



Q Violence against women

A 2023 Research Report on:

*The status of Media
Coverage of Violence
against Women and Girls in
Nigeria: A Review of News
Coverage.*

Supported By



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2023

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ABOUT THE STUDY

Despite global efforts, violence against women and girls continues to be a serious human rights violation. In a **Review of the News Coverage of Violence Against Women and Girls** report, the media's coverage of violence against women and girls in Nigeria is scrutinised. The study uses content analysis to evaluate how violence against women and girls is reported in the top three online news brands Nigerian newspapers - Punch, Vanguard, and Sahara Reporters, from January to June 2022.

THE CRITICAL QUESTIONS EXPLORED ARE:

1. What is the frequency of journalists reporting on violence against women and girls?
2. To what extent do national news organisations cover various forms of violence against women and girls?
3. How are news stories about violence against women and girls portrayed?

Despite this, the study indicates that under-reporting of various types of violence persists, and the language used is often insensitive. The report intends to offer insights into strengthening the media's responsibility in stopping violence against Nigerian women and girls.

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 content. AWiM's approach includes training, research, advocacy, and partnerships, yielding 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 with the support of the MacArthur Foundation and the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism. It aims 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 to implement investigative initiatives.

This project also includes researching 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 will support the advocacy for a gender policy framework that requires improved media coverage and investigative measures for such cases.

ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

Despite global efforts, violence against women and girls continues to be a serious human rights violation. In a **Review of the News Coverage of Violence Against Women and Girls** report, the media's coverage of violence against women and girls in Nigeria is scrutinised. The study uses content analysis to evaluate how violence against women and girls is reported in the top three online news brands Nigerian newspapers - Punch, Vanguard, and Sahara Reporters, from January to June 2022.

AViM	Africa Women in Media
GBV	Gender Based Violence
NBC	National Broadcasting Commission
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

The following key terminologies, which are used throughout this report, align with the official definitions from UN Women Africa¹ regarding gender-based violence and various forms of violence against women and girls:

Gender-Based Violence	results from gender inequality, power abuse, and harmful norms, which lead to harmful acts towards individuals or groups based on their gender.
Violence Against Women and Girls	encompasses physical, sexual, and psychological abuse inflicted upon women because of their gender. These acts breach fundamental rights and cause women and girls suffering in their public and private lives.

Domestic Violence	also known as domestic abuse or intimate partner violence, is a range of patterns of behaviour used to gain or maintain power and control over a partner, including physical, sexual, emotional, financial, or psychological abuse.
Femicide	is the deliberate killing of women because of their gender. It can be expanded to include any murder of women or girls. Femicide cases are mainly carried out by partners or ex-partners, and often involve home abuse, threats, intimidation, sexual violence, or situations where women are less powerful or have fewer resources than their partners.
Honour Killing	refers to killing a female (woman/girl) family member who is believed to have brought dishonour or shame to the family, typically related to sexual purity and supposed transgressions by women.
Sexual Violence	is defined as any sexual act that is carried out without the victim's consent, even if the individual is underage, has a mental disability, or is under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE CAN INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

Sexual Harassment	involves unwelcome physical contact that is sexual in nature (e.g., grabbing, pinching, slapping, or rubbing against someone) as well as non-physical forms like catcalling, sexual comments about someone's appearance, soliciting sexual acts, inappropriate staring, stalking, and exposing oneself.
Rape	is any non-consensual vaginal, anal, or oral penetration of another person with any bodily part or object. This can be by any person known or unknown to the survivor, within marriage and relationships, and during armed conflict.
Corrective Rape	is a form of sexual assault that forces victims to conform to heterosexuality or normative gender identity based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.
Rape Culture	is the social environment that normalises and justifies sexual violence, and it is driven by gender and sexuality biases and persistent gender inequalities rooted in patriarchy.

Human Trafficking,	which involves obtaining and exploiting individuals through force, fraud, coercion, or deception, is a crime that victimises many women and girls worldwide and often leads to sexual exploitation.
Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)	is the practice of intentionally altering or injuring female genital organs for non-medical reasons. FGM's practice and reasoning vary in different areas. For example, in some societies, FGM is a traditional practice considered essential for preparing girls for marriage and adulthood, driven by beliefs about gender and sexuality.

Child Marriage

is defined as any marriage involving a spouse under the age of 18.

