

# THE MASS MEDIA AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN IMO STATE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

## Abstract

*The study examined the mass media and gender base violence in Imo State. The investigation was anchored on the agenda setting and social network theories. The survey method was adopted for the study, while the sample size of 385 was drawn from a population of 5,408,756, using the Australian sample size calculator. The multistage sampling technique was adopted using questionnaire as the instrument of data collection. Findings revealed that the extent to which residents of Imo State are exposed to media reports and programmes on gender-based violence is high at 44%. Analysis also revealed that, at a mean average of 3.5 (N=379), the knowledge level of residents on gender-based violence is high. It was also revealed that, at an average mean of 3.5 (N=379), media programmes and reports have been able to induce perceptive/attitudinal change on gender-based violence positively. This is so because the respondents perceive the menace or act as a threat to human, family, societal and national development. The study further revealed that adequate awareness campaigns, enlightening programme, media programmes/reports on the need for the abolition of harmful social practices were the factors that can aid media efforts in actualizing perceptive/attitudinal change on gender base violence. The researcher recommended that the Nigerian government through state and non-state actions should put substantive measures in place to protect her citizens from gender-based violence.*

**Keywords:** Mass media, gender, gender-based violence, violence

## **Introduction**

In recent time, cases of violence against the male and female gender have increased. The mass media are filled with stories on gender based violence such as battery, assault, emotional blackmail against male and female, abuse, sexual molestation, etc. there is no gain stressing the obvious that all cross countries cases of gender-based violence are recorded. It has no social, economic, or national boundaries. In some countries, these cases seem to be grossly underreported. Gender-based violence is a “serious, life-threatening global problem that affects women, girls, boys, and men, and it is widely underreported in all settings” (Liyeh, Tassew, Ayalew, Goshu & Mihretie, 2020).

The World Bank noted in their 2019 report that gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most oppressive forms of gender inequality, posing a fundamental barrier to the equal participation of women and men in social, economic, and political spheres. GBV “includes intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual assault, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and abuse, child abuse, female infanticide, and child marriage. Such violence impedes gender equality and the achievement of a range of development outcomes” (World Bank, 2019).

Klugman, Hanmer, Twigg, Hasan, McCleary-Sills and Santa-Maria, (2014) citing World Bank’s Inter Agency Standing Committee, noted that Gender-based violence is “an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) difference between males and females”. This implies that violence can be mated out on both the male and female gender by any of the opposite gender or same gender category. However, Arango, Morton, Gennari, Kiplesund and Ellsberg (2014) noted that “women are much more vulnerable because violence reflects and reinforces existing gender inequalities. GBV includes intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, female genital mutilation,

sexual exploitation and abuse, child abuse, female infanticide, and child marriage” Exposure to intimate partner violence is linked to a multitude of adverse physical health outcomes, including acute injuries, chronic pain, gastrointestinal illness, gynecological problems, depression, and substance abuse (Taft & Watson, 2008).

Although the term “gender based violence” is widely used as a synonym for violence against women, GBV also occurs among men (Oladejo, Yusuf & Arulogun). In a doctoral study conducted by Chukwuma Uzoamaka in the University of Ibadan, it was revealed that more men are becoming victims of gender based violence in Nigeria. The study further revealed that in spite of being abused, men won’t report their ordeal, because they fear stigmatization from friends and family. They usually do not want any third-party interference and because they are still financially dependent on their wives. More married men are becoming victims of spousal abuse, but suffer in silence, because the society does not believe men can be victims of spousal abuse, hence, the non-disclosure of such experience for fear of stigmatization (News Agency of Nigeria, 2021).

In order to checkmate the cases of gender-based violence in the country, Nigeria adopted in 2006 a Framework and Plan of Action for the National Gender Policy. Consequently, the federal and state governments adopted several legislative and policy instruments, including The Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act of 2015, which prohibits female genital mutilation, harmful widowhood practices, harmful traditional practices and all forms of violence against persons in both private and public life. The Ekiti State government and Lagos State government went further to pass into law, The Gender-Based Violence Act and The Lagos State Protection Against Domestic Violence Law of 2007. The unique nature of these laws were the fact that they both added economic abuse as a form of gender-based violence (Usigbe, n.d.).

