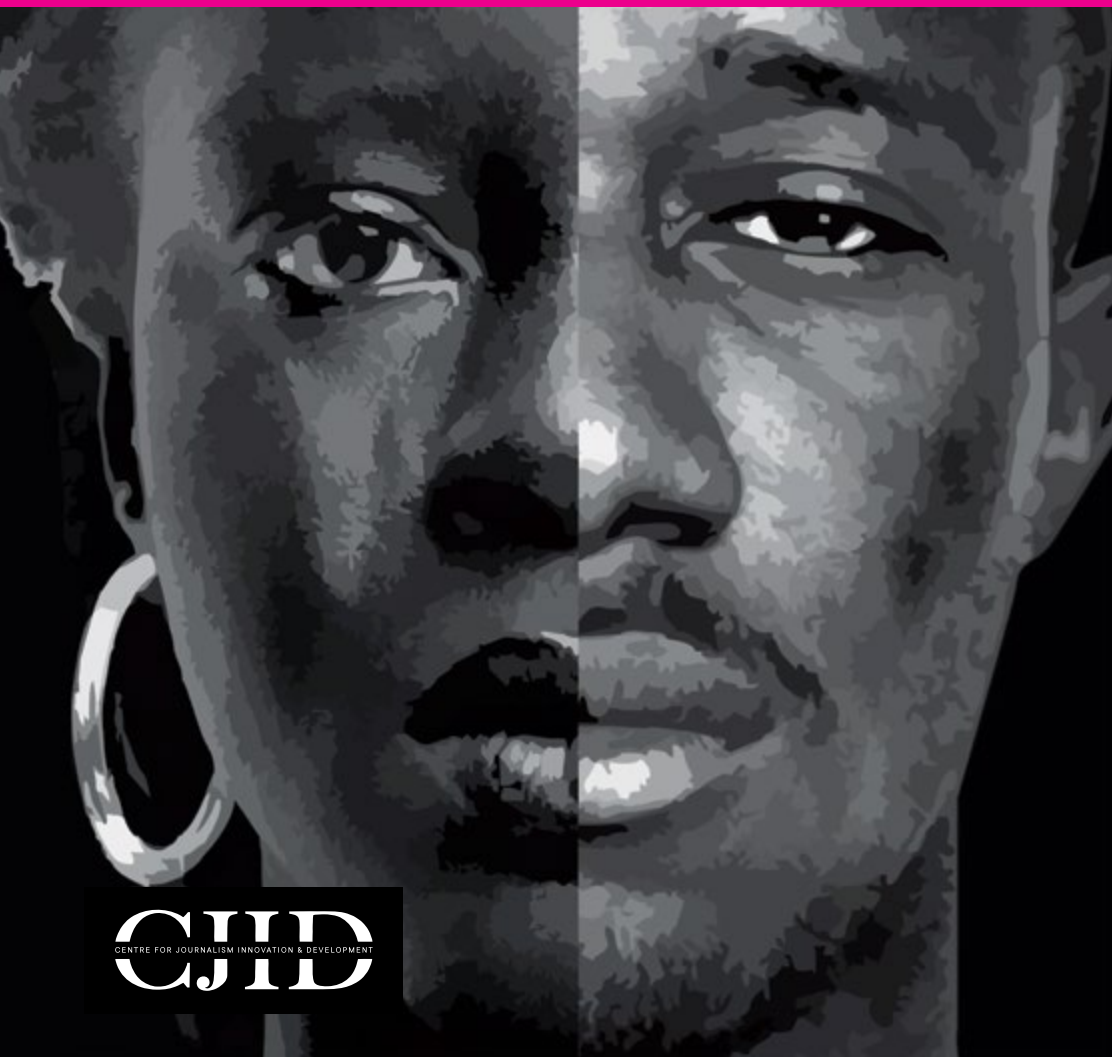


# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE REPORTING HANDBOOK





# **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE REPORTING HANDBOOK**

**Centre for Journalism Innovation  
and Development – CJID**

Published in Nigeria in 2022 by

**Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development – CJID (formerly PTCIJ)**

53, Mambolo Street, Zone 2, Wuse, Abuja.

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ISBN: 978-978-999-587-5

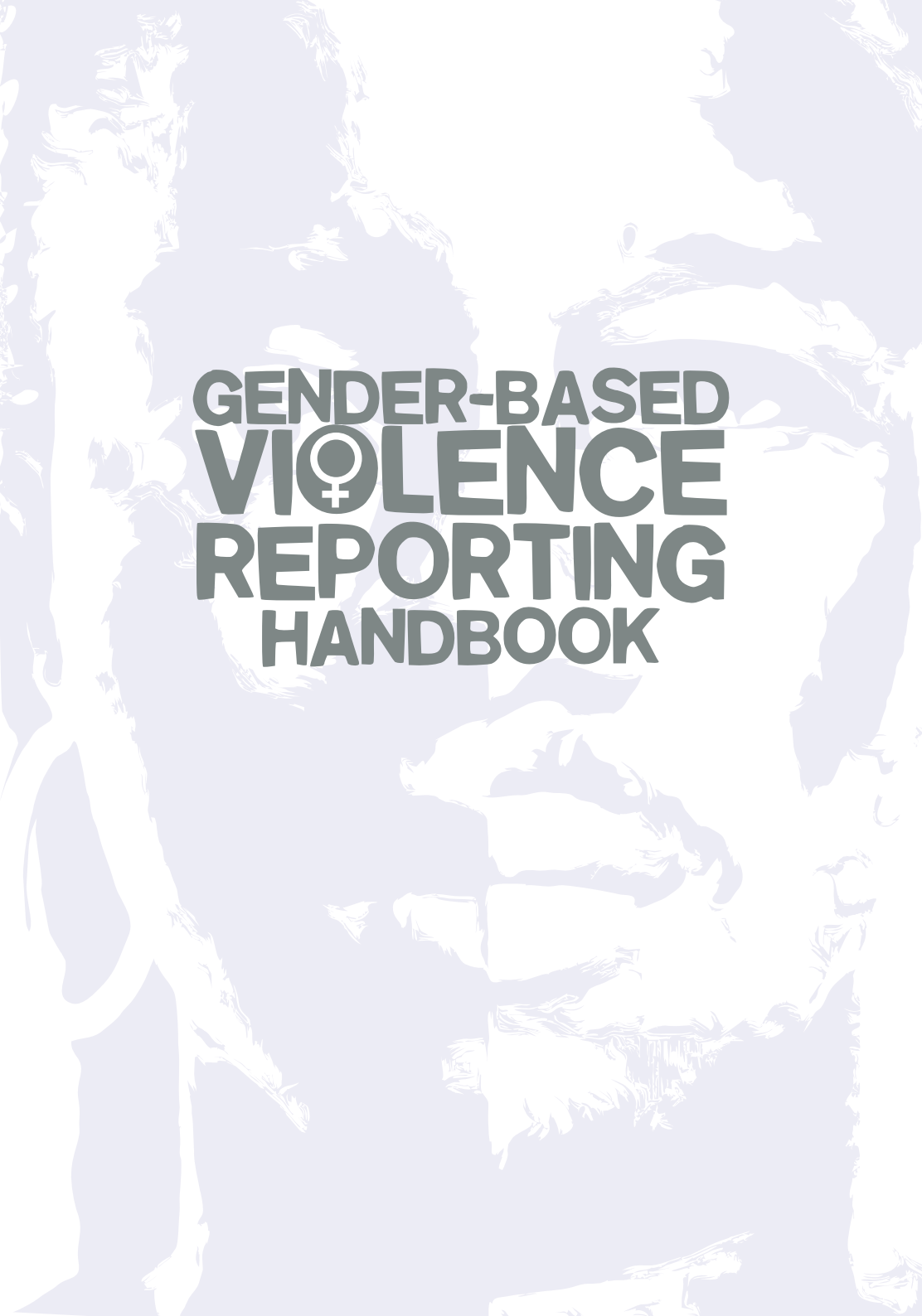
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### **About CJID**

Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development is a non-governmental organisation, founded in 2014, to promote a truly independent media landscape that advances fundamental human rights, good governance and accountability in West Africa through investigative journalism, open data and civic technology.




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**GENDER-BASED  
VIOLENCE  
REPORTING  
HANDBOOK**

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# Opening Note

**W**est Africa has a long history of gender-based violence (GBV), perpetuated by a culture of impunity and the underrepresentation of women in positions of influence and power. The crisis is further exacerbated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in a surge in cases of domestic and sexual violence. Women in the region today are facing “two pandemics,” while at the same time carrying the burden of caring for their families. In Nigeria, poor coordination and implementation amongst key stakeholders, ineffective legal and policy frameworks, coupled with entrenched gender discriminatory norms, have hampered efforts to address GBV.

The media and civil society and advocacy groups across the region have mobilised to call for change and public officials have made commitments to strengthen the role of women in society. However, the converging crises of the pandemic and gender-based violence highlight the ineffectiveness of one-off, short-term solutions in combating a problem rooted in “harmful social and cultural norms.”

Ending gender-based violence and discrimination therefore requires deeper and broader cultural, societal, and political buy-in. The underrepresentation of women in public institutions, combined with their continued objectification in the media, undermine any effort to address the deeply entrenched and damaging culture of discrimination against them. As the “gatekeepers of culture,” the media play a critical and essential role in righting this long-term wrong.

To drive meaningful and lasting gender equity in Nigeria, the role and voices of women in society need to be amplified. The media



need to “tell the stories of women,” with an emphasis on those “in leadership in public and private sectors” to maximise their influence. Empowering women journalists to raise the curtain on gender-related issues, amplify their representation in the media, and sustain reporting around them, is therefore key to combating the societal and cultural norms that overlook and/or enable gender-based violence.

GBV is covered by the media regularly, which is an indicator that there is a recognition of the problem, however, it is also a reason to analyse the way the media report on the issues involved and their responsibility in the process of starting conversations on violence against women and girls as a social problem. Unfortunately, there are usually significant flaws in the manner in which the media report GBV, such as the insufficient attention paid to this category of issues in the country and prevention thereof and the unethical reporting on sensitive cases.

Investigative and ethical journalism is a crucial attribute of just and equitable societies, which helps to safeguard the basic rights of citizens. It is, therefore, particularly important for journalists to be equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to deploy data-driven and thought-provoking story-telling tools to drive reforms and policy changes on issues affecting violence against women and girls.

