under the age of 16 who are involved in cases concerning sexual offenses, crimes and rituals or witchcraft either as victims, witnesses or defendants.*

Article 6 of the Nigerian Press Council Code of Ethics demonstrates the use of the word sex rather than gender:

> *A journalist should refrain from making pejorative reference to a person's ethnic group, religion, sex or to any physical or mental illness or handicap.*

The guidance shows how to report violence in a broad sense in Article 8:

> *A journalist should not present or report acts of violence, armed robberies, terrorist activities or vulgar display of wealth in a manner that glorifies such acts in the eyes of the public."*

By stating that journalists should not glorify violent acts, there are a few interpretations that could be problematic. For example, it could be construed as prohibiting vivid descriptions, visuals/audio, or any sensory details of violence that may risk being seen as glorification. This would severely limit factual reporting. Meanwhile, overly cautious journalists may interpret this as meaning certain violent events should not be covered at all to avoid potential glorification. This risks censorship of newsworthy issues. The lack of clear guidelines on reporting violence against women and girls leaves journalists uncertain, leading to excessive organisational discretion rather than evidence-based standards.

Specifically, for reporting on violence against women and girls, this vagueness in the Nigerian Press Council Code of Ethics enables misreporting or under-reporting. Graphic details may be avoided at the cost of exposing the actual statistics. More precise wording is needed so responsible reporting can inform the public about violence while respecting harm to victims.

The Nigeria Broadcast Code, mentioned earlier, lacks specific guidelines on reporting violence against women and girls. In the NBC Code, certain content, such as portraying women as sex objects or promoting gender-based violence, is prohibited.

For example, the Nigeria Broadcasting Code handbook's chapter 3, subsection 3.10, highlights gender-based violence, which encompasses violence against women and girls:

> *A Broadcaster shall ensure that: Womanhood is presented with respect and dignity.*

Additionally, both headlines illustrate the tensions between attracting reader attention and compassionately upholding victim dignity. However, prioritising compassion should frame these complex decisions. And with growing advocacy, the media landscape is evolving to reward exposés holding power to account over clickbait. We must appeal to editors' and publishers' humanity in countering market demands. By creating headlines that attract audiences and harm those who need a voice, news writers are neglecting their journalistic responsibility. News media organisations owe victims and vulnerable groups resisting messages normalising brutality against them.

Therefore, the Vanguard Headline (April 20, 2022) could state instead, "Man murdered woman" or "Court orders Man arrest for a violent act against a woman." Although the perpetrator of the crime was described appropriately as "allegedly killed by her husband, Samuel Matthew" in the body of the story, it was accompanied by an image of the victim's mother and two children.

However, the privacy of the survivor/victim's family members must be protected, especially if they are minors.

SHOCKER! Story of community where minors easily get pregnant, underage marriage prevalent" April 9, 2022 (Vanguard Headline).