Additionally, as per the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 2, the voluntary and complete consent of both intending spouses is required for marriage. Girls face a higher chance of being forced into marriage as children, leading to school dropout and other forms of violence.

Online or digital violence

against women is when a woman is targeted with acts of violence through the use of technology such as social media, mobile phones, email, or computer games and can include:

Cyberbullying

involves the sending of intimidating or threatening messages.

Non-consensual sexting

involves sending sexually explicit content without the receiver's permission.

Doxing

involves revealing private or identifying information about the target to the public.

RESOURCES:

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

✿ <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>







THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

Violence against women and girls is a commonly occurring, severe human rights violation frequently left unreported because of the “impunity, silence, stigma, and shame” surrounding it (WHO 2021). It encompasses physical, sexual, and psychological manifestations, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, harassment, human trafficking, female genital mutilation, and child marriage. Gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at someone because of their gender, and violence against women and girls is an example. Women and girls are more vulnerable to gender-based violence, although it can happen to anyone, anywhere (UN Women, 2023)



The target of Sustainable Development Goal 5.2.1 is to put an end to all kinds of violence against girls and women, whether it's exploitation or trafficking, in both public and private spaces. (United Nations 2015)



The media is a powerful tool that can shape how people think and feel and can also educate communities about ending violence against women and girls.

Following Fawole and Asekun-Olarimoye's (2005) observation of a lack of data on violence against women and the Nigerian media, numerous studies have surfaced, including Ekweonu's (2021) Newspaper Coverage of Domestic Violence Against Women During Covid-19 Lockdown. Understanding journalists' knowledge, attitude, motivation, and roles in media houses is a crucial first step in addressing violence against women and girls (Fawole and Asekun-Olarimoye 2005).

Studies have demonstrated the potential of media reporting to combat violence against women and girls by exposing its causes, promoting positive norms, and sharing essential information to reduce risk. Avoiding the reflection of harmful values and perspectives is crucial, yet many reporters still fail to do so.

Some key findings from academic research have shown that news media reporting reinforces discriminatory gender norms and violence. This discrimination varies across regions and has an intersectional effect. The media reinforces hierarchies by creating stereotypes and tropes by differentiating victim types and prioritisation of certain groups. Reports on gender-based violence usually focus on singular incidents or crimes, with the language often placing the responsibility on the victim

for not conforming to established gender norms. Journalists frequently use sensational or shocking tactics to make it newsworthy. Evidence shows reporters are still not seeking input from experts in gender-based violence, women's rights, and child protection.

Domestic violence cases surged during the pandemic, and media coverage declined, partly because journalists did not follow up on their stories, according to Ekweonu's study. According to the study, the media could not affect change in audience attitudes within a Nigerian context.

The media constitutes a key institutional site of power and sphere of influence.

Therefore, efforts to better understand the processes and dynamics that contribute to the normalisation of violence against women and girls and the perpetuation of harmful and discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes should direct analytical attention towards the role of news media reporting. Indeed, scholars note it is not only whether but also how news media reports on violence against women and girls (the modalities and practices used) that bear how the public is influenced or 'trained' to interpret violence and its victims. Moreover, when news reports of violence against women and girls fail to signpost survivors to relevant resources and services, this can put victims/ survivors at further risk.

THIS STUDY INVESTIGATES THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

This report uses content analysis to examine how the top three online news brands in Nigeria cover violence against women and girls. The following questions guide the report:

1. What is the frequency of journalists reporting on violence against women and girls?
2. To what extent do national news organisations cover various forms of violence against women and girls?
3. How are news stories about violence against women and girls portrayed?



THE CONTENT

Section 1

A content analysis was used as the study approach to respond to the research questions. Our search for online news stories from Nigerian outlets used different types of violence against women and girls as keywords. Listed below (see Figure 1) are the keywords employed in this study:

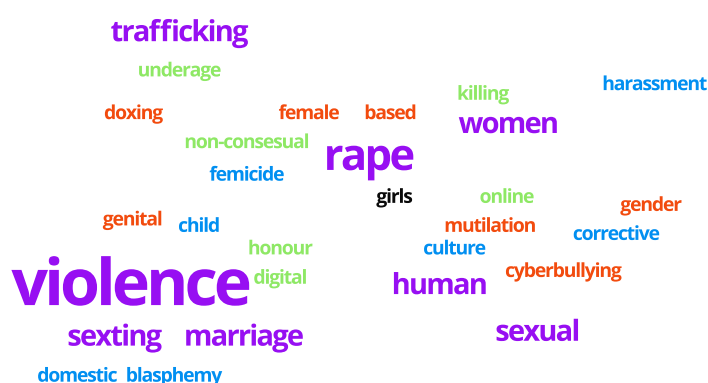


Figure 1: Keywords used in content analysis

This study found the following organizations published a range of news stories on violence against women and girls during January – June 2022.