The Ford Foundation is proud to support this handbook the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID), which aims to enhance the capacity of journalists to tell insightful and detailed stories, backed with facts and evidence. This handbook also presents a comprehensive overview of the key concepts, issues

and legal instruments in reporting on GBV. The contributors include a diverse range of individuals working on gender issues and professional investigative journalists who bring the much-needed perspectives to addressing the key issues in reporting GBV.

It is the hope that this effort will galvanise the urgent action required in ensuring proper investigative reporting is conducted when covering and reporting GBV cases.

**Olufunke Baruwa**

*Regional Program Officer, Gender, Racial & Ethnic Justice  
Ford Foundation Office for West Africa*

# Foreword

It is with great pleasure that the Australian High Commission, Abuja supported the production of the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development's Gender-based Violence Reporting Handbook.

Gender-based violence, in every instance, is unacceptable. It is therefore crucial that the media ensure their coverage does nothing to legitimise these abhorrent acts. Broad understanding within the community is the first step towards ending sexual and gender-based violence. This handbook aims to aide journalists in Nigeria in their reporting of sexual and gender-based violence, thus contributing to the accurate and informed coverage of these fundamentally important issues for the Nigerian community.

The media have a crucial role in shaping this conversation and creating the space for real, long-lasting change. The Australian Government has a steadfast and ongoing commitment to be at the forefront of efforts to promote gender equality and female empowerment, with a special focus on ending violence against women and girls. Whether in multilateral forums at the United Nations or at the local level in partnership with civil society, Australia seeks to advance global development, peace and stability by promoting gender equality and women's leadership and decision-making at all levels.

Our support for this project in Nigeria reflects this commitment. I hope this handbook will be an ongoing resource for journalists in Nigeria today and into the future, contributing to quality reporting that shines a light on the safety of Nigerian women and girls.

## **Jonathan Ball**

*Chargé d'Affaires (Acting High Commissioner)  
Australian High Commission, Abuja*

# Introduction

## Making Sense of Gender Reporting

Is there any reason why we need to give specific character and significance to reporting gender issues in African journalism? Some of the region's best thinkers on the matter and specifically on the patterns of abuses that occur in that province think the answer is in the affirmative. What we have here, then, is this exceedingly useful and masterly executed slim volume on the ontology of gender, the reality of its journalism, and the representation of its abuses seen through the prism of what is generally characterised as Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

As readers will find out from this manual on how to get better at reporting GBV, the reality in the field is a story of shabby if not incompetent craftsmanship. What proportion of this sloppiness is due to ignorance, stereotypes, or bias, is unclear, but the significant challenge to affirm is that the projects of democracy and development would be undone if we fail to adequately provide urgent remediation and express commitment to address this failure in the day-to-day expression of our gender reporting protocols.

This handbook, one of the emerging series dedicated to different knowledge areas of our profession, is dedicated to this mission of remediation to which the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) is set to help address. For such mission, therefore, the first port of call is an engagement with what we mean when we say we are discussing gender. The contributors to this volume have attentively taken turn to trash this out, and readers will be slightly tickled at what initially appears to be a repetitive definition of 'gender' in most of the chapters as, 'socially

constructed and differentiated values, roles, privileges, and rights accorded to people based on biology or self-defined identity in different cultures.’

This ritual of definition invariably leads us to two pathways: underscoring the embarrassing lacuna and knowledge gap about gender reporting in the universe of our journalism; and an urgent query on how we might then interrogate the presentation of journalism in the context of its services to the goals of democracy and development. If indeed journalism is to help enable a public sphere, while setting the agenda for development, even as it serves as a veritable accountability mechanism, how come that the case for attention to gender matters in most of our communities have ended at the short end of the journalistic bargain?

The community we speak of, in gender terms, is so statistically significant amongst us that any act of violence directed to it ought to trigger the journalistic antennas and call us to service and action. Good journalism, after all, is all about public good, and part of its broad mandate is contained, through the reality of its identity and its normative structure, encapsulated in the vessel of that larger democratic aspiration of any political community. Through the treaty obligations of states, through their statutes and policies, and through the outcomes of their juridical resolutions in case law, we know that good journalism relentlessly seeks accountability on democratic deficits and how leaders and citizens are able to exchange trust from dialogue and mandates.

Thus, within its normative space, as we find out from experts listed in this handbook, gender reporting in general, and its variant that is dedicated to the abuses of gender representation, GBV, is

inherently aligned to the interrogation of the structure of power and status, the production of resources, and the architecture of benefits and access to them in a community. This is essentially a purposive type of journalism and reporting, the endgame of which is a restorative and deliberative democracy in which the ratios of power, privileges, and rights are re-evaluated and rebalanced to allow the key principles of moral philosophy and ethics to prevail.

Repeated moments in this fabulous keepsake and evenly argued handbook, tellingly challenge reporters and editors to an awareness that journalistic coverage of GBV is a furtive invitation to help unlock the 'differential access to societal benefits, which, in turn, creates differences in relational status and political power.' For journalist already dedicated to the investigative tradition of the profession, this is a daily testament, and an aide-memoire that fundamental public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy.

It is this recurrent resort to the theme of democracy that will relieve the handbook of awkward claims from those who may suggest that gender reporting is a closet political engagement, for which the handbook has sought to be a manifesto. In different tones and with generous references from different communities in West Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Liberia, contributors to the handbook stress the point that in a democracy, the constitution of a public sphere and the active resolve to improve its neural fibres through the empowerment of the citizens using the semantics of justice, is the epicentre of the journalistic objective.

As the political philosopher John Rawls would have put it: this (sense of justice) is to constitute the fundamental charter of a well-

ordered human association. Thus, as one of the many insightful instances of this compelling handbook puts it, “GBV requires immersion in clear gender appreciation and understanding.” This is logical, and journalists need to be reminded that social stratification is nothing but a cursor for social inequality - including gender inequality. Invariably, gender hierarchy not only promotes male dominance but is also an outgrowth of the variation and imbalance of social status in our communities. If we therefore resolve to address this problem through the instruments of justice and equity, as one of the contributors here contemplates, our media need to “...assert the equality of gender” as a staging ground “for addressing injustices against women, including all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination, economic empowerment, and equal access to opportunities.”

**Dapo Olorunyomi**

*Chief Executive Officer,  
Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development*



**1**

**Understanding Journalists’  
Perspective of Gender-Based  
Violence In Nigeria  
– A Survey Analysis**

**Busola Ajibola**





## Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is one of the prevalent human rights issues in Nigeria and any form of violence targeted at an individual on the basis of their gender qualifies as GBV. It is categorised by the United Nations (UN) as a composite of acts that are likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including the threats of such acts, coercion or the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. There is emerging evidence that men and boys also experience GBV, but women and girls are disproportionately affected.

The 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey<sup>1</sup>, which shows that 31 per cent of women between the age of 15 and 49 experienced gender-based violence, is proof that GBV is a growing crisis and has pronounced life-threatening consequences. The 31 per cent statistics in the NHD survey represented an increase in the occurrence of GBV from 28 per cent in both 2008 and 2013. And from that recorded 31 per cent, there was a 149 per cent monthly increase documented in 23 states over the period of the COVID-19 induced lockdown<sup>2</sup>.

Other forms of GBV that are not captured in the above statistics include child marriage – with Nigeria having 3.5 million child brides and taking a third place in the world<sup>3</sup>; female genital mutilation (FGM)<sup>4</sup>, in which 20 million women and girls<sup>5</sup> in Nigeria – a representation of 10 per cent of the global number – have undergone FGM, of which 82 per cent were cut before the age of

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1 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018 Key Indicators Report

2 Gender-based violence in Nigeria during the Covid-19 Crisis: The Shadow Pandemic prepared by UN Women with UNFPA, UNODC and UNICEF on behalf of the UN System in Nigeria.

3 <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/nigeria/> Accessed on 23/05/2021

4 <https://www.afro.who.int/news/who-and-partners-harmonize-government-efforts-stop-medicalization-female-genital-mutilation> Accessed on 23/05/2021

5 Prevalence of FGM <https://www.28toomany.org/country/nigeria/> Accessed on 23/05/2021

5<sup>6</sup>. Added to these is the alarming increase in sexual abuse and rape of children.

GBV, according to the UN, is a deep-rooted human rights violation that arises from unequal power relations between men and women. It is mainly utilised in discriminating against and dominating women, with the sole intent of preventing their advancement and the attainment of sustainable development goals (SDG) 5, which is gender equality. Factors that have continued to engrain GBV include discriminatory cultural norms, the pervasive impunity enjoyed by perpetrators and the lack of access or outright denial of justice to survivors/victims. There remains a high rate of silence on the part of survivors, as many of them are blamed or shamed for their own violations or for seeking redress. The fear of stigma and the silence of victims have been identified as factors that contribute to the under-reportage of cases of GBV, making the gathering of reliable data on incidents of GBV an uphill task.

## **GBV and the Fourth Estate: Why Should the Media Care?**

The media is an institution that possesses agenda-setting powers. It has the power to project issues, either as salient, trivial or unworthy of attention through the way it crafts its reportage. The significant role of the media in this sense has been long established<sup>7</sup> as a means of expanding the knowledge of the public and policymakers. In essence, the manner in which the media reports gender-based violence can determine the degree of importance the public and policy makers accord the issue, and how solutions are rallied. Besides, journalists and members of

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6 *ibid*

7 Ochonogor, C.I and Orlu-Orlu, H.C (2011). Newspaper Coverage of the 25 Attempted Bombing of an American Airliner and the Nigerian Rebranding Project. In Oladokun Omojola (Ed.), *Media, Terrorism and Political Communication in a Multicultural Environment* (pp. 359-365). Lagos: Atman Press.



the media ecosystem are saddled with enormous responsibilities to combat GBV, given the privileged access they have to people reading, watching and listening to them – a privilege that confers on them the status of change agents.

However, albeit unconsciously, it is possible for journalists and other media professionals to also escalate or perpetuate GBV. These happen when the media stereotype women in their reports, or objectify them in advertorials, commercials or entertainment, or engage in amplifying the abuse, shaming and victimisation<sup>8</sup> of women perpetrated by security agencies. The media can also perpetuate GBV if they enable public sympathy or forgiveness for perpetrators of GBV, or elevate gender-discriminatory norms in media narratives. Gender insensitive reporting and negative stereotypes can, as a matter of fact, reinforce erroneous beliefs that women must fit into certain socio-cultural expectations and that those who refuse to do so deserve violence meted out to them.

For the Nigeria media to therefore take a lead in breaking the silence on GBV and rallying solutions, journalists, editors and other media professionals must have a better understanding of the dynamics that exacerbate GBV. The media must first acknowledge the equality of humans – male, female, and others in between – and educate their audiences on the sanctity of that truth. In addition, the media must lead efforts aimed at eliminating GBV and follow such commitments with transformative storytelling.