Despite the aforementioned efforts of the government, plus media programmes and reportage on GBV, violence against gender still persist. The media have a role to play in the fight against GBV. Dekic (2017) explains that gender-based violence is a problem of the entire society, it is considered a global pandemic, and the role of the media is to address this issue in a responsible way and to stir public discussion. Gender-based violence continues to occur in many countries of the world despite various measures taken to stop it. The media can shape the attitudes and perceptions of people and can be an advocate for social change (Fawole & Olufunmilayo, 2005).

### **Statement of Problem**

As a result of the rise in gender-based violence, both government and non-governmental organizations have floated different programmes and campaigns in the media to fight the menace in the society. Yet, the cases of gender-based violence continue to increase. On daily bases, the media are filled with reports of violence against men, women and children. This is worrisome. When there is gender based violence, the psychological scars often impede the establishment of healthy and rewarding relationships in the future. Forms of gender violence span from forced marriage to physical, mental and sexual assault.

The mass media should be at the front of fighting gender based violence because this threatens the family structure and the young ones suffer emotional damage when they are exposed to such acts. Mass media can play a useful role in propagation of information about gender based violence. The media can be used to create awareness, convey education and act as deterrence to various abuses. The “say no to gender-based violence” campaigns and “Orange the world” campaigns are cases of media awareness to end gender based violence. Despite the

aforementioned efforts of the government, plus media programmes and reportage on GBV, violence against gender still persist.

Could it be that the media reports and programmes are not properly prepared and placed for the people to listen to, read or view them? Or is it that the people do not have time to expose themselves to the reports and programmes? Or that the media have not been properly engaged to fight gender based violence.

It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to analyze the mass media effort in the fight against gender based violence in Imo State.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to analyze the mass media effort in the fight against gender-based violence in Imo State. The specific objectives were to:

1. Ascertain the extent to which residents of Imo State are exposed to media reports and programmes on gender based violence.
2. Examine the knowledge level of residents of Imo State on gender based violence as a result of media programmes and reports.
3. Determine whether media programmes and reports have been able to induce perceptible/attitudinal change on gender based violence amongst residents in Imo State.
4. Identify factors that can aid media efforts in actualizing perceptible/attitudinal change on gender based violence amongst residents in Imo State.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were:

1. To what extent are residents of Imo State exposed to media reports and programmes on gender based violence?
2. What is the knowledge level of residents of Imo State on gender based violence as a result of media programmes and reports?
3. How has media programmes and reports been able to induce perceptible/attitudinal change on gender based violence amongst residents in Imo State.
4. What are the factors that can aid media efforts in actualising perceptible/attitudinal change on gender based violence amongst residents in Imo State?

### **Gender-Based Violence and GBV in Nigeria Defined**

Klugman, Hanmer, Twigg, Hasan, McCleary-Sills and Santa-Maria, (2014) defined gender-based violence as “an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person’s will and that is based on socially ascribed (gender) difference between males and females”. Violence becomes gender based when it is targeted against a person because of his or her gender. It includes, but is not limited to, physical, sexual, psychological harm (including intimidation, suffering, coercion, and/or deprivation of liberty within the family or within the general community) and violence perpetuated by the state (Jhpiego, 2020).

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the most pervasive yet least visible human rights violation in the world. It includes physical, sexual, mental or economic harm inflicted on a person because of socially ascribed power imbalances between males and females. Gender-based violence takes numerous forms: Intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation, trafficking for sexual exploitation, female infanticide, and ‘honour’

crimes are common – with intimate partner violence occurring at staggering rates in every country, (UNICEF, 2021).

In Nigeria, the incidence of gender based violence (GBV) is growing astronomical with the activities of the insurgency in the north east. Gender based violence is a common social problem in Nigeria especially in the Northern parts of Nigeria. There has been an increase in the cases of domestic violence, sexual exploitation, forced early marriage, and rape of minors since the spate of Boko Haram insurgency (Okolo & Okolo, 2018).

### **Empirical Review**

Makinde, Odimegwu, Abdulmalik, Babalola, and Fawole, (2016) carried out a study on social media and gender-based violence which revealed that the victims experienced physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence from their aggressors. One case resulted in the death of the victim, while two required hospitalization following severe trauma. Furthermore, three of the victims were raped, while rape was attempted for the other two cases. In consonance to the findings of Makinde, et al (2016), Ugwu, Obioji, Eme (2016) investigated gender-based violence in Nigeria which aimed at the trends of gender-based violence in Nigeria and found that victims of violence can suffer sexual and reproductive health consequences, including forced and unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, traumatic fistula, and sexually transmitted infection including HIV, and even death.

