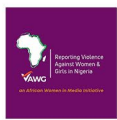




AWiM Report 2025

Policy Brief on Enhancing Collaboration
Between Governance Bodies,
Institutions, and Media to Address
Violence Against Women and Girls.



Publication Information

AWiM extends its heartfelt gratitude to the research participants, particularly the women journalists, who generously gave their time, shared their knowledge, and entrusted us with their stories. We are profoundly grateful to the various contributors—including interview and focus group participants, and online survey respondents—whose collaboration was essential in co-creating this research report.

This policy was written by Osai Ojigbo and Judith Gbagidi [insert biographies]. The authors wish to express deep appreciation to Dr. Yemisi Akinbobola, AWiM Co-founder & CEO, for her significant contributions in refining and reviewing this brief. Development of this policy brief is part of the Collaborative Media Project on Reporting Violence against Women and Girls in Nigeria and is supported by the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Current Landscape in media reporting on VAWG	6
Role of governance and institutional structures	8
Recommendations	10
References	12

Definitions and Acronyms

Definitions:

Violence against women is defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”

Violence against women also includes “all acts perpetrated against women which cause or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, including the threat to take such acts; or to undertake the imposition of arbitrary restrictions on or deprivation of fundamental freedoms in private or public life in peacetime and during situations of armed conflicts or of war”. The Maputo Protocol states explicitly that all references to women include girls.

VAWG is defined as “violence that is directed at an individual based on their gender, and it is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men”. It is rooted in gender inequality and discrimination, perpetuating the subordinate status of women in society.

Acronyms:

AWiM: African Women in Media.

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

CJID: Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development.

ILO: International Labour Organisation.

OSCE: Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme.

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

UNFPA: United Nations Population Fund.

VAPP: Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015.

VAWG: Violence Against Women and Girls.

WHO: World Health Organization.

Executive Summary

Women journalists increasingly face online harassment—including threats, doxxing, and gender-based abuse—that hinders their safety, silences their voices, and undermines press freedom. Existing laws in Nigeria, such as the Cybercrimes Act and the recently enacted Nigeria Data Protection Act, offer partial protection but fail to address targeted online violence and enforcement remains weak. Media organizations also often lack clear policies or digital security measures, leaving women journalists vulnerable. To safeguard their rights, legal reforms must explicitly criminalize online gender-based harassment, law enforcement needs specialized training, and media institutions should implement robust safety policies. Enhanced data collection, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and clear reporting platforms are essential to ensure women journalists can work freely and safely in the digital age.

Introduction



Globally, violence against women and girls (VAWG) is recognized as one of the most acute and permeating human rights violations, with profound implications for individuals, communities, and societies.

Violence against women is defined in Article 1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”. Similarly, Article 1(j) of the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) defines such violence to include “all acts perpetrated against women which cause or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, including the threat to take such acts; or to undertake the imposition of arbitrary restrictions on or deprivation of fundamental freedoms in private or public life in peacetime and during situations of armed conflicts or of war.” The Maputo Protocol states explicitly that

Addressing VAWG recognises that the female gender experiences violence in different forms throughout their life cycle (WHO 2021) and presents a comprehensive strategy for tackling the issue. (Spotlight Initiative). VAWG is “violence that is directed at an individual based on their gender, and it is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men.” (UNFPA

“any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”



(2020)). The root cause therefore of VAWG is “rooted in gender inequality and discrimination, perpetuating the subordinate status of women in society.” UN Women (2022).

While the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) did not specifically mention violence against women and girls, the CEDAW committee in General Recommendation 19 clarified that discrimination against women includes gender-based violence and in General Recommendation 35 reinforces this as gender-based violence against women and girls. (CEDAW Committee, 2017). Other relevant international treaties are the International Labour Organisation (ILO) C190-Violence and Harassment Convention, which addresses the issues of harassment in the workplace, and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security which highlights the importance of addressing VAWG in conflict and post-conflict situations, recognising it as a critical component of international peace and security (United Nations Security Council, 2000).

International legal frameworks that highlight the obligation of the states to prevent, prosecute, and eliminate VAWG acknowledge the enormity of the problem. States have unequivocal commitments under international law to not only enact but also to implement and monitor laws that address all forms of violence against women.

In Nigeria, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015 (VAPP) was enacted to address VAWG in the broader context of violence. The law provides explicit punishment for various forms of VAWG including rape, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, harmful traditional practices, and sexual harassment. However, implementation of the VAPP is curtailed due to limited resources and bureaucracy to ensure survivors get the justice they deserve (Ikuteyijo, 2024).