## **What Journalists Think About GBV and Its Reportage In Nigeria – A Snap Survey Analysis**

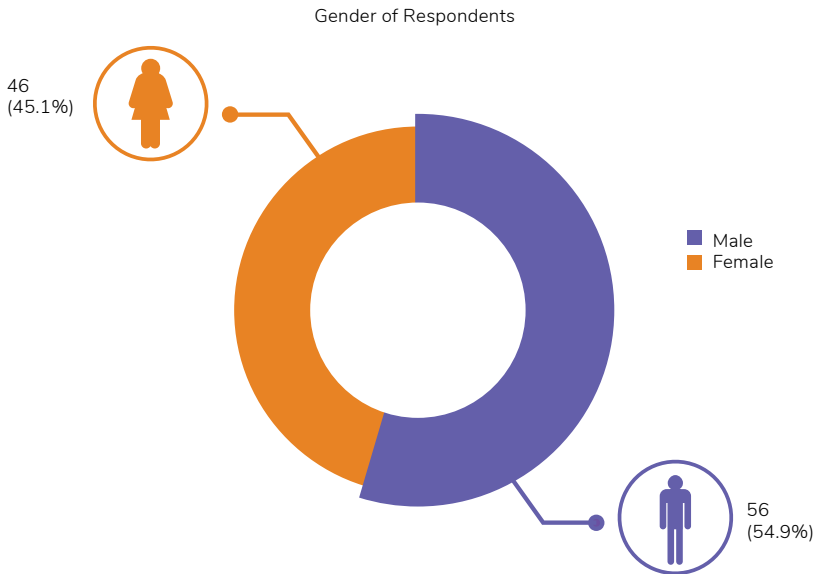
To understand the perspectives of journalists on GBV better, the

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<sup>8</sup> SARS officers pressed my yansh while arresting me - pregnant woman laments - watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCgjoCdnT7o>

challenges they encounter in the course of reporting it, and to open-up opportunities for the media to evaluate what it needs to do better in GBV reportage, the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development conducted a survey in which one hundred and two journalists were polled. As shown in Chart 1, the majority of the survey respondents are male. This might immediately suggest the gender composition of newsrooms, and that more male journalists, than females, are reporting GBV. However, the scope of the survey makes it difficult to ascertain such claims as facts.

**Chart 1**

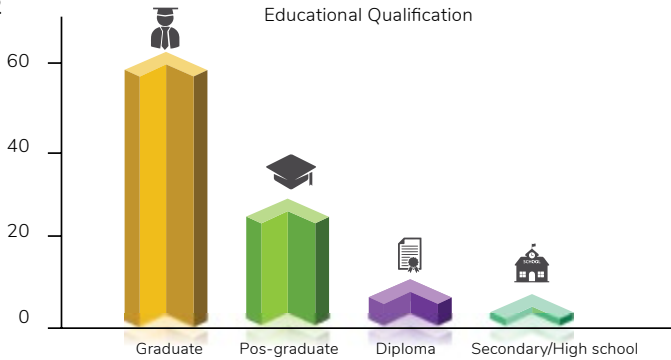


Majority of the respondents, fifty-eight, are graduates, while seven have secondary school certificates. The seven most likely account for students in tertiary institutions who practice journalism. The perspectives of campus journalists on GBV is significant, considering the numerous reports of sexual harassment across



Nigeria tertiary institutions<sup>9</sup>, with campus journalists participating in reporting the incidents<sup>10</sup>.

**Chart 2**



Sixty-one of the respondents have not practiced journalism for more than five years and the majority work with online news platforms. Seventy-five respondents are reporters, fifteen are editors and others work as research officers, communication officers and so on for media organisations.

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- 9 <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/273135-breaking-oau-dismisses-professor-involved-in-sex-for-mark-scandal.html>
  - <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-49907376>
  - <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/ssouth-east/413617-imsu-suspends-lecturers-involved-in-alleged-sex-for-grade-scandal.html>
  - <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/south-south-regional/361139-sexual-harassment-akwa-ibom-university-sacks-eight-lecturers.html>
  - <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/372689-exclusive-nigerian-university-student-records-another-lecturer-threatening-to-fail-her-over-sex.html>
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  - <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/423623-special-report-how-unclear-policies-contribute-to-sexual-harassment-in-nigerian-universities-part-1.html>
  - <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/423917-special-report-how-nigerian-lecturers-sexual-harassment-force-students-to-quit-school-part-2.html>
  - <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/424250-special-report-the-ordeals-of-rape-victims-in-a-nigerian-university-3.html>
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Ot3QWHXN20>
  - 10 <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/features-and-interviews/425240-many-nigerian-higher-institutions-lack-sexual-harassment-policies-4.html>

Chart 3

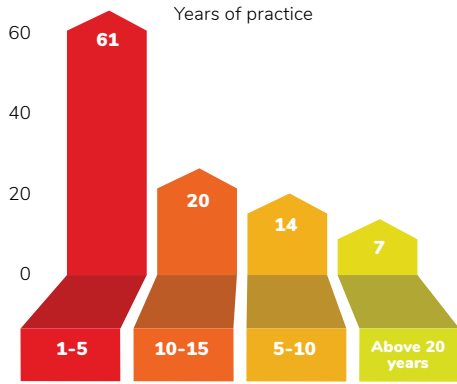


Chart 4

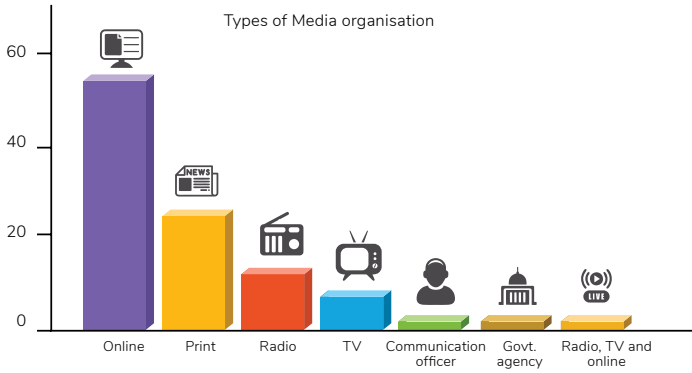
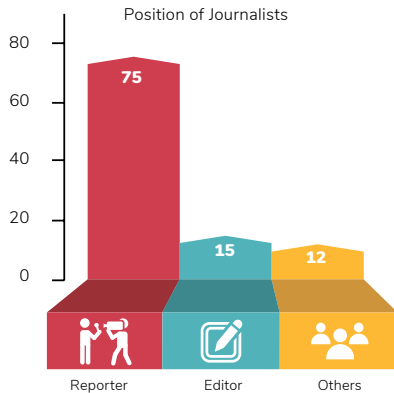


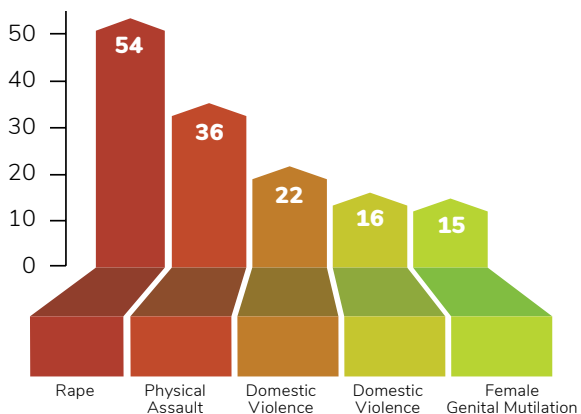
Chart 5





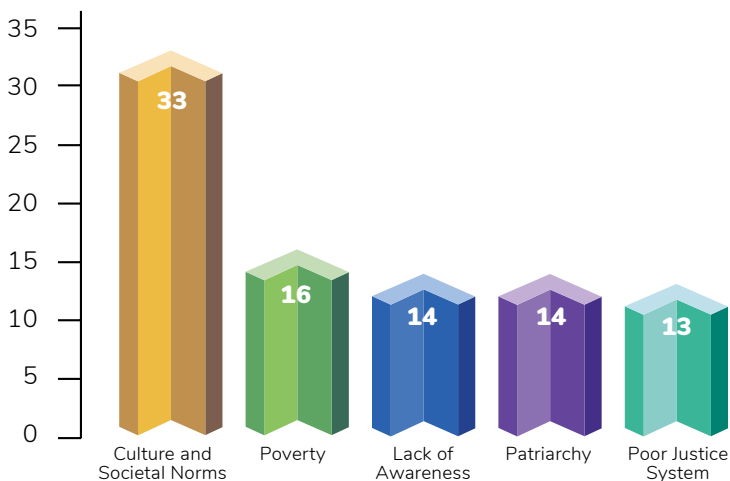
### Chart 7

Top 5 Types of GBV listed by Respondents



### Chart 8: Causal factors identified by respondents

Top 5 factors considered to be causes of GBV in Nigeria listed by Respondents





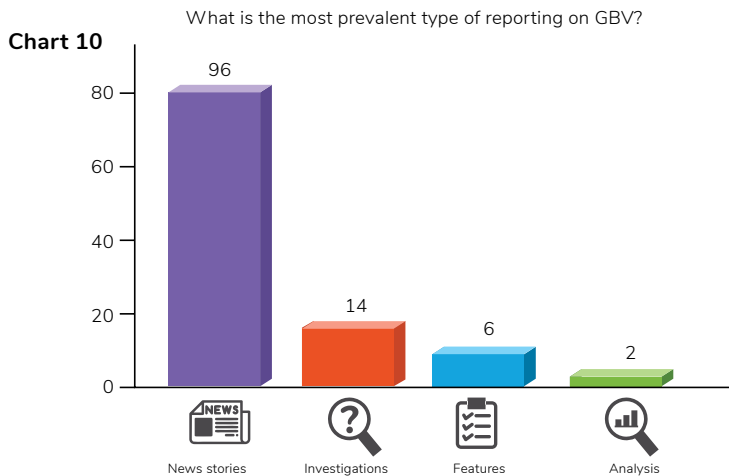


job or advance her career is a valid aspiration, which should never be responded to with violence in any form, like we saw in the case of Hiny Iniobong Umorena, a young lady who, in her quest for a job, was lured, raped and eventually murdered<sup>13</sup>. Suffice to say that journalists are also members of the society and are prone to socialisations and the indoctrination of orientations that perpetuate GBV. But as change agents, they must rise up to challenge and change norms, expectations and beliefs that can negatively impact women’s lives or make them susceptible to GBV.