Similarly, Ekweonu (2020) content analyzed newspaper coverage of domestic violence against women during covid-19 lockdown in some select dailies and found that the newspapers neither gave prominence nor adequate coverage to domestic violence against women within the lockdown period. It was also found that the newspapers hardly follow-up their stories on

domestic violence within the period. In another study by Eshiet (2014) which investigated social media orchestrated gender-based violence among youths in Nigeria, using a combination of methods - content analysis of reported cases in the media and in-depth interview of victims. The finding revealed a dangerous pattern of social media orchestrated gender-based violence among youths.

In Dauda (2018) study, it was revealed among other findings that socio-cultural factors promoted domestic violence in Nigeria and that women who experienced domestic violence preferred to rather keep mum than report to the law enforcement agencies. Lastly, it showed that mass media intervention has indeed been very impactful as evidenced by increased awareness and knowledge on domestic violence sponsored jingles on the available mass media channels.

In the study of Fawole and Asekun-Olarinmoye (2005), the results of the survey revealed that 86 of the 230 (37%) stated that both sexes have equal privileges and rights, while 78 (34%) felt that violence could help to keep women in check or in control. Female media practitioners had significantly higher knowledge and attitude scores than their male counterparts. Regular programmes on VAW usually consisted of 30-minutes or one-hour weekly programmes on radio and television as well as articles in the newspapers. Enlightening the public (41%) and portraying women in a successful light (12%) were some of the activities the practitioners were ready to embark upon.

In a different study, Orji, Anyanwu and Emeana (2021), it was revealed that the level of awareness of the campaign against discrimination and violence among women based on their exposure to television broadcast is minimal at 50% and that television broadcast's in the campaign against discrimination and violence against women were perceived to be

unsatisfactory at 46.1%. In essence the finding indicated that exposure to television broadcasts do not significantly influence women's participation in the campaign against discrimination and violence among them.

In another study carried out by Mittal and Singh (2020) which examined gender-based violence during COVID-19 pandemic revealed that similar to the previous pandemics and epidemics; there was an alarming increase in the incidents of gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. It further revealed that other risk factors that have been found attributive to the surge of gender-based violence was economic insecurity and alcohol consumption.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on agenda setting and social learning theories.

#### **Agenda Setting Theory**

This theory was propounded by Maxwell Mc Combs and Donald L. Shaw in the year, 1973. This theory explains that there is a relationship between news coverage and public perception of importance issues (Alvernia, 2019). The type of attention given to an issue by the media determines the level of importance the people will ascribe to it. Agenda setting theory refers to how the media's news coverage determines which issue becomes the focus of public attention (Communication Studies, 2020).

This theory is relevant to this study as it refers to how the media determines which issues becomes the focus of public attention. Thus, the media can cover issues on gender-based violence, thereby making it the focus of public attention.

#### **Social Learning Theory**

The theory was developed by Albert Bandura in 1977 as an alternative to the earlier work of fellow psychologist B.F. Skinner, known for his influence on behaviorism. While behavioral psychology focuses on how the environment and reinforcement affect behavior, Bandura put forth that individuals can learn behavior through observation (Online MSW Program, 2020). One of the most popular explanatory frameworks for gender based violence suggests that individuals learn how to behave through both the experience of and exposure to violence (Susman & Kendra, 2021).

This theory is relevant to this study because it reveals that anyone can learn violent behavior from the social environment and be motivated to act it out based on the level of motivation or benefit he/she is likely to gain; given that such benefit outweighs the punishment.

### **Research Methodology**

The study employed the survey methodology. The survey methodology was chosen because it involves sampling of opinion of different people using questionnaire to elicit information from respondents. Population of the study comprised residents of Imo State which according to the 2018 projected population is 5,408,756 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The sample size of 385 was arrived at using the Australian sample size calculator. The sampling technique used for the study includes; multi-stage sampling technique, non-proportionate sampling and purposive sampling technique. Questionnaire was the instrument for the data collection and it was face validated by two research experts in the field of mass communication. The researcher used simple percentages and mean analysis for the statistical analysis of data gotten from the field.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

In the course of this study, 385 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents to fill. Out of which 379 (98%) copies were retrieved and found valid while 6 copies (2%) were lost on the field.