Media Organisations/Publication			
The Guardian Nigeria News	Premium Times	Vanguard Nigeria	Opinion Nigeria
Opinion Nigeria	Blueprint Nigeria	Report Women	Business Hallmark
The Whistler Nigeria	Business Post Nigeria	Nigeria Info FM (NAN)	Business Day Nigeria
PM News Nigeria	Daily Nigerian	Punch Online	Daily Trust Online
Sahara Reporters	Health Digest Nigeria	The Sun News Online	Hum Angle Media
Tribune Online Nigeria	Independent Nigeria	Alimosho Today	Leadership Nigeria
Independent Nigeria			

Figure 2: List of Media Organisations Reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls in Nigeria

We looked more closely at Nigeria's top three online news brands: Punch Online, Vanguard Nigeria, and Sahara Reporters. We explored online news articles from the selected papers. The study population comprised 679 news stories that were published online on Vanguard (203), Sahara Reporters (245), and Punch Online (231) from January to June 2022 (see Figure 3). The study evaluated how often and in what categories publications were released during the months examined. We analysed ten stories from each of the three publications to evaluate their sensitivity in covering them, using the Zero Tolerance and Guidelines on Media Reporting on Violence against Women as a framework¹.

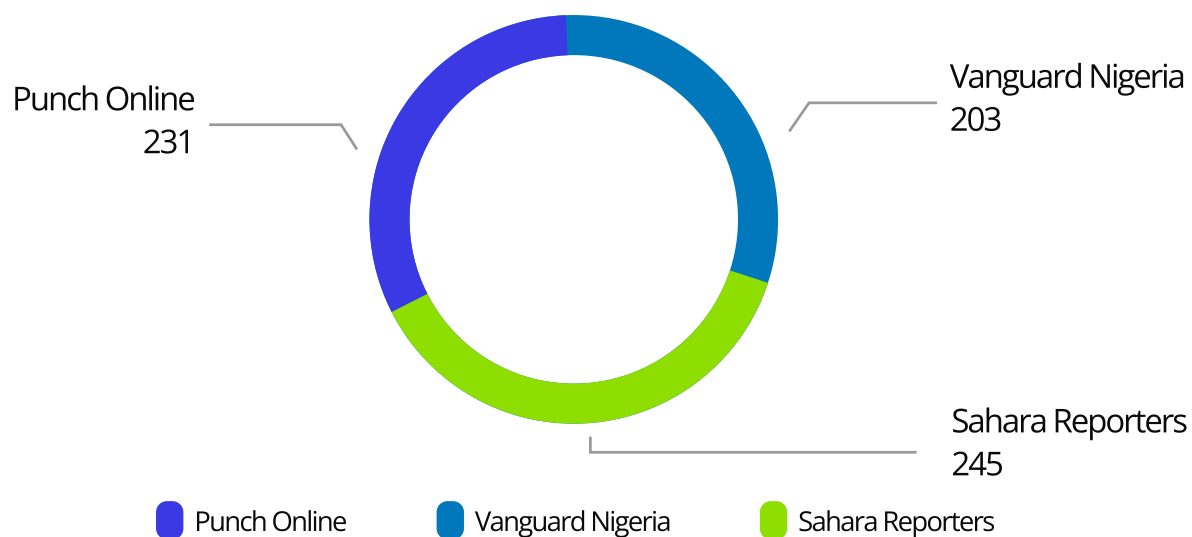


Figure 3: Count of Media Publications Per News Organisation

Despite alarming rates of violence against women in early 2022, coverage in Nigeria's top three online news brands papers fell critically short. Women's Aid Collective (WACOL)/Tamar Sexual Assault Referral Centre (Tamar SARC) (2022)⁴ documented over 450 violence against women and girls' cases from January-June 2022 encompassing rape, denial of inheritance, femicide and more. Yet analysis of the same period for online news brands, Punch, Vanguard and Sahara Reporters, prioritised few types of violence against women and girls in their news coverage. During the outlined period (January - June 2022), the data collected shows that the most featured stories were about Blasphemy (358), Rape (125), and Domestic Violence (105) (see Figure 4).