**Appendix 2** contains actual responses provided by the respondents.

### GBV Reporting Patterns

The most prevalent type of reporting on GBV is through news stories, as confirmed by 78.4 per cent of the surveyed respondents. The media, without doubt, gives prominence to serious and current issues by giving them news treatment.



13 <https://itakeactions.org/actions/justice-for-late-iniobong-umorena>



However, that GBV is given straight news treatment also implies that such coverage lacks in-depth engagement. By limiting the reportage of GBV to mostly news reports, the media is failing to spotlight social, cultural and economic factors that make the issue of gender-based violence very complex. As emphasised in one of the chapters in this handbook, journalists need to expand the reportage of GBV beyond episodic incidents or news report, and adopt a thematic coverage (TC) approach that situates episodic incidents of GBV within the structural realities of the Nigerian society<sup>14</sup>. The media must not treat violence against women as a minor issue that should be reported as *short news items*, *other news* or the *background issue*. GBV are not isolated 'incidents' or private family matters, they are very serious societal problems and must be treated as such<sup>15</sup>.

Fifty (49.02 per cent) out of the one hundred and two respondents stated that they have reported GBV at some point in their careers, while the remaining fifty-two (50.98 per cent) mentioned that they are yet to report on GBV. That almost half of the journalists who responded to this survey have reported GBV at some point underscores the prevalence of this form of violence and confirms the ranking that Nigeria is one of the most dangerous and unsafe countries for women to live in<sup>16</sup>.

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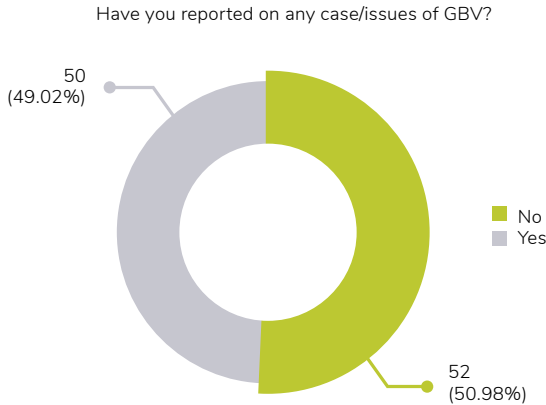
14 Read the chapter on *Unpacking the Nature of Gender-Based Violence* by Chiedo Nwankwor and Adedeji Adebayo

Also, read *Stay on the story: How to do follow-up reports until something happens in cases of GBV* by Motunrayo Famuyiwa-Alaka

15 Anne Marie Impe (2019) opus cit.

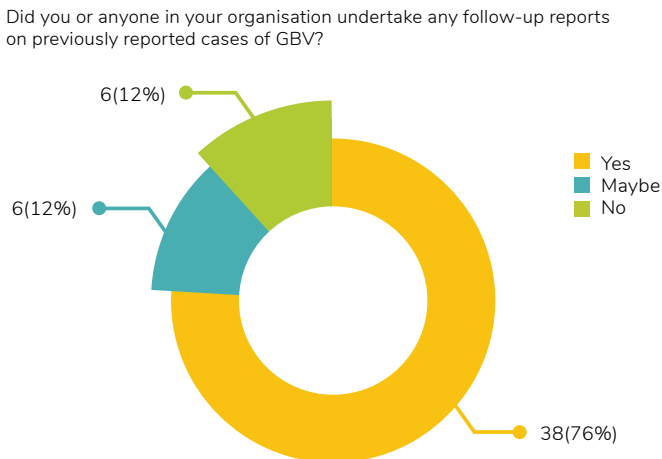
16 <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/most-dangerous-countries-for-women>

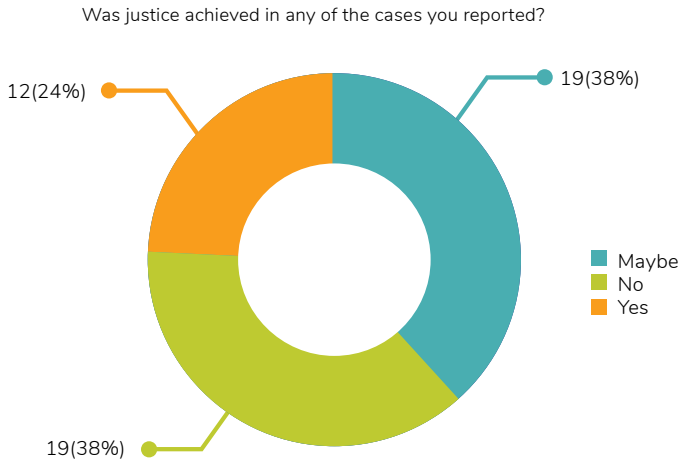
**Chart 11**



Thirty-eight (76 per cent) of the journalists who responded that they have reported GBV indicated that they, or someone in their organisations did follow-up reports on previously reported cases. Six (12 per cent) of the fifty did not do any follow-up report and the remaining six (12 per cent) were unsure whether there were follow-ups about the initial reports or not.

**Chart 12**

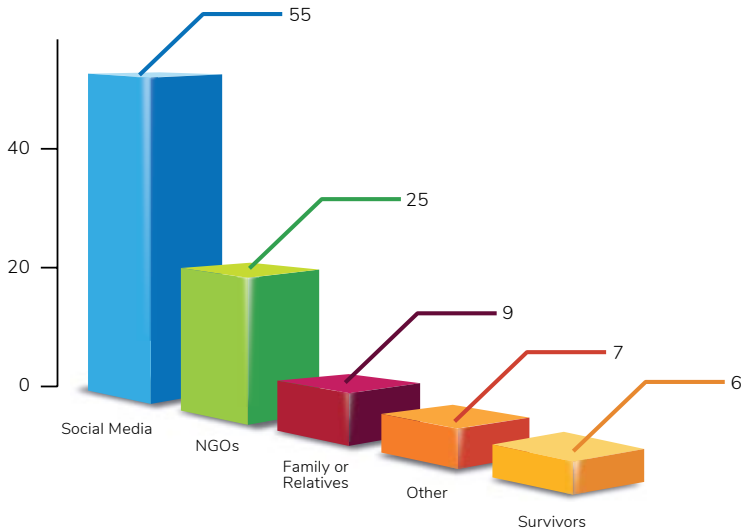


**Chart 13**

Among other things, Chart 13 reveals the evasiveness of justice pertaining to cases of GBV in Nigeria. 38 per cent of journalists who have reported GBV responded that justice was not achieved in the cases they reported, 38 per cent were unsure and only 24 per cent could confirm that justice was achieved. These point to the need for journalists to report GBV untiringly - following up cases till their logical conclusions are reached, and not abandon them as breaking news. Reportage of GBV should provide the public with consistent information about how security agencies respond and handle complaints, the challenges that survivors encounter with the gathering and preservation of evidence, and also information about judicial processes from the onset of the cases till judicial conclusions.

### Chart 14

Through which of the following channels do you mostly receive reports about incidents of GBV?

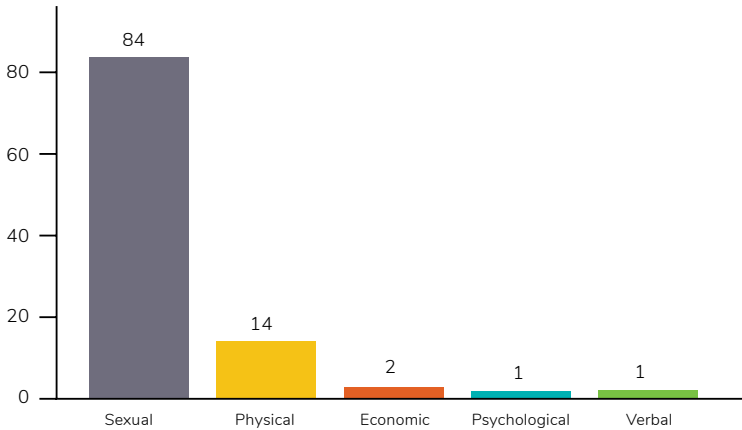


Findings from the survey reveal that journalists mostly receive reports on GBV through the social media. Only a few reports are sourced from survivors, and the families and relatives of survivors. This helps illustrate the fact that there is still so much to be done with regards to getting survivors of various forms of violence and abuse to break their silence and seek justice and support. The media can contribute towards the achievement of this through emphatic, non-sensational, non-judgmental and dogged reporting. Also, as indicated by eighty-four of the respondents, sexual violence is the mostly reported form of GBV, followed by physical violence, economic violence, psychological violence and verbal violence respectively.



### Chart 15

Which of the following forms of GBV do the media mostly report about?



### Media Obligations On GBV Reporting

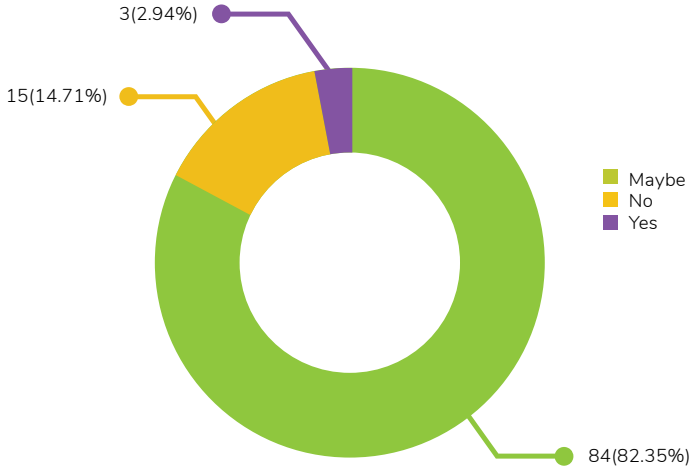
The second section of the survey considered media obligations around the reporting of GBV. Findings from survey respondents reveal the following:

1. Journalists/the media have an ethical obligation to report GBV, not as isolated events but as an issue that has deep intersection with other social inequities;
2. That GBV is a social issue that is as important as corruption, insecurity and so on;
3. That despite 1 and 2 above, long-form reportage of GBV in feature stories, investigative reporting, and analysis, are rarely initiated by the media;
4. The most prevalent type of reporting on GBV is news reporting.

The big question would then be: Why is the media not investing in extensive long-form reporting that can help the public contextualise GBV as a deep social problem requiring swift responsive and preventive policies?