**Table 1: Responses of respondents on their level of exposure to gender-based violence**

Options	Frequency	Percent
Very high	132	34%
High	161	44%
Moderate	55	14%
Low	21	5%
Very low	10	3%
Total	379	100

*Source: Field Survey (2021)*

Analysis of data revealed that 44% of the respondents affirmed that their level of exposure to mass media reports on gender-based violence is high. This implies that the level of exposure to media programmes and campaigns among Imo State residents is high.

**Table 2: Respondents level of knowledge on Gender-based violence**

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
Gender based violence is a harmful act	201	153	17	8	3.4	Accepted
Gender based violence is anti-human	219	137	19	4	3.5	Accepted
Gender based violence leads to disarray, chaos, confusion, disunity and disorderliness in a family	259	108	7	5	3.6	Accepted
Gender based violence is an abuse on the peace and wellbeing of an individual	227	140	9	3	3.6	Accepted
<b>Average Mean</b>					<b>3.5</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

*Source: Field survey, 2021*

*Decision rule: Given that the benchmark of a 4-point Likert scale for decision is 2.5, it means that if the calculated mean is 2.5-4.0, then the item in question is accepted. However, if the calculated mean is 1-2.4, then the item in question is rejected.*

From the analysis of data, result revealed that at an average mean of 3.5 (N=379), the knowledge level of residents of Imo State on gender-based violence is high as a result of media programmes and reports on the menace. By implication, these results shows that the residents are on the know of gender based violence reports on the media with a high level of knowledge.

**Table 3: Respondents responses on whether media programmes on gender-based violence have been able to induce attitudinal change in them**

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
I think gender-based violence causes traumatic experiences	203	171	5	0	3.5	Accepted
I think gender-based violence threatens the life of the victim	200	170	5	4	3.5	Accepted
I think gender-based violence can lead to violation of human rights and discrimination against the attacked person	152	210	10	7	3.3	Accepted
I think gender-based violence impedes family, societal and national development	224	141	9	5	3.5	Accepted
<b>Average Mean</b>					<b>3.5</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

*Source: Field survey, 2021*

*Decision rule: Given that the benchmark of a 4-point Likert scale for decision is 2.5, it means that if the calculated mean is 2.5-4.0, then the item in question is accepted. However, if the calculated mean is 1-2.4, then the item in question is rejected.*

From the analysis of data, result revealed that at an average mean of 3.5 (N=379), the respondents affirmed that: gender based violence impedes family, societal and national development; it causes traumatic experiences, threatens the life of the victim and it leads to violation of human rights and discrimination against the attacked gender. This therefore, implies that media programmes and reports have been able to induce perceptive/attitudinal change on gender-based violence positively.

**Table 4: Responses on factors that can aid media efforts in attitudinal change on gender-based violence amongst residents in Imo State**

Options	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Decision
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Adequate awareness campaigns on the consequences of gender-based violence	253	118	6	2	3.6	Accepted
Enlightening programme on gender-based violence	230	143	4	2	3.6	Accepted
Media contents/reports on the need for the abolition of harmful social practices	250	129	0	0	3.6	Accepted
The media should popularize media policies and laws aimed at eradicating gender-based violence	222	151	5	1	3.6	Accepted
<b>Average Mean</b>					<b>3.6</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

*Source: Field survey, 2021*

*Decision rule: Given that the benchmark of a 4-point Likert scale for decision is 2.5, it means that if the calculated mean is 2.5-4.0, then the item in question is accepted. However, if the calculated mean is 1-2.4, then the item in question is rejected.*

Result of the mean analysis of data indicated that, at an average mean of 3.6 (N=379), the respondents attested that adequate awareness campaigns on the consequences of gender-based violence, educative and enlightening programmes on gender-based violence, media contents/reports on the need for the abolition of harmful social practices and the popularization of media policies and laws aimed at eradicating gender based violence are the factors that can aid media efforts in actualizing perceptive/attitudinal change on gender based violence. This suffices that, if these factors are put in place by media organizations in Imo state, the fight against gender-based violence would be won and would be completely eradicated from the communities.