> *Women are not portrayed unfairly as sex objects or stereotyped.*

> *The Broadcaster shall not promote the gender-based violent programme(s).*

Programming format and genres are covered in Chapter Four of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code[10], including discussion programmes, children and young persons, religion, and instructional. But guidance for news media handling real cases of violence against women and girls appears absent. This ambiguity means broadcasters lack clarity on how to cover violence against women's and girls' topics ethically. The risk is that uncertainty results in broadcasters defaulting to avoiding coverage of violence against women and girls altogether, rather than report responsibly in the public interest. As such, audiences lose access to information on a pressing human rights problem.
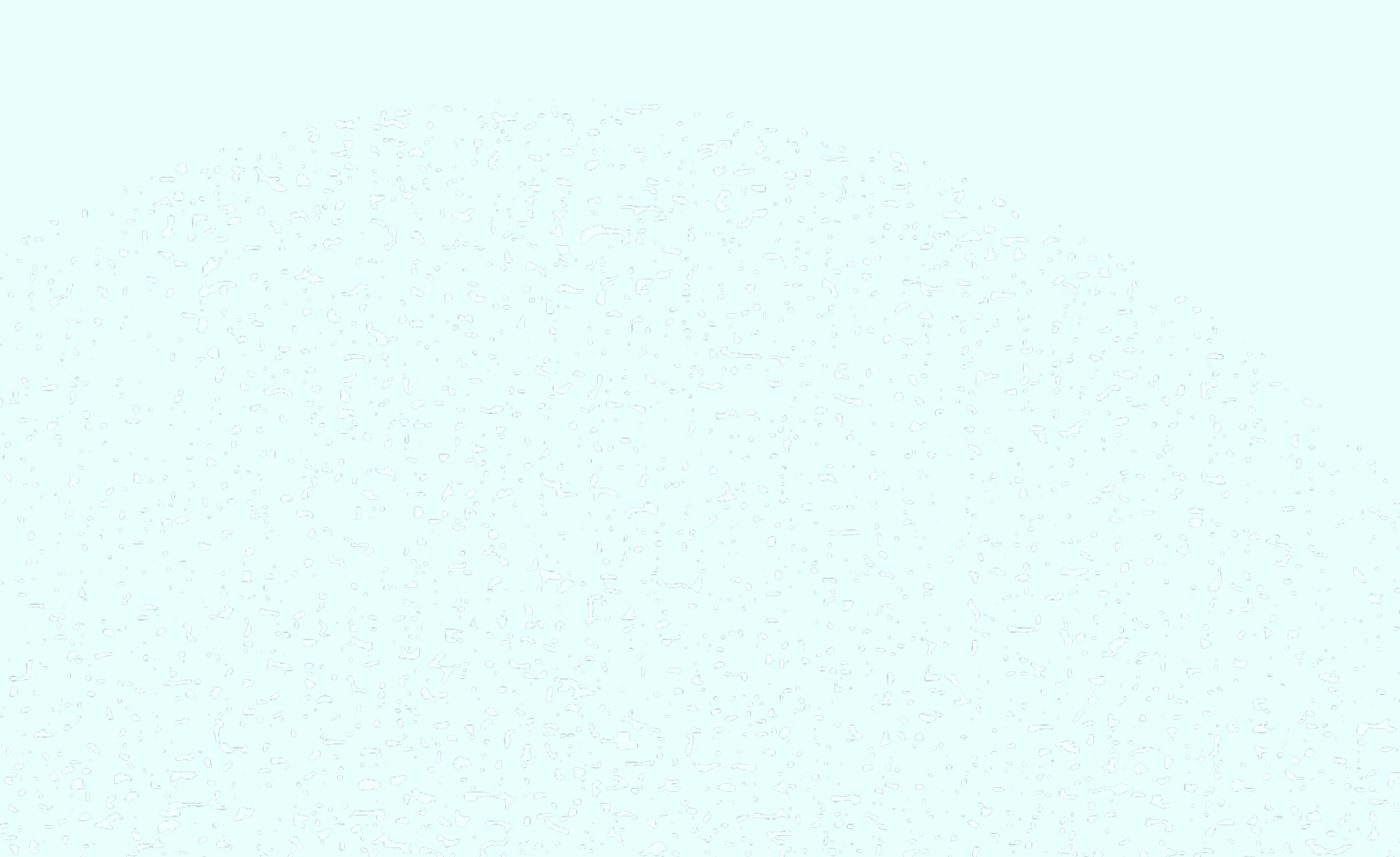
THE CONTENT

Section 2

The National Information Technology Development Agency's[11] objectives include making the digital ecosystem safer for online users by setting out best practices for online platforms. In addition, the National Information Technology Development Agency is anticipated to establish tactics for addressing harmful online data and taking a co-regulatory strategy to execute and comply with it. Although the National Information Technology Development Agency Code of Practice is a more recently developed regulatory framework, it fails to cover violence against women and girls.

This review finds that the Nigeria Broadcasting Code is the regulation that best guides reporting violence against women and girls; however, the policy's language is generic, vague, and open to interpretation. Thus, it is challenging to understand how national guidelines like these can help reduce violence against women and girls. For media organisations to become change agents in the fight against violence towards women and girls, they must use specific language in national and internal guidelines.