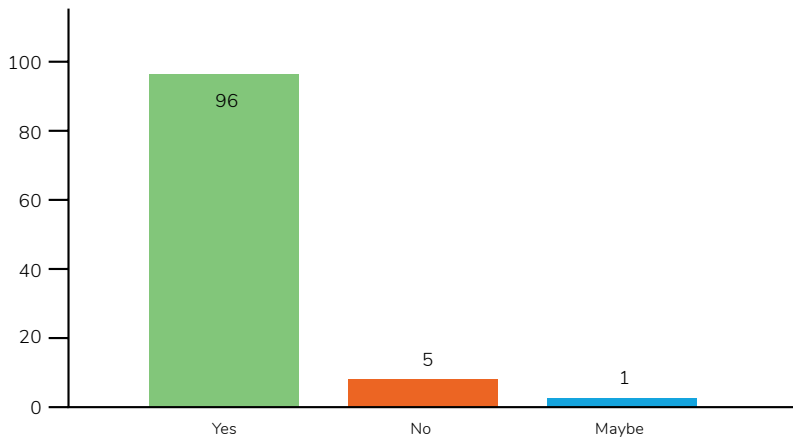
### Chart 16

Does the media have an ethical obligation of initiating reports about GBV issues as a social problem and not just an isolated event(s)?



### Chart 17

Do you think GBV coverage is as important a social issue as corruption, insecurity, etc.?

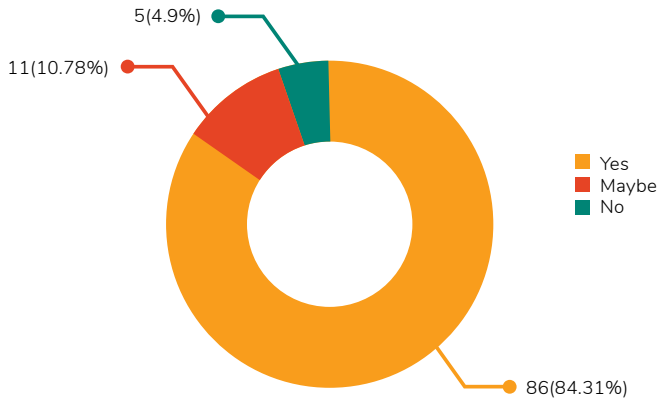






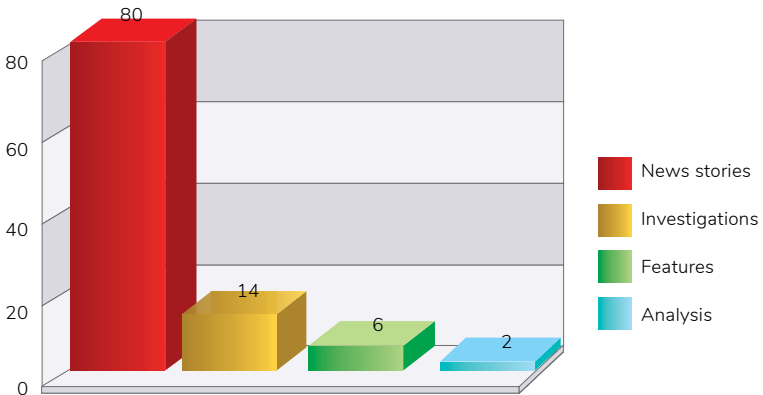
**Chart 18**

Do you agree that long from reportage of GBV as a social problem is rarely initiated by the media?



**Chart 19**

What is the most prevalent type of reporting on GBV?



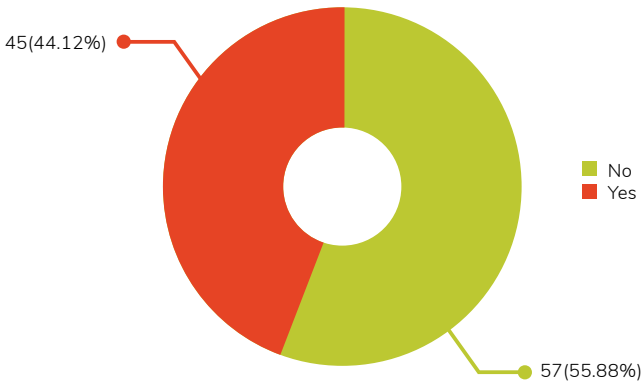
## Ethical Considerations and Dimensions To GBV Reportage

55.88 per cent of the respondents indicated that they are unaware of any ethical guidelines for GBV reporting and only fifty-nine journalists responded to the section that required them to

mention any GBV reporting guidelines they are familiar with. This underlines the significance of interventions like this GBV reporting guideline, which aims at providing awareness, sensitisation, and guide for journalists, editors and other media professionals about GBV and facilitates better reportage.

**Chart 20**

Are you aware of ethical rules that guide journalists and editors on GBV reporting?



**Chart 21**

Journalists should protect suspected perpetrators' intimate details at all times in news report?





## Chart 22

Is showing the faces of perpetrators of GBV ethical?



Forty-nine (48.04 per cent) of the respondents believe that journalists should protect the intimate details of perpetrators of GBV at all times in news reports, and sixty (58.82 per cent) believe that it is ethical to reveal the faces of perpetrators in Nigeria, getting convictions for cases of GBV, especially sexual offences, are uphill tasks. In 2017, for instance, there were 2,279 reported cases of rape and indecent assault. Yet, despite this volume of reported cases, the police recorded no single conviction<sup>17</sup>! Even though findings from data mined from law reports and news reports showed that there were sixty-five rape convictions between 1973 and 2019<sup>18</sup>, the reality is that the conviction rate is still very low when compared to the prevalence of such crimes. The frustration about the denial of justice in this regard prompted civil society

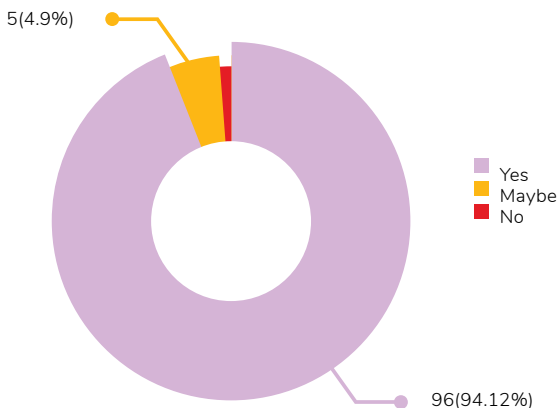
17 Nduka Orjinmo (2020): #WeAreTired: Nigerian women speak out over wave of violence  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52889965> Accessed on 19/05/2021

18 Kunle Adebajo (2019): FACT CHECK: No, it is not true Nigeria has recorded only 18 convictions in rape cases  
<https://www.icirnigeria.org/fact-check-no-it-isnt-true-nigeria-has-recorded-only-18-convictions-in-rape-cases/> Accessed on 19/06/2021

organisations working in the area of GBV in Nigeria to adopt the “name and shame” initiative<sup>19</sup>. In states like Ekiti, convicted sex offenders are listed in the Sex Offenders Register and posters containing their images are published in their local governments and towns of origin/residence<sup>20</sup>. Some, however, believe that the images of perpetrators can easily reveal the identities of GBV survivors, especially where they are minors.

96 respondents (94.12) believe that intimate details of victims/survivors and their families should be protected at all times in news reporting, and 84 respondents (82.35 per cent) indicated that it is unethical to show videos and pictures of survivors of GBV. In all, the principle of confidentiality, especially in rape cases, and where such survivors are minors must be respected at all times. The exception to this would be where the survivor is an adult and consents to making his/her identity public.

**Chart 23** Journalists should protect the intimate details of victims/survivors and their families at all times in news report



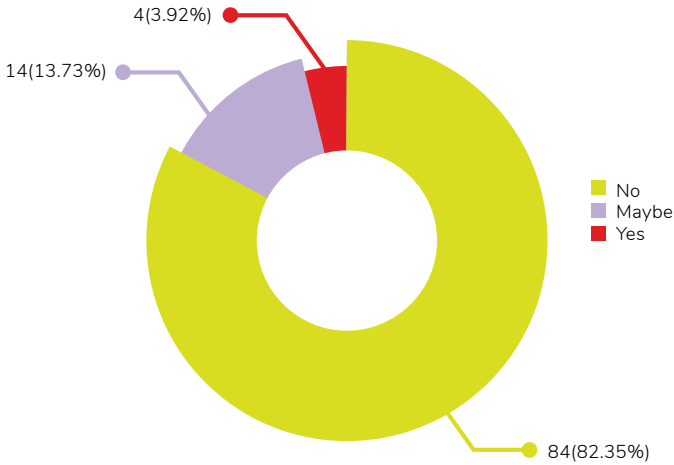
19 Baobab Women (2019): Naming and Shaming Perpetrators of Sexual Violence in Nigeria <https://www.baobabforwomen.org/post/home-and-shaming-campaign> Accessed on 01/04/2021

20 Bisi Fayemi – Championing the Fight Against Gender-based Violence <https://www.thisdaystyle.ng/bisi-fayemi/> Accessed on 19/06/2021



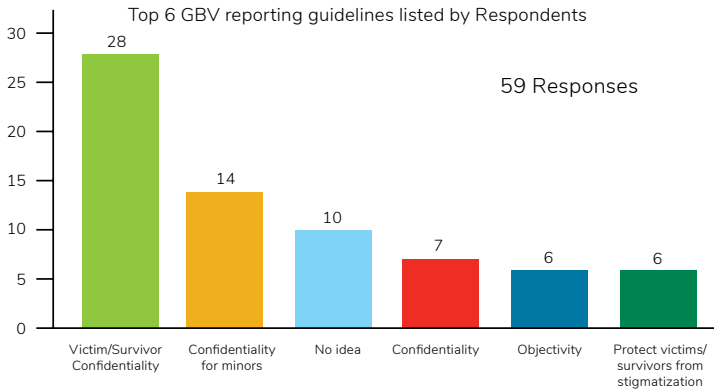
**Chart 24**

Is showing the faces of perpetrators of GBV ethical?