### **Discussion of Findings**

#### **The Extent to which Residents of Imo State Are Exposed to Media Reports and Programmes on Gender-Based Violence**

Result of data analysis revealed that 44% of the respondents affirmed that their level of exposure to mass media reports on gender-based violence is high. This result is contrary to the finding of Ekweonu (2020) which revealed that newspapers neither gave prominence nor adequate coverage to domestic violence against women within the lockdown period. It was also found that

the newspapers hardly follow-up their stories on domestic violence within the period. Not minding what Ekweonu found, this study still indicated that the level of exposure to media programmes and campaigns among Imo State residents is high.

### **The Knowledge Level of Residents of Imo State on Gender Base Violence as a Result of Media Programmes and Reports**

Communicating the knowledge level of residents of Imo State on gender-based violence as a result of media programmes and reports, data analysis revealed that, at an average mean of 3.5 (N=379), the residents of Imo State have a high knowledge level on gender-based violence issues as a result of media programmes and reports on the menace. This is closely related the result of Fawole and Asekun-Olarinmoye (2005) which showed that female media practitioners had significantly higher knowledge and attitude scores than their male counterparts. This implies that the knowledge of residents in Imo State in relation to gender-based violence is high.

### **How Media Programmes and Reports Have Been Able to Induce Perceptive/Attitudinal Change on Gender Base Violence Amongst Residents in Imo State.**

In furtherance to data analysis, result revealed that, at an average mean of 3.5 (N=379), the respondents affirmed that gender-based violence impedes family, societal and national development; it causes traumatic experiences, threatens the life of the victim and it leads to violation of human rights and discrimination against the attacked gender. This therefore, implies that media programmes and reports have been able to induce perceptive/attitudinal change on gender-based violence positively. This result further corroborates with the findings of Ayodeji, Odimegwu, Abdulmalik and Babalola (2016) which showed that the victims experienced physical, psychological, sexual and economic violence from their aggressors. Their study further showed that one case resulted to the victim's death, while two were hospitalized due to severe

trauma. The result also supports the social learning theory which holds that individuals learn how to behave through both the experience of and exposure to violence. It is of the opinion that social behavior is learned by observing and imitating the behavior of others. Given the fact that anyone can learn violent behavior from the social environment and be motivated to act it out based on the level of motivation or benefit he/she is likely to gain.

### **Factors That Can Aid Media Efforts in Actualizing Perceptive/Attitudinal Change on Gender-Based Violence Amongst Residents in Imo State**

Enquiring the factors that can aid media efforts in actualizing perceptive/attitudinal change on gender-based violence amongst residents in Imo State, result showed that, at an average mean of 3.6 (N=379), the respondents attested that adequate awareness campaigns on the consequences of gender-based violence, educative and enlightening programme on gender-based violence, media contents/reports on the need for the abolition of harmful social practices and the popularization of media policies and laws aimed at eradicating gender-based violence were the factors that can aid media efforts in actualizing perceptive/attitudinal change on gender-based violence. This suffices that, if these factors are put in place by media organizations in Imo state, the issues of gender-based violence can be completely eradicated. Supporting the agenda setting theory, if the media places so much importance on making issues of gender-based violence priority, it would be given utmost attention by both governmental and non-governmental organisations.

### **Conclusion**

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the most oppressive forms of gender inequality, posing a fundamental barrier to the equal participation of women and men in social, economic, and political spheres. GBV includes intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual assault, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and abuse, child abuse, female infanticide, and child

marriage. Despite the aforementioned efforts of the government in the previous chapters of the study, plus media programmes and reportage on GBV, violence against gender still persist. Thus, the study concludes that with constant media programmes/reports on the need for the abolition of harmful social practices and the popularization of government policies and laws aimed at eradicating gender-based violence, the fight against gender-based violence would be won.

### **Recommendations**

1. The researcher recommends more exposure to gender-based violence reports on TV, radio and newspapers should be promoted.
2. The study also recommends that media organizations should place more significance, importance and emphasis on issues bordering on gender-based violence.
3. It is also recommended that the Nigerian government through state and non-state actions should put substantive measures in place to protect her citizens from gender-based violence.

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