Current Landscape of Media Reporting on VAWG



The current landscape in Nigeria and globally of media reporting on violence against women and girls (VAWG) presents an intricate and challenging picture. While the media holds immense potential to be a powerful tool for change, raising awareness, and influencing public attitudes towards VAWG, it has sometimes fallen short of meeting this role effectively. The prevalence of sensationalism is a significant and prevalent issue with the media reporting on VAWG. Reports frequently focus on the most shocking and graphic details of violence, prioritising sensational narratives over the dignity and privacy of victims. This approach not only trivialises the seriousness of VAWG but also perpetuates a culture of victim-blaming, where the narrative shifts away from holding perpetrators accountable and instead scrutinises the victims' actions or characteristics. Such reporting practices contribute to a societal environment where violence against women and girls is normalised, and the responsibility for violence is unjustly placed on the victims themselves (UNESCO, 2022; OSCE, 2023).

The issue of “ethical lapses in reporting” further undermines the media’s role in addressing VAWG. Many journalists and media outlets lack adequate training and clear guidelines on how to report on VAWG in a manner that is respectful and sensitive to survivors. The International Federation of Journalists (2022) emphasises that this lack of training often results in the re-victimization of survivors through the media. For instance, disclosing personal details, using inappropriate language, or failing to anonymise identities can exacerbate the trauma experienced by survivors and discourage other victims from coming forward (GBV Journalism, 2023). Moreover, media reports

often lack the necessary context, failing to link individual incidents of violence to broader societal issues such as gender inequality, cultural norms, and systemic failures that perpetuate VAWG. This lack of contextualisation limits the media's ability to foster a deeper understanding of VAWG's root causes and advocate for the necessary societal changes to combat them (UNDP, 2023).

Despite the existence of guidelines designed to improve media reporting on VAWG, their application could be more consistent across different media outlets. Media professionals are often unaware of or choose to disregard guidelines provided by organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNESCO, which advocate for a survivor-centred approach that prioritises the dignity and rights of those affected by violence (UNESCO, 2022; UNDP, 2023). Furthermore, enforcing ethical standards and guidelines needs to be more consistent, leading to varying levels of adherence across different media outlets. Even when media organisations adopt guidelines, such as those provided by international organizations, their application can be uneven due to factors such as editorial policies, commercial pressures, and the lack of a regulatory framework that holds media accountable for ethical breaches (OSCE, 2023).

The coverage of VAWG also varies significantly across different regions, influenced by local cultural norms and socio-political contexts that may not prioritise gender equality. In Africa, including Nigeria, media coverage of VAWG is often random and fails to hold perpetrators accountable or advocate for systemic change. Research by African Women in Media (2024) indicates that many African countries struggle with consistent and ethical media coverage of VAWG, highlighting the need for more robust training for journalists and greater adherence to international reporting guidelines. Additionally, in regions where press freedom is limited, media professionals face challenges such as censorship, threats, or lack of access to information, which can further compromise the quality and impact of media coverage on VAWG. These contextual challenges can significantly affect the quality of VAWG reporting. For instance, in areas with limited press freedom or where journalists face threats and censorship, reporting on VAWG can be particularly difficult, leading to self-censorship or the inability to cover stories comprehensively, further limiting the public's understanding of the issue (Bunjak & Bagić, 2022).

Academic literature also highlights the impact of media ownership and control on VAWG reporting. Media outlets controlled by entities with vested interests may avoid covering VAWG issues that could be seen as controversial or damaging to those interests (Tandfonline, 2023). This can result in a lack of diversity in reporting and a failure to address the systemic nature of VAWG, leaving significant gaps in public knowledge and awareness.





Role of Governance and Institutional Structures

Governance and institutional structures play a pivotal role in shaping the media's approach to reporting on violence against women and girls (VAWG). These structures, which include government agencies, regulatory bodies, civil society organisations, and international institutions, are essential in establishing frameworks that guide ethical reporting, ensuring accountability, and fostering a media environment supporting survivors' dignity and rights.

One of the primary roles of governance in media reporting on VAWG is developing and enforcing regulatory frameworks. Regulatory bodies, such as the Nigerian Press Council and the National Broadcasting Commission, are responsible for setting standards that ensure media reporting adheres to ethical guidelines. These bodies can mandate the inclusion of specific protocols for reporting on sensitive issues like VAWG, thereby reducing the risk of sensationalism and victim-blaming that

often accompanies media coverage (Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development [CJID], 2024). By enforcing these standards, regulatory bodies help to create a media landscape that is more respectful and supportive of survivors.

In addition to regulatory frameworks, institutional structures, including civil society organisations and international bodies, provide critical support through training and resources for journalists. These institutions often develop and disseminate handbooks, guidelines, and training programs that equip media professionals with the knowledge and skills to report on VAWG ethically. For instance, Project Alert Nigeria provides research and documentation highlighting best practices in VAWG reporting, offering practical tools for journalists to improve their coverage of these issues (Project Alert, n.d.). Such resources are invaluable in bridging the gap between ethical standards and everyday journalistic practice.

Governance structures foster partnerships between the media and civil society organisations. These partnerships are crucial for amplifying the voices of women and girls affected by violence and ensuring that their stories are told in a way that promotes justice and accountability. The “Raising Her Voice” initiative by Oxfam, for example, illustrates the power of such collaborations in Nigeria, where governance structures and civil society work together to enhance the capacity of women to influence policy and media narratives around VAWG (Oxfam, 2012). These collaborative efforts help ensure media coverage informs the public and drives systemic change.