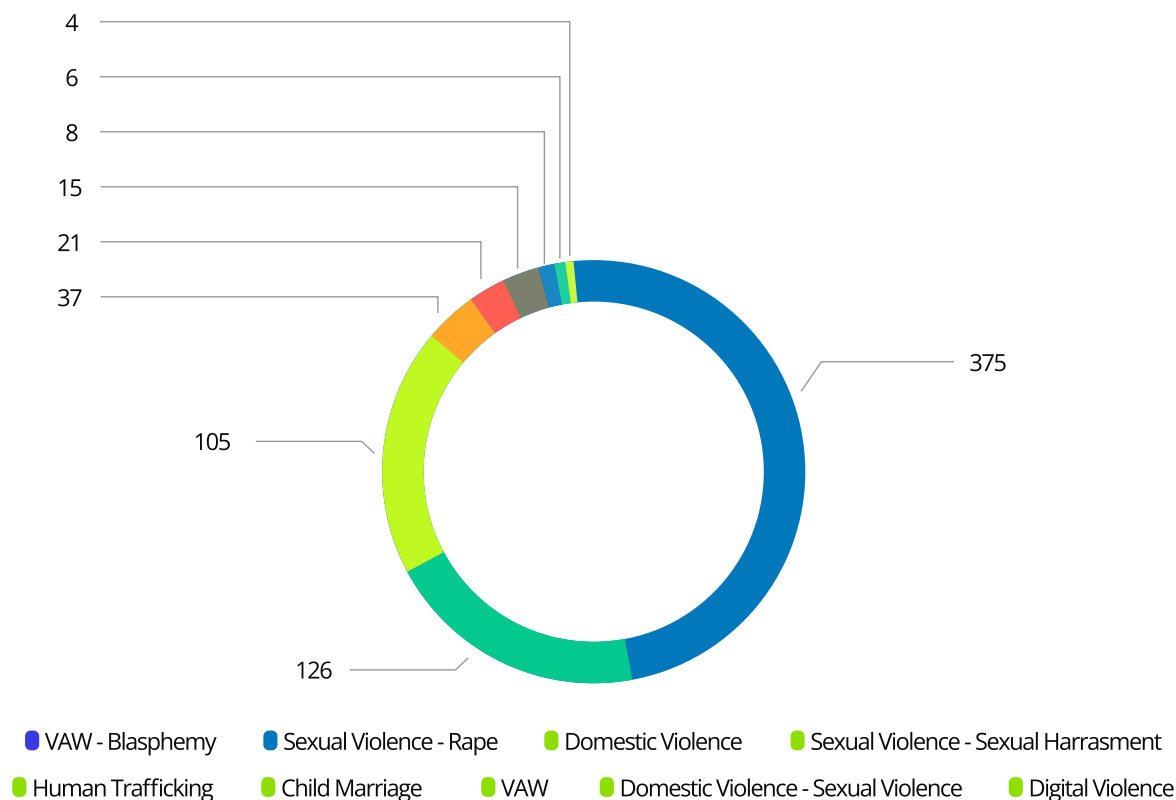


Figure 4: Category of News

The personalities involved and the public outcry are being questioned as potential factors for the level of publicity in all three stories. According to our analysis of news sources, nearly half of all stories (53%) about violence against women and girls centred on the murder of Deborah Lynch, who was accused of making blasphemous statements about Prophet Muhammad. The murder of gospel singer Osinachi Nwachukwu was the focus of 71% of domestic abuse-related news in national dailies, making it the second most reported issue. Significant coverage was given to the domestic abuse case filed against Former Aviation Minister Fani-Kayode in these dailies. Countless follow-ups were made to all three stories mentioned above. If we remove the three stories that received significant coverage, will the other stories across Nigeria's top three online news brands adequately cover violence against women and girls during January to June 2022?

Other than three extensively covered incidents featuring famous victims, the data suggests that violence against women and girls received minimal media attention.

For 181 days (during the periods of January and June 2022) the online news brands averaged just four daily articles on diverse violence devastating Nigerian women and girls. Forms like trafficking and child marriage saw only 91 total stories. Several violence against women and girls issues lacked any reporting over the six months, such as rape, defilement, incest, denial of inheritance, femicide, doxing and more, as outlined by the Women's Aid Collective (WACOL)/Tamar Sexual Assault Referral Centre (Tamar SARC) in June 2022.