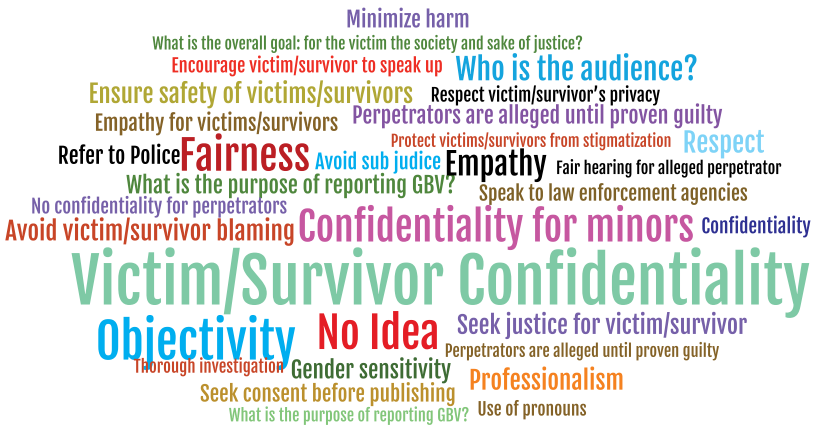


Apart from this, journalists are advised to avoid secondary victimization of survivors of GBV, they should portray survivors as resilient, they should rebalance information to improve gender equality, and respect the rights and dignity of survivors. To achieve successful interviews with survivors of GBV, journalists should prioritise the safety of their interviewees, be attentive and be non-judgmental. More importantly, the reporting framework contained in this GBV reporting handbook will help in bridging the existing gap for journalists in need of more knowledge in that area as well as advance the knowledge of those who are already familiar with ethical factors that must be considered in the course of reportage.

**Chart 25: GBV reporting guidelines respondents are familiar with**



**Chart 26** GBV reporting guidelines listed by respondents



## The GBV Reporting Process: Issues and Challenges Confronting Journalists

Understanding the challenges that journalists encounter while reporting GBV is central to redesigning a better reporting process. An assessment of responses provided by journalists shows that access to information about incidents of GBV is a serious challenge and this exists on three main levels. Journalists battle with accessing information from survivors of GBV and their families,



from members of the community, and from law enforcement agencies.

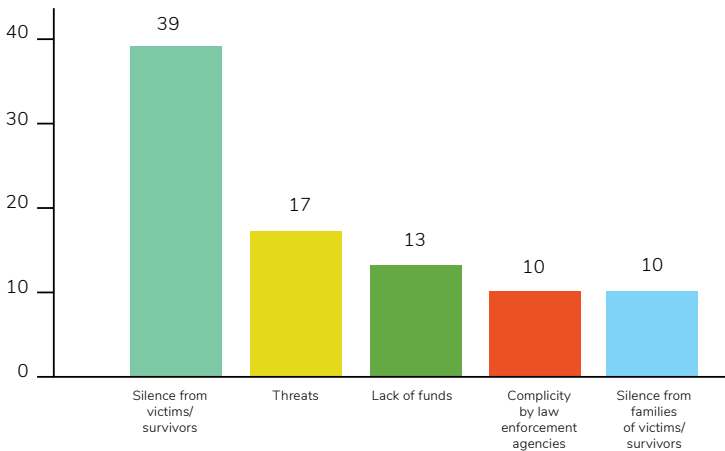
Poor access to information on incidents of GBV can contribute to the under-reporting of the issue and this can be frustrating to journalists. They must however realise that among other challenges, survivors of GBV battle stigmatisation, victim-blaming, self-blame, fear of reprisal and lack of trust in the justice process. These factors explain why many survivors and their relations keep the trauma of the abuse they experience to themselves. The challenges are worse in societies where perpetrators of GBV are defended, made excuses for, or where forgiveness is emphasised above justice for the abused and consequences for the abuser. This guidebook however provides some knowledge on how journalists can navigate the challenges of accessing information, including ways to conduct sensitive interviews, while prioritising the safety of survivors and their families.

Journalists also identified the lack of cooperation of security agencies, and what they termed “unprofessional conducts” exhibited by prosecuting agencies, as limiting factors affecting the way they report GBV. The role of security agencies, especially Police officers, Civil Defence officers, and officials of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), are very critical. As first responders to GBV, police officers are responsible for opening up cases, investigations, and evidence gathering. Police also perform the role of referring survivors to other professionals, sexual assault referral centres, mediation units, counseling units and so on. Most importantly, police officers are responsible for prosecuting alleged perpetrators of gender-based violence on behalf of the state. In light of this, it is quite understandable that journalists express frustration where there is a lack of professional working relationship with prosecuting agencies and police officials working on cases of GBV.

Editorial sabotage, lack of interest by newsrooms and the lack of funding are also some of the challenges listed by respondents as being faced in the reportage of GBV. This calls for a need for newsroom gatekeepers and the general civil society community to give more attention to the issue.

**Chart 27**

Top 5 challenges journalists face while reporting GBV cases as listed by respondents



**Chart 28**

Challenges journalists encounter while reporting GBV





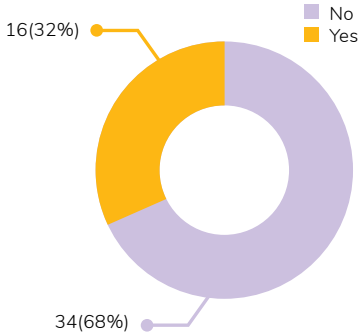


Journalists listed physical violence and psychological trauma as part of the challenges they encounter in the course of reporting GBV. According to the survey, there are situations in which journalists are threatened by perpetrators of GBV to desist from reporting on this, through the threats of lawsuits, etc. Sometimes too, journalists, according to the survey, are physically or verbally attacked. It is also possible for journalists to decide not to report a GBV case because they fear that perpetrators serving jail sentences can haunt them if freed unlawfully or before they complete their jail times. (The **Appendix section of this analysis** contains actual responses provided by respondents).

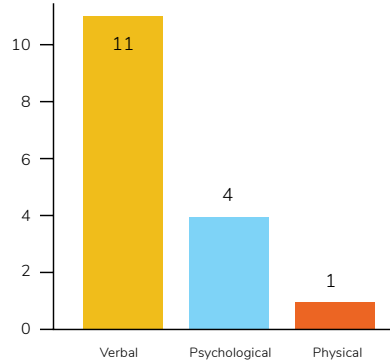
Twenty-seven, representing 54 per cent of the fifty journalists who responded that they have reported cases of GBV, have experienced psychological trauma in the course of carrying out their assignments. However, only three out of those who admitted to have been traumatised subsequently sought psychosocial care. This raises the issue of mental health awareness among journalists. Even when journalists are not eyewitnesses to incidents of GBV, the nature of their jobs as editors and reporters make it impossible for them to avoid the news of such violent incidents. They are therefore second-in-line witnesses or responders to such violent incidents and this can impact their mental health severely. For journalists to continue to perform their societal roles effectively, they must therefore be encouraged to speak about their trauma and seek help when needed. In the past three years, the Premium Times Centre for Investigative journalism (PTCIJ) has provided interventions on psychosocial care to journalists and media professionals at no cost to the beneficiaries. More than twenty journalists have benefitted from this intervention and the opportunity still exists for those who might require support in this regard.

### Chart 29

Have you ever experienced any form of violence while reporting a case of GBV?

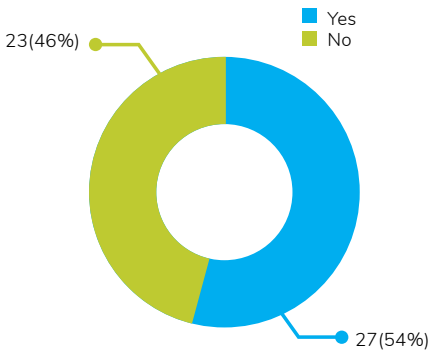


What form of violence did you experience?

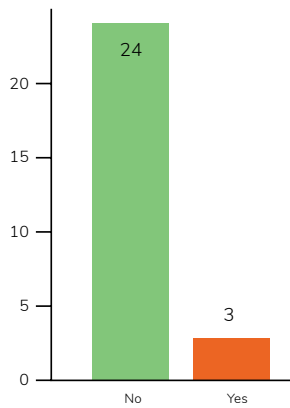


### Chart 30

Have you ever been exposed to any form of psychological trauma while reporting a case of GBV?



If yes, did you seek psycho-social support?



# 2

## Gender-Based Violence: A Conceptual Analysis

Funmi Para-Mallam & Amina Salihu



A sound conceptual framework for explaining gender-based violence (GBV) must be grounded in a proper understanding of the concept of “gender.” The term gained currency in the early 1990s. Yet, it remains shrouded in misunderstanding and suffers from misuse and abuse, while often being conflated with ‘sex’. In comparison with ‘sex’, which defines the biological attributes of a person born male or female, gender refers to the socially

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***While sex is a biologically determined and universal given aspect of identity, which is usually unchangeable through time and space, gender is socially determined through established and shared cultural values. This produces differential access to societal resources, opportunities and benefits, which, in turn, creates differences in socioeconomic status, as well as relational and political power.***

constructed differentiated value, roles, privileges and rights accorded by different cultures to people on the basis of biological or self-defined sex identity (UN, 1993). In other words, cultural groups worldwide interpret the physical attributes of males and females differently and encode their bodies with different meanings. For example, in ancient Egypt, men did the cooking, while women worked outside the home. Among the Kofyar of Plateau State in Nigeria, a husband was obligated to give his consent and provide space within the matrimonial home for his wife to entertain a lover, if she so desired (Netting, 1979).

On the other hand, among the Urhobo of Delta State and many other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, an extra-marital affair by a woman



attracts severe customary penalties. In comparison, married men are expected to engage in, and are excused or exonerated for the same behaviour. Thus, gender is a social code that determines appropriate behaviour for men and women in private and public spaces. While sex is a biologically determined and universal given aspect of identity, which is usually unchangeable through time and space, gender is socially determined through established and shared cultural values. This produces differential access to societal resources, opportunities and benefits, which, in turn, creates differences in socioeconomic status, as well as relational and political power. Consequently, variations in social status (social stratification) emerge, of which gender hierarchy (i.e. male dominance) is an important manifestation (Nweze and Takaya, 2001). According to Galtung (1969), social stratification is a pointer to social inequalities, including gender inequality.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a manifestation of gender inequality. The United Nations (2006) refers to GBV as violent behaviour of a physical, sexual, psychological or economic nature that targets an individual on the basis of their biological sex. Recently, sexual orientation has been included in this definition. Theories of GBV – its nature, forms and manifestations – could be classified broadly into two categories – the naturalistic or essentialist theories and constructivist theories. Naturalist theories include the use of socio-biology and evolutionary psychology to explain gender-based violence (Storkey, 2015). This outlook regards GBV as naturally evolving from the male anatomical and psychological makeup. The argument is that to secure their progeny, males act violently towards potential female mates. They do this to exert control over the female and ward off competition from other males, in a process called ‘natural gene ‘selection’. From this perspective, rape is an innate impulse without moral undertones, rather than aberrant or deviant human behaviour.