The role of governance also extends to the use of data in shaping media narratives around VAWG. By harnessing the power of data, governance structures can provide evidence-based insights that guide media reporting. For example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Nigeria has emphasised the importance of data in informing both prevention and response strategies for gender-based violence (UNDP, 2022). Data-driven reporting helps contextualise individual VAWG cases within broader trends and systemic issues, thereby enhancing the depth and impact of media coverage.

Finally, international institutions like the World Health Organization (WHO) support government efforts to curb gender-based violence through initiatives that include media engagement strategies. These institutions play a crucial role in setting global standards and providing technical assistance to national governments, helping to align media practices with international human rights norms (WHO, 2023). By supporting governments in developing and implementing comprehensive strategies for media engagement, these institutions ensure that the media contributes positively to the fight against VAWG.



Recommendations

To the Government

1. Review Legislation, Policies and Procedures. This requires repealing discriminatory laws or provisions that continue to perpetuate gender stereotypes and discrimination, amendment of existing laws to reflect current manifestations of VAWG in online and digital spaces, and protection for specific communities like women journalists. Strengthening the state's responses to VAWG must comply with international human rights law and standards, ensuring that state action does not impact other fundamental rights and freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression and the media.

2. Strengthen Regulatory Frameworks and Enforcement. Regulatory frameworks governing media reporting on VAWG require enhancement. Regulatory bodies such as the Nigerian Press Council and the National Broadcasting Commission need to enforce sterner guidelines that mandate ethical reporting standards, particularly in cases involving violence against women and girls. These guidelines should be implemented with regular audits and penalties for non-compliance should be implemented to ensure adherence to these guidelines.

3. Promote Data-Driven Reporting. Governance structures should encourage and facilitate the use of data in media reporting on VAWG. Data-driven journalism can provide deeper insights into VAWG's prevalence, patterns, and impact, helping contextualize individual cases within more significant societal trends.

4. Establish Inter-agency cooperation. Set up a coordinating task force comprised of representatives from relevant government agencies, enforcement bodies, institutional bodies, professional organisations, women's groups, health providers, schools, NGOs, civil society and the media to ensure an effective and coordinated approach to tackling VAWG and monitoring the publicity and media coverage of VAWG cases that is gender-sensitive and balanced.

5. Adequate funding and resourcing. Provide adequate budgets to support the implementation of laws combatting VAWG and the institutions tasked with monitoring, investigating, prosecuting violators and providing support for survivors.

6. Public campaigns in conjunction with the Media. To raise awareness about VAWG, impact and challenge stereotypes and cultural practices that condone it.





To the Media

1. Comprehensive Training for Journalists. Regular and comprehensive training on reporting on VAWG ethically and sensitively should be imbibed with a focus on the importance of maintaining the dignity and privacy of survivors, avoiding sensationalism, and providing context that links individual incidents to broader societal issues. This calls for collaboration between media organisations, civil society groups, and international bodies to facilitate developing and disseminating these training programs, including ethical investigative journalism on VAWG.

2. Develop Media Reporting Codes and Guidelines. Media houses can adapt responsible, gender-sensitive, respectful and contextual codes for reporting on VAWG. This offers journalists and other media workers a self-checklist of acceptable storytelling, managing survivors, avoiding victim-blaming, and dealing with bias.

3. Support Specialised Reporting on VAWG. Ensure that VAWG stories are not de-prioritized unduly and that they are seized as opportunities to enlighten the public about the issue to support initiatives to combat this. That spaces on TV, radio, newspapers and other media outlets are accessible to advocates and civil society to inform the public about VAWG and promote preventive and cultural change. Showcase more often successful prosecution of cases to inspire others to take action.

To Civil Society

1. Foster Collaboration Between Media and Civil Society. To amplify survivors' voices and advocate for systemic change, strong partnerships between media organisations and civil society groups is essential to provide journalists with access to expert knowledge, survivor stories, and resources that enhance the quality and impact of their reporting. Initiatives like Oxfam's "Raising Her Voice" program demonstrate the value of such collaborations in improving media coverage of VAWG.

2. Research and Monitoring. Conduct research and analysis into the systemic and structural causes of VAWG, providing relevant information to the public, media, government and international monitoring bodies. Providing expert opinions on VAWG to enrich media coverage of VAWG stories.

3. Advocacy and Civic engagement. Participating in public consultations organised by the government to raise the situation of VAWG survivors and proffer solutions for addressing them. To hold the government accountable for its commitments to addressing VAWG through advocacy missions, presentations to international monitoring bodies and other advocacy strategies. Collaborate with others, including the media, to amplify advocacy initiatives and civic engagements.

4. Training and Capacity Building. Provide resources and develop content on gender discrimination, VAWG, women's rights tailored for different audiences including specific training for media.



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