We then ask, what regulatory frameworks govern media organisations at a national level?
Radio and television broadcast media are regulated by the Nigerian Broadcast Code ('NBC Code'). The Nigerian Press Council has a Code of Ethics that regulates print journalism, while the National Information Technology Development Agency regulates new and digital media. According to the Nigerian Press Council's website, it serves as a buffer between the media and the public9, ensuring that the media upholds the highest standards of ethics and professionalism.

MEDIA PRACTITIONERS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR COVERAGE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS.

The various ways of covering issues on violence against women and girls are discussed by media practitioners in this part of the report. Our survey respondents noted that although not all platforms addressed violence against women and girls, several did allocate time and space for it. There are still fundamental challenges, such as a lack of funding, women's underrepresentation in media, and a lack of women in leadership positions within media.

The survey asked if media organisations have any kind of platform, such as a programme, page, column, or any other type of platform, devoted to reporting violence against women and girls. 49% of those surveyed said they lacked programmes or platforms to publish violence against women and girls' reports, while 49% had them. The remaining 2% did not respond (see Figure 6). Figure 7 shows the platforms listed by the survey respondents. *They include The Guardian Woman Column, The Baroness, and Female Outcome.*

No Answer
2%

Yes
41%

No
59%

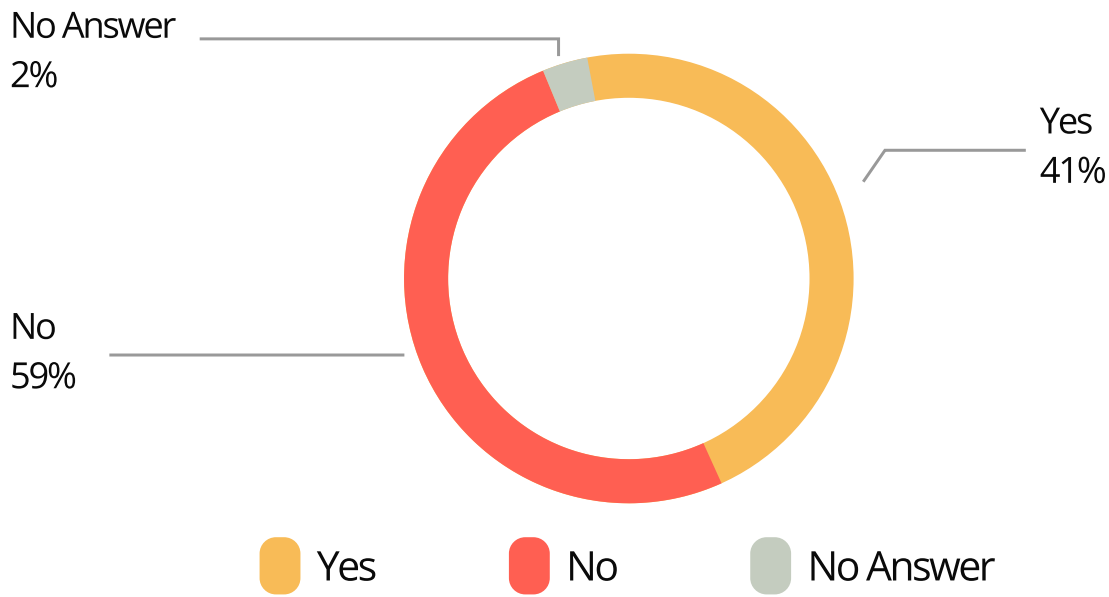Yes   No   No Answer

Figure 6: Does your media organisation have a dedicated platform
for reporting issues of Violence Against Women and Girls?