With specific reference to sexual violence, Para-Mallam (forthcoming) argues that dominant beliefs in Nigeria tend to support this evolutionary or biological understanding of GBV. Other essentialist theories resort to ideology or religion to argue from the perspective of providence or divine ordinance (CEWHIN, 2020). Their premise is that God created males to be naturally dominant and aggressive, and females to be passive. That these are part of their core essences. Females should, therefore, be submissive, so as not to rouse male anger and violent behaviour. Whenever this natural order of things is disrupted, for example, by female insubordination, the essentialist school of thought claims that the male naturally has to assert his authority through violence. Like evolutionary theories, essentialist justifications for GBV are frequently supported in folklore and norms. The high tolerance for GBV towards women and girls among many Nigerian cultures, accompanied by prevailing blame-the-victim cultures, could be explained, in part, within these essentialist theoretical frames (Alemika, 2001). More specifically, essentialist notions show up in media representations of gender identities, roles and relationships. Adverts, films, drama and music lyrics communicate dominant ideas about culturally appropriate modes of being and behaviour for men and women.

Constructivism, on the other hand, includes critical realist frames of analysis, such as conflict and feminist theories. It assumes that social reality is a product of human agency, often working through social institutions to create systems of constraint that shape human behaviour. Here, gendered behaviour is not hardwired into the genes, and neither is GBV. Instead, they are the products of social learning and cultural conditioning. Social anthropologists validate constructivist arguments in studies of human societies. For example, Margaret Mead's study of the Arapesh people of Papua New Guinea showed how leadership selection in the



community was based on unisex character traits, shared by both women and men (1935). Johan Galtung (1969, 1990) espoused a conflict theory that highlighted the role of structural and cultural violence in GBV. He viewed violence as a structure of constraints imposed by the powerful on the weak and vulnerable, thereby reinforcing inequality and disadvantage. GBV is a form of structural violence because it is typically invisible and mediated by hidden social institutions – formal and informal. These could be the

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State, religious establishments, the family, corporate operational procedures, legal/policy regimes, and customary laws. Galtung (1990) also spoke of cultural violence. Culture is a mediator of GBV, insofar as it promotes customary norms and practices that encourage and normalise violence. Cultural violence emanates from long-standing, shared meanings, values and attitudes that rationalise the discriminatory treatment of women and girls, justifying them as natural and normal.

Feminist theories are diverse. But they generally construe GBV as emanating from the patriarchal organisation of society. Patriarchy serves as a worldview that ascribes greater value to males than females, and accords more rights, privileges and power to the former (Pateman, 1995). As a result, the reproductive and

productive capacities of females are 'colonised' for male benefit. Feminism perceives violence against women and girls as the ultimate expression of patriarchal control, which generates and reinforces the subjugation and oppression of females. Of recent, intersectional feminist theory has underscored how gender identity is influenced by race, ethnicity, class, religion, geographical location, disability and age, to create multiple and

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***Of recent, intersectional feminist theory has underscored how gender identity is influenced by race, ethnicity, class, religion, geographical location, disability and age, to create multiple and multi-layered sites of discrimination, vulnerability and violence. Amadiume (1987) had hinted at this type of intersectionality in Male Daughters, Female Husbands. Intersectionality reveals that GBV is a complex and multidimensional social reality that affects both males and females, young and old, from all walks of life, in different ways.***

multi-layered sites of discrimination, vulnerability and violence. Amadiume (1987) had hinted at this type of intersectionality in Male Daughters, Female Husbands. Intersectionality reveals that GBV is a complex and multidimensional social reality that affects both males and females, young and old, from all walks of life, in different ways. Nevertheless, empirical evidence indicates that, globally, females are disproportionately affected.

## **Manifestations of Gender-Based Violence**

GBV manifests in both obvious and obscure ways. The most





evident exhibitions of GBV are regularly splashed across diverse media platforms, including newspaper headlines. Acts of spousal battery/killing, incest, rape, the kidnapping and sexual enslavement of schoolgirls, boy-child conscription into gangs and terrorist groups, sexual harassment and so forth are rampant and rising. Specific harmful traditional practices (HTPs) fall within this category. They include female genital mutilation, widowhood rites, and girl-child marriage. Physical and sexual forms of GBV tend to capture media and law enforcement attention because they are more direct and their effects readily visible. Some entity could be held responsible for specific acts of aggression. These direct forms of GBV are prevalent in domestic, as well as public spaces. They occur in homes, schools, religious establishments, work places, hospitals, markets, public transportation and political party arenas. In fact, they happen everywhere and disproportionately to women and girls (UN, 2006). Usually, but not exclusively, men and boys are the perpetrators. Usually, too, there is no institutional support system or legal redress for victims to readily access. This is because direct violence tends to be undergirded and sustained by structural and cultural violence (Omeje, 2008).

Both forms of violence usually have no single or tangible perpetrator, although they may be effected through the agents of the state or community power. As a structural fact, GBV manifests in the form of inequitable laws, including customary laws or state laws and policies that victimise or exclude on the basis of sex. For example, labour laws that specify gender-differentiated pay or different retirement ages for men and women. In a number of establishments, male and female employees are subject to different sets of written and unwritten guidelines related to recruitment, transfers, and appointments. Structural violence is rooted in the 1999 Constitution, which fails to incorporate the gender character of the nation within its definition and elaboration

of Federal Character (Mark-Odu, 2000). In fact, there are explicit provisions and gaps in the Constitution that discriminate against females.

Cultural violence is characterised by narratives that stereotype males and females and constrain them within predefined roles. For instance, males are raised to believe they should always be better, braver and more ambitious or successful than women. As such, when a man sees these traits in his wife, he may feel threatened and resort to violence to gain control over her. The incident of the unemployed man who stabbed his bank worker wife to death is a case in point (*Premium Times*, October 12, 2012). Media coverage portrayed him as emasculated from having to live with his wife being the breadwinner. Denying girls the right to access or continue in education and marrying them off also constitutes cultural violence. So also does the conscription of boys into militias or homosexual rings. These are prevalent forms of GBV in parts of Nigeria. Others include the preference of sons, relegation of females primarily to domesticity while denying them legitimacy as leaders in private and public spaces, polygamy and the entire rubric of harmful traditional practices (HTP).

Cultural violence is keenly evident in the high tolerance for violence against women and girls in society, buttressed by the culture of silence, shame, and stigmatisation that surrounds GBV. Numerous GBV incidents are promoted and sanctioned by custom. They begin in childhood when little girls are made to stay indoors and do household chores, while boys are free to romp and play. Or, when a woman has to run double shifts (in the office and at home) without commensurate input from her spouse, so as not to turn him into a 'woman wrapper' (Para-Mallam, 2011). Cultural violence also pervades public institutions as state agents embody and transmit gender-biased worldviews into their official duties. Thus, in conflict zones, women and girls have often fallen victim



to sexual molestation and exploitation by military peacekeepers or officials at internally displaced 'persons' (IDP) camps (Search for Common Ground, 2019; UN Women, 2008; 2016). Inadvertently, media reporting might perpetuate cultural violence through gender-stereotyped narratives.

It is pertinent to note that, in practice, direct, structural and

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cultural violence often overlap and reinforce each other. This further complicates GBV, making it more difficult to detect, deter and defy. For instance, many Nigerian cultures condone wife-beating and institute laws that make it difficult for women to seek counselling, separation, divorce, or child custody. Societal nonchalance towards wife battery and the lack of appropriate institutional responses converge to create a web of interlocking triggers that sustain GBV.

## **Trends in Gender-Based Violence**

As invisibilised as GBV is, there are some changes in the ecosystem that the discerning journalist should know. Some of these are discussed here and in greater detail in ensuing chapters.

**The Legal framework:** Given the structural and cultural contexts through which gender is constructed, although insufficient, appropriate law enforcement is a necessary condition to change current gender dynamics. A gender-responsive journalist must understand the law and policy environments well and also understand their limitations. International statutes such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 and 1250, which spotlight the misappropriation of women's and young people's bodies, respectively, as weapons of war requiring protection and a voice, are crucial. In the Nigerian

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context, the Penal Code, Criminal Code, the Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015, and the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) VAPP Act 2015 are essential to note. The most forward-thinking GBV law in Nigeria, however, is the VAPP Act. It has detailed clauses that look at GBV through a broad gender lens. Unlike the Criminal and Penal Codes, the VAPP Act defines and criminalises violence in the domestic sphere, including HTPs such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), harmful widowhood practices and the abandonment of the family. There



is need to pay attention to the chapter in this handbook on legal frameworks.

**Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV):** This is a form of gender-based violence pertaining to sexual violation and assault. There is the prevalence of this form of violence in places where women, and children, are traditionally considered safe – the home, schools, places of worship and internally displaced persons’ (IDP) camps. The Ngozi Okonjo–Iweala (NOI) polls show that one in every three girls in Nigeria would have experienced sexual assault before 25 years of age (NOI, 2019,4). Key responses to this scourge have been the establishment of various Sexual Assault Referral Centre Services (SARCS) and the National Sexual Offenders database by governments and development partners in the country. SARCS are community-based structures, which serve as first responders to SGBV. SARCS provide first aid, advice, collate data and escalate cases to security agencies, health professionals and others who can advance investigations or support actions. There is an increasing number of SARCS in Nigeria. The RoLAC Programme of the European Union (EU), which supports a network of SARCS, reported a growing membership, comprising 29 SARCS (including four satellite SARCS in Yobe State) across 17 stakeholder states. Since the establishment of the first SARC in Lagos in July 2013, the SARCS have assisted over 13,000 survivors of sexual assault, providing medical care, counselling and justice support services free of charge to clients (RoLAC, 2020).

The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), working with a multi-agency team, developed the National Sexual Offender Database (NSOD), a digital register to name and shame sexual offenders, and deter potential offenders. This is in line with the provisions of Sections 1(4) and 40(2) of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act 2015.

Alongside the sex offender register is a database of service providers – professionals and caregivers – who citizens reporting sexual violence, survivors and even perpetrators can approach for advice and support. Launched in 2019, the database ([www.nsod.naptip.gov.ng](http://www.nsod.naptip.gov.ng)) is a simple, easy to use electronic-based reporting template, which also serves as a communication loop between service providers, the public, NAPTIP, and security agencies on SGBV. Members of the public can confirm an organisation’s status as a service provider or search for and reach registered service providers to communicate cases that may require their interventions.

## **The Intersection of Media, Journalism and GBV**

Given what we know about the dynamics surrounding GBV, what then should the journalist know and do? Here, we examine the intersections around language, power, voice, critical inquiry, and follow-through.