This is consistent with previous research showing that Nigerian media lacks sufficient focus on giving equal representation to the range of violence affecting women. As the "voice of the voiceless" (Ekeli, 2008), the press has a duty to expose all forms of violence against women and girls, which violates their rights equally. The focus on celebrity domestic violence should not overshadow the impact of everyday violence on non-prominent women and girls.

The fact that violence is surging while under-reporting remains consistent indicates prioritisation gaps. Outlets reviewed in this study focused substantial attention on selected prominent women while neglecting other pervasive violence against women and girls' cases. To drive action on this human rights issue, more balance and frequency should be given to reflecting the full pressures Nigerian women face.

We then considered how often media organisations should cover stories on violence against women and girls and the optimal balance for their coverage. While no universal optimum exists at the time of this review, Nigeria's violence against women and girls statistics indicates major coverage growth is needed to address current inadequate levels and narrow framing. Consideration should also be given to tone, variety, depth, fatigue and newsworthiness factors. A key finding reveals that Nigerian media reporting does not adequately address the complex trauma of violence against women and girls. Our analysis revealed that only 35% of the stories sampled from online news outlets accurately depicted crimes, perpetrators, and victims. Problematic language, stereotypes and victim-blaming persisted in two-thirds of coverage.

In this study, sensitive reporting places victims' rights, dignity, and wellbeing at the forefront, guiding decisions on how much information to include and how graphically to present details of gender-based violence incidents. It exercises care around language that could shame victims or trigger significant emotional distress. Appropriate headlines align with these sensitivity principles through fact-based, non-dramatic framing focused on the violence act itself rather than scrutinising victims.

According to the data analysed for this study, a majority (65%) of the stories from Nigerian online news outlets did not demonstrate the sensitivity needed in covering violence against women and girls. Two instances of insensitivity are evident in the following headlines:

Violence against women and girls is a commonly occurring, severe human rights violation frequently left unreported because of the “impunity, silence, stigma, and shame” surrounding it (WHO 2021). It encompasses physical, sexual, and psychological manifestations, including intimate partner violence, sexual violence, harassment, human trafficking, female genital mutilation, and child marriage. Gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at someone because of their gender, and violence against women and girls is an example. Women and girls are more vulnerable to gender-based violence, although it can happen to anyone, anywhere (UN Women, 2023)

“Curbing the menace of domestic violence” - April 17, 2022 (The Punch Headline)

“Men that hit women need psychological help – Hilda Dokubo” June 12, 2022 (The Punch Headline).

Our analysis using the Zero Tolerance Media Guidelines reveals several issues with the Punch headline “Curbing the menace of domestic violence” (April 17, 2022). The term “menace” can sensationalise domestic abuse, potentially normalising or trivialising it. Additionally, describing violence as an uncontrolled force to be “curbed” creates a separation from the responsible actions of abusers who must face consequences. Moreover, depicting abuse as an abstract “menace” reinforces the misconception that domestic violence is uncommon, rather than a pervasive issue that necessitates preventive measures. The dehumanised language overlooks the importance of addressing gender inequality. Furthermore, the guidelines recommend using “domestic abuse” instead of “violence” to cover a range of harm against women, including emotional, verbal, financial, and physical forms.

The Punch headline "Men that hit women need psychological help" (June 12, 2022) frames domestic abuse and gender-based violence problematically, as revealed by the Zero Tolerance Media Guidelines. Rather than recognising societal gender inequality, the headline attributes domestic abuse to psychological disorders. Moreover, the use of terms like "hit women" fails to acknowledge the traumatic impact of physical, emotional, and other forms of abuse in domestic violence situations, where language should accurately depict the severity. Overall, the headline conflicts with all advice against excusing, rationalising or minimising deliberate violence against female partners.

Abuja High Court Orders Arrest of Nigerian Lawyer For Cutting Off Wife's Ear With Pliers" June 1, 2022 (Sahara Reporters Headline).

Man disembowels 23-yr-old wife, flees with her phone so she can't call for help" April 20, 2022 (Vanguard Headline).