Feminique Archives (New Telegraph)

Guardian Woman Column

Rotv24

Capital Sounds 90.9 FM

The Baroness

Nigeria Today

Women, Girls and Good Governance

Prime Radio
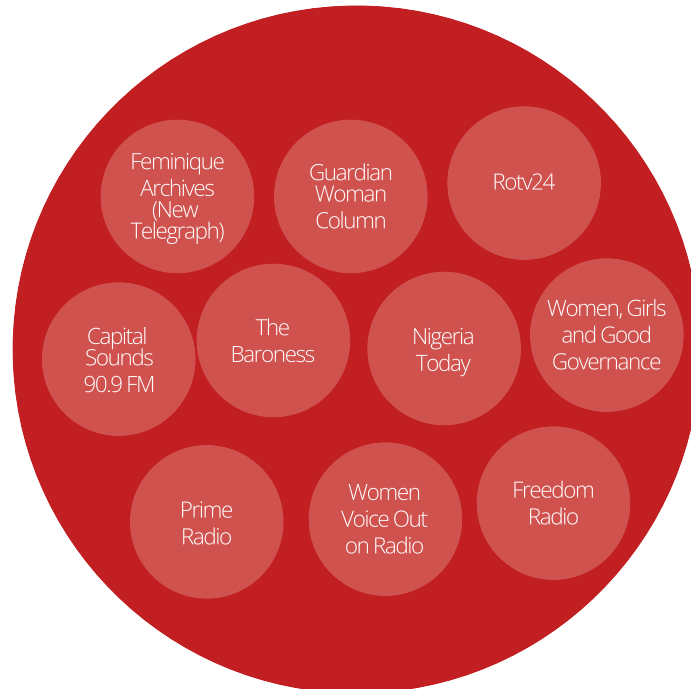
Women Voice Out on Radio

Freedom Radio

Figure 7: List of dedicated platforms that report on violence against women and girls.

Efforts have been made by some radio programmes to create and broadcast shows in local languages, expanding their audience and connection with the community. One of our survey respondents shares the structure of a segment produced in a local language for radio audiences:

> *The... programme... is a 15 mins [show]... segmented into two, in the first segment of the programme... feedback [is read] and some reactions of... the listeners on a topic discussed in the previous week and continue discussing it with a guest or start a fresh topic all depends on the topic at hand.*

In Nigeria, some media outlets like Women Radio FM 91.7[12] have received funding to support dedicated gender-equality programming. However, many outlets face sustainability challenges. For instance, a survey respondent indicated that a radio programme called "Women, Girls & Good Governance" previously aired on Unilag Radio struggled with funding shortfalls. Though rebranded as Mothers of Nation and moved to YouTube, it continues to grapple with financial constraints.

This contrast shows that even pioneering stations like the first women-centred radio network, Women Radio FM 91.7, rely on grants to fund operations and gender-focused content. When funding fluctuates or disappears altogether, maintaining consistent coverage of women's issues becomes difficult across the Nigerian media. Therefore, more systemic and sustainable solutions are needed to ensure the viability of reporting on gender rights across outlets.

Technological innovations are expanding how media covers violence against women and girls. The survey found outlets increasingly use digital platforms to amplify their reporting, though approaches remain inconsistent. Social media handles like LukuLuku Radio Programme and websites such as Anchor FM[13] were cited as examples covering violence against women's and girls' issues. In addition, 39% of respondents said they collaborate with organisations to harness technology and news for curbing violence against women and girls.

However, gaps persist in how media leverages modern tools. For instance, the #femaleoutcome campaign airs on Nigeria Info 92.3 PH radio but lacks steady social media posts despite its searchable hashtag. To drive change, practitioners need capacity building and organisational policies to standardise quality reporting on diverse forms of violence against women and girls across multimedia channels.

The Code's stipulation for 30-60 minutes minimum weekly airtime on general women's programming is a positive step. However, the lack of allocated time specifically covering violence against women and girls enables broadcasters to deprioritise this crucial human rights issue. Mandatory minimums specifically for reporting on different types of violence against women and girls appear uncommon globally. However, given Nigeria's alarming rates of violence against women and girls, the Nigerian Broadcasting Code should be more prescriptive. Requiring substantial, equitable airtime would convey these pervasive violations deserve urgent, headline attention rather than occasional coverage trapped in small programming windows or niche outlets.