*Use of inclusive language:* Language is akin to social action, having power to shape thought and deeds. Therefore, using gender-inclusive and gender-responsive language that avoids standardising male realities is important. Terms such as ‘he’ and ‘man’ contribute to making women invisible – that is, they obscure the importance of women and distract attention from their existence (Saul, 2012). Likewise, avoid terms such as ‘chairwoman’, ‘woman doctor’ or ‘manageress’ because that calls attention to the presence of women in positions that are perceived as male territory. Use ‘chairperson’, ‘manager’ and ‘doctor’ instead. When a person has just experienced violence, they are in that instance referred to as a victim. They have a right to their victimhood as a moment to come to process the pain and trauma of violation and they should gain empathy and be listened to. A victim becomes a survivor when s/he has benefitted from



support and respect, which leads them to use the experience of rape as a lever to speak up and protect others. Salazar and Casto (2011) argue for a conceptual model of first overcoming the GBV, which then leads to healing.

*Naming sexual corruption:* Tackling GBV demands a rethinking of concepts and contexts. Corruption as the misappropriation and capture of resources not earned is well understood. Also, the violation of a person's bodily integrity and their dignity, which are valuable resources, is corruption, as this is equivalent to

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the misappropriation of valuable resources. But coming to this awareness requires a new thinking that helps in bringing a new lens to how gender, corruption and journalism intersect. Journalists must know that women's bodies have become weapons of war and exploitation. Take, for example, women as sex slaves during conflicts, sex for grades in tertiary institutions, and sex for food at Internally Displaced Persons' camps, as forms of sextortion and harassment. There can be no sexual harassment where there is no sexual corruption, already.

*Knowledge and compassion:* Awareness of the drivers (such as patriarchy and socialisation) and the enablers of GBV (such

**What do safe spaces look like in the journalism sector? Policies such as paternity leave, a long paid maternity leave, flexible working hours, life insurance, sexual harassment guidelines with preventive and redress mechanisms are essential. Also, funding GBV investigation, creating work-life harmony, protection for the journalist on the field, non-discriminatory care for both professional and administrative staff and a humane working condition, are all needed to herald a shift towards gender justice within the media and the field of journalism itself.**

as, bias and the absence of equitable systems) are required to check implicit bias. This is an unconscious association, belief, or attitude toward a social group (Kerry, 2020). A linear approach to storytelling and reporting precludes and prejudices the experiences that need to be factored into a story. When reporting focuses attention negatively on the victim, with a view to blaming them, rather than the alleged perpetrator, it is usually motivated by implicit bias. This is double injustice (suffering violence and being disbelieved). Victim blaming is discussed explicitly in this handbook. Media and investigative journalism should always ask these indicator questions:

- How many women will benefit, vis-à-vis men?
- How does the story design factor in the effective participation of women across diverse social locations?
- Is there accessibility for the poor and persons with disabilities?
- What commitments are being made by duty bearers?





- Who will follow up to ascertain justice is done?
- What will be the impact of the story on women and girls?

Posing these questions serve to cause a shift in mindsets and norms needed for transformative gender-responsive thinking, planning and use of resources.

*Modelling GBV Awareness:* What do safe spaces look like in the journalism sector? Policies such as paternity leave, a long paid maternity leave, flexible working hours, life insurance, sexual harassment guidelines with preventive and redress mechanisms are essential. Also, funding GBV investigation, creating work-life harmony, protection for the journalist on the field, non-discriminatory care for both professional and administrative staff and a humane working condition, are all needed to herald a shift towards gender justice within the media and the field of journalism itself.

*Disaggregating data:* Data is life, and numbers can be used as evidence of the seriousness of a situation. Gender washing the fact of presuming the same needs for all women and men (Darroch, 2014) can lead to a missed opportunity to tell an accurate story of how different categories experience life. Women are not a homogenous category; they are differentiated by experiences of age, geography, class and disability, and each should be treated distinctly.

### **Some data sources on gender include:**

NBS: <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/>

UN; UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA

NGOs; WLP <https://learningpartnership.org/> PWAN <https://www.partnersnigeria.org/>

Oxfam: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/not-all-gaps-are-created-equal-true-value-care-work>

World Bank: <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/gender-statistics>

NOI Polls: <https://noi-polls.com/noipolls-rape-poll-report/>

Sexual Offender Register: [www.nsod.naptip.gov](http://www.nsod.naptip.gov)

<https://herstoryourstory.ng>

Development Partner websites: MacArthur Foundation, Ford Foundation and OSIWA are examples

*A Prevention Vanguard*: At the core of this ask, is an attempt to answer the question: How should a media and journalism (MAJ) professional pitch intervention on GBV; when is the MAJ player required? Again, a response requires a stepping back and reflection on the role of the MAJ player. Traditionally this role seems to begin from the point of response to violation - a report *after the fact*. To be an active anti-GBV advocate, the MAJ player must seek to act *before the fact*. In other words, consider GBV as a social issue with deep intersectional ramifications that must be prevented from happening, and not just an issue to report. MAJ should spotlight issues that if not checked could lead to GBV, including its SGBV form. For example, highlight conflict red flags before the occurrence of the vulnerability that comes with them.

## **Conclusion**

Journalism and its media form are crucial because of their inherent capacity to shape public opinion. They can also redirect thought and action. MAJ showcases societal conscience and stirs the imagination, bringing the unknown to the surface and challenging even what we think we know. Life imitates art through visual and oral experiences, and that includes different forms of media and journalistic reporting. Such power must be wielded with utmost responsibility and intentionality for the greater good. It



is a professional duty, as well as a moral and social obligation to be responsive to how this power could affect vulnerable and oppressed people. Because when one person's dignity is diminished without consequence, it becomes possible for the dignity of many others to be ignored. Impunity then thrives on a large scale.

Storytelling requires an appropriation of the voice, reality and experiences of others. If it does not take these into account, falsehood, power imbalances, and injustice are reinforced. Because GBV can be very personal and intimate, empathy is required in reporting. A deep intentional awareness of vulnerability helps

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build equity and could make the journalist more conscious about expanding the space for enhancing female voices and visibility. A persistent curiosity to investigate all public and private places where women, men, girls and boys could be vulnerable to violence should attract the journalistic searchlight.

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<https://www.partnersnigeria.org/>

<http://www.nsod.naptip.gov.ng>

# 3

## Unpacking the Nature of Gender-Based Violence

Chiedo Nwankwor & Adedeji Adebayo







## Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is prevalent, yet least recognised as a human rights violation in the world (Boughzala et al., 2017). While the United Nations (UN) has identified GBV as a public health and development issue, governments and other governance structures worldwide, especially in developing countries, fail to dedicate adequate attention to the scourge. From female genital mutilation, honour killings, sexual assault and rape, paedophilia, battery, to murder and everything in between, GBV describe violence targeted at individuals or groups of individuals on the basis of their gender (Obidike and Eucharia, 2020). Despite its severe implication, virtually all societies in the world have institutions that, in a way, obscure or deny such abuse (United Nations Fund for Population Activities, 2020). According to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) (2017) global estimate, at least one in every three (35 per cent) of the world's female population has experienced physical or sexual violence in her lifetime.

While statistics show that women and girls constitute most of the victims of GBV, validating its characterisation with female victimhood and male perpetration, existing evidence now supports male victimhood as well. GBV constitutes a serious public health concern, with both immediate and long-term consequences on survivors' sexual, physical and psychological health and wellbeing. Therefore, it requires individual, collective and institutional corrective interventions to stem its tide. Individuals (especially women who are essential development drivers) with a history of sexual abuse are at increased risk of health problems, such as chronic pains, physical disability, drug and alcohol use, anxiety and depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), unwanted pregnancies, complications from unsafe abortions and death.

At the societal level, victims of GBV may suffer additional predicaments of stigmatisation, ostracism or death. Even when not ostracised or killed (as in the case of ‘honour killing’), some families and community members may assault the victims, blaming them for the experience, which could further put them at greater risks of exploitation and unhealthy social relations. Importantly, societies in which GBV is tolerated tend to limit women and girls’ contributions to development and peacebuilding initiatives. According to UNFPA (2020: 9), this can also add to

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the “disintegration of inherent protection mechanisms that safeguards civil liberties, freedom of expression, social justice and social progress”.

In Africa, specifically Nigeria where gender equality and women’s rights remain significantly constrained, the impunity of perpetrators is deeply rooted in the beliefs about patriarchal cultures, which result in notions of women and girls as second-hand citizens who are inferior to men, therefore putting women and girls at the risk of GBV. These beliefs pose a severe challenge to guaranteeing safe spaces for women and girls, and rip apart



the fabric of society. As such, in order to ultimately address GBV, it is essential to persistently call attention to this social menace and, more importantly, how stories about it are told in the media. However, rather than employing Thematic Coverage (TC), which speaks more to the roots of events, existing literature on the issue suggests that the mass media coverage of GBV applies largely episodic framing, in portraying accounts of GBV only as isolated cases, without recourse to the structural context of the society in which such violence occurs (Easteal, Holland and Judd, 2015; Sutherland et al., 2015).

This chapter discusses the concept of GBV, terminologies associated with it, and makes a case for thematic coverage (TC) of GBV in storytelling.

## **What is Gender-Based Violence?**

Common understanding often suggests natural, predictable, and self-evident contrasts between the genders, especially in a binary sense. However, extensive research by scholars over the years has amplified the clarity of the concept of gender as a term characterised by psycho-social parameters. It is fundamentally “the non-physiological aspect” of an individual (Lips, 2005). Gender is a set of socially constructed ideas – learnt behaviors, actions, and roles pertaining to what it means to be masculine and feminine. Kevane (2014) defines gender as “a set of shared and evolving discursive habits that prescribe and proscribe behavior for persons in their social roles as either men or women.” These prescriptions or proscriptions have concomitant effects on decision-making and access to resources worldwide, albeit to varying degrees. The expectations and consequences involved predominantly frame women as weak and victims, on one hand, and frame men as strong and perpetrators, on the other hand, thereby making male victimhood and perceived weakness as

socially abnormal or taboo. GVB is primarily framed as targeted against women because of the social and cultural conceptions of gender. Although social penalties surrounding victimhood cut across genders and make it a harrowing ordeal for women and men to acknowledge and report GBV, especially sexual violence, men's experiences and issues tend to be marginalised because of culturally constructed notions about gender roles and identities.

GBV is a contested term in the scholarly and practice communities, with multiple definitions. However, in this chapter, we have limited the scope of our definitions to institutional articulations to reduce the biases of individual defining