Multiple issues arise from analysing the Sahara Reporters (June 1, 2022) and Vanguard's (April 20, 2022) headlines above using the Zero Tolerance guidelines, particularly in how violence against women is framed insensitively. Graphic language that emphasises cutting off the victim's ear risks making brutality appear normal. The term "wife" used in a dehumanising way goes against advice on maintaining the dignity of victims following trauma. Both headlines do not adhere to key principles on gender inequality, violence facilitation, survivor dignity, and addressing the wider issue of domestic violence. Applying core recommendations around terminology, accountability, and adding prevalence statistics could significantly enhance understanding. Significant improvements can be achieved by following core advice on terminology, survivor experiences, and accurate depiction of attackers' culpability in addressing violence against women.

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).

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

15-year-old Sex Slave Held By Rapist In Mother's House For 3 Years, Offered To Other Men." March 22, 2022 (Sahara Reporters Headline).

Similarly, sensationalism is present in both headlines, yet neither identifies the crime. The focus should be on using clear language that avoids blaming or stereotyping the survivor/victim. Instead, emphasis should be placed on the perpetrator's responsibility, as they are the sole party responsible for the violence. Also, the idea of 'underage' marriage should be reframed as child abuse. Overall, within the reports sampled, the language requires significant intervention.

The above extracts provide a glimpse into Nigeria's top three online news brands' report on violence against women and girls. However, local journalists have been urged by researchers, including Associate Professor Nkem Fab-Ukozor from IMSU, to follow ethical and professional reporting standards to raise awareness and prevent violence against women. Therefore, we will investigate the policies and guidelines that dictate media coverage of violence against women and girls in our next report.

RESOURCES:

✂ <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/Media-Guidelines-on-Violence-Against-Women.pdf>

✂ <https://saharareporters.com/2022/07/14/6-months-report-enugu-anambra-top-list-violent-cases-against-women-girls-nigeria>





Conclusion and Recommendation

This content analysis indicates that although Nigeria's top three online news brands have increased their coverage of violence against women and girls, they need to do more to fully report on the entire range of these human rights violations. A content analysis of 679 online news stories from Punch, Vanguard, and Sahara Reporters between January and June 2022 indicates that reporting on violence against women and girls is deficient in frequency and depth.

Although a few high-profile cases, such as Deborah Samuel's murder and domestic abuse allegations against Precious Chikwendu, have been extensively covered, reporting on other prevalent forms of violence, such as child marriage, human trafficking and digital violence, remain inadequate. Stories about these issues accounted for just 13% of the total coverage of violence against women and girls in the analysed sample. Analysis reveals severe gaps in Nigerian media coverage assessing the full spectrum of gender-based violence women face beyond physical assault. Lack of reporting on non-physical forms like emotional, financial, or digital abuse keeps this influential driver of entrapment and harm invisible. The media has the power to prompt action on important issues that are not adequately addressed in the public, policy, and legal sectors.

In addition, the language and framing used in some of the reviewed news reports were insensitive and perpetuated damaging stereotypes about victims/survivors. The results indicate a need for improvement in adhering to ethical reporting standards and avoiding victim-blaming or normalising language. Nigerian media must follow ethical guidelines and diversify coverage to address violence against women and girls fully. The media has a significant responsibility for providing extensive and sensitive coverage of the diverse forms of violence against women and girls in Nigeria.

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. A reporting guideline on violence against women and girls in Nigeria should be developed through collaboration between journalists, knowledgeable advocates, activists, and researchers to ensure improved story framing and coverage.
2. Comprehensive training on gender-sensitive reporting based on existing guidelines, such as the Zero Tolerance Framework, is necessary for journalists and editors. This can help improve story framing, language, images, and statistics.
3. The safety and dignity of survivors/victims and their families should be prioritised.
4. Newsroom leadership that is more gender-balanced and diverse reporting teams can enhance the coverage and presentation of these stories.
5. Regularly monitoring and evaluating news content on violence against women and girls should be undertaken to monitor improvements in frequency, framing, language and ethical standards.
6. Media leaders to elevate compassion over profits in coverage addressing violence against women and girls.
7. News organisations should incentivise investigation of root injustices over graphic clickbait.

Building on this analysis of violence against women and girls' media coverage gaps, the second report titled "Review of the Media Policy Guidelines" dives deeper into the regulatory framework governing this reporting in Nigeria. Examining organisational and industry policy weaknesses that hinder comprehensive, ethical practices around violence against women and girls' coverage. Therefore, the next report spotlights urgent recommendations to anchor journalism standards for covering violence against women and girls within universal codes of conduct. With concrete direction on tailoring media policies to enable dignified,



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