By declining to designate reporting standards tailored to violence against women's and girls' issues, the Code treats femicide, rape, trafficking, and other widespread violations in Nigeria as insignificant topics. Explicit weekly minimums would signal tackling gender-based violence warrants sustained focus to influence social norms and enable policy changes on par with addressing economic, political or security challenges. Otherwise, the Code's positive general stipulation risks being tokenistic without strong accompanying requirements for informing audiences regularly about different manifestations of violence destroying women's lives.

Respondents in media organisations have identified inflexibility in designing women's programmes and limited coverage of violence against women and girls-related stories. Most respondents who faced difficulties claimed that the main issue was a lack of funding for women's issues. Another respondent stated the following:

> *I think the guidelines are tilted towards safeguarding the interest of victims, minimising harm, and more importantly averting domestic violence in society. But there is a need to have more airtime for women's voices.*

Other survey respondents echoed the call for increased representation of women.

To address these issues, respondents recommend that women journalists/presenters, and victims/survivors, should have more airtime. Calls were made by media experts in 2022 for greater representation of women as editors in newspapers:

> *There should be more women in print journalism and as editors, as a way of promoting more gender-equality and women-sensitive reporting" (Onyebuchi and Fab-Ukozor, 2022).*

Although this was not a direct question as part of this survey, calls for change were made by 15% of respondents who reported unequal and unfair treatment of male and female journalists or media professionals in their organisation. However, simply appointing women to senior leadership roles does not automatically improve outcomes for women across a media organisation. Especially, as there is still the existence of patriarchal organisational cultures constraining women leaders; unconscious gender bias among both male and female leaders; lack of influence if only 1-2 "token" women leaders and companies hiding ongoing discrimination behind prominent women figureheads. Progress involves tackling systemic barriers, biases, and power imbalances, while ensuring women's participation across all levels.

RESOURCES:

❄ https://nitda.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Code-of-Practice.pdf

❄ https://anchor.fm/christiana-makut

Conclusion and Call to Action

In conclusion, our analysis of Nigeria's industry regulations and survey responses indicates a lack of attention to violence against women and girls. Some coverage of violence against women and girls, the Gender-Based Violence dashboard[14] and Reporting Guidelines for Mainstreaming Violence Against Women are [15]essential steps. Still, more needs to be done in improving media presentation and coverage of violence against women's and girls' stories. This report suggests that regulatory frameworks for press, online, and broadcast media fall short in addressing media reporting of violence against women and girls. Specific guidance on reporting is necessary to enhance the response to the crucial problem of violence against women and girls. This[YA3] lack of guidance has resulted in several media organisations in Nigeria not having a programme solely dedicated to covering issues related to violence against women and girls and not giving fixed time slots to women's programmes. This is part of a wider issue regarding the considerable amount of work required to address the disparities between men and women in job role distribution and women in media and leadership positions. This information was revealed in a 2020 report called **The Barriers faced by women journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa**, published by African Women in Media and FOJO Media Institute[16].

RECOMMENDATIONS

Media organisations should increase coverage of all forms of violence against women and girls, not just high-profile cases. More visibility is needed for under-reported issues, such as child marriage, human trafficking, and digital violence. With more comprehensive, ethical, and solutions-focused coverage, the news media can positively shape public discourse around ending all forms of violence against women and girls in Nigeria.

1. Adopt established media guidelines on ethical reporting of violence against women and girls like Zero Tolerance[17], IFJ guidelines[18], and CJID handbook[19] at both national and organisational levels.

2. Develop clear processes for policy implementation and compliance monitoring across Nigerian media.

3. Promote transparency and diversity in decision-making roles to enable impactful participation of women.

4. Consciously challenge limiting generalisations and biases hampering women's advancement in media.

5. Foster responsible, sensitive reporting on VAWG that warns about signs of violence and provides help resources.

6. Allocate more time and space to spotlighting diverse issues related to violence against women and girls.
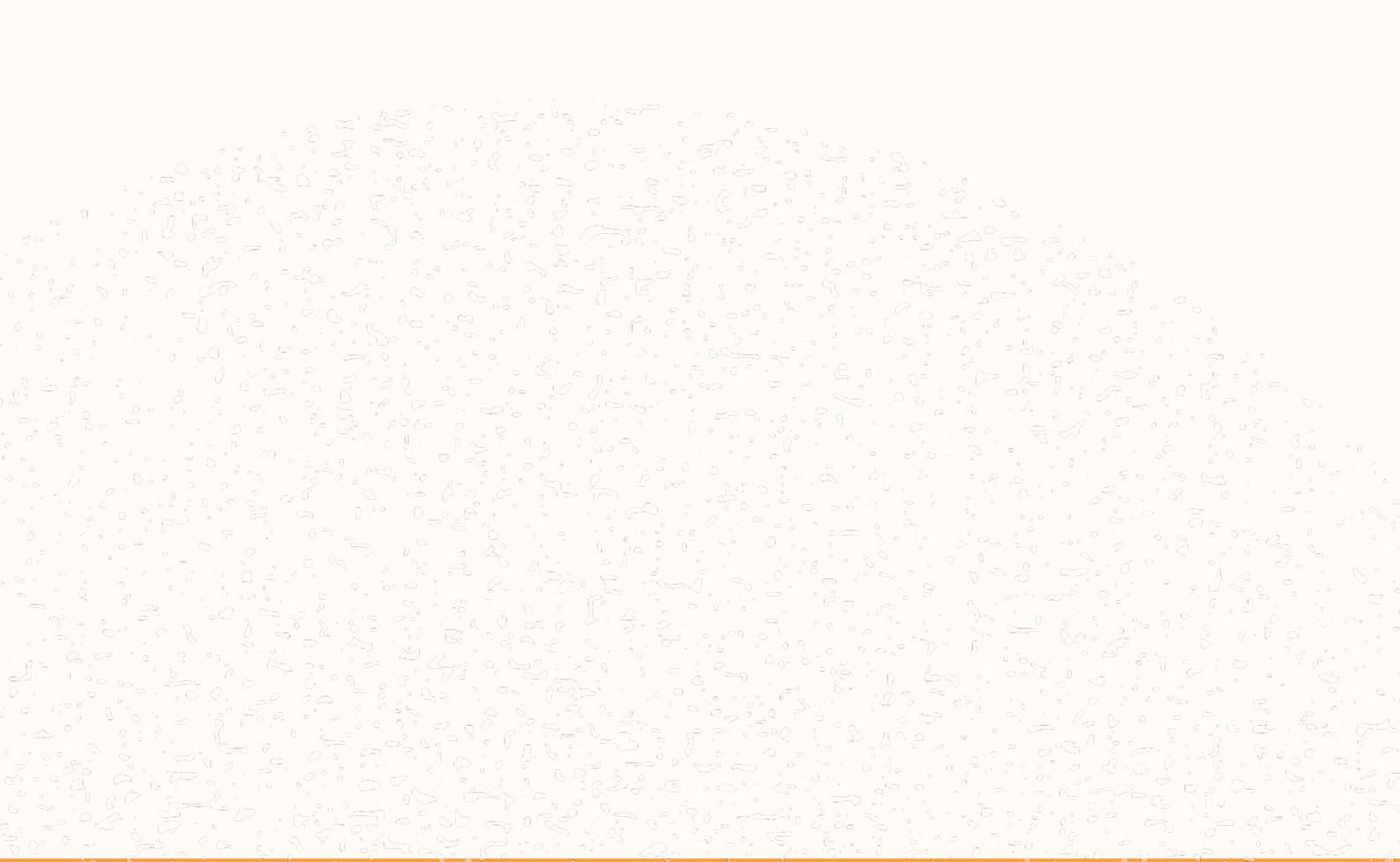
The final installation of the violence against women and girls report "The Way Forward" profiles the comprehensive initiatives undertaken, and crystallising expert-backed solutions spotlighted throughout previous research. "The Way Forward" synthesises findings into concrete, actionable recommendations. This final instalment centres lived expertise while charting an ambitious, collaborative path, placing stories of women and girls at the heart of just, compassionate journalism standards.

References

socially transformative reporting on these urgent yet neglected stories, "Review of Media Policy Guidelines" provides a roadmap towards standards placing women and girls' right to truthful voice before profits.

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Our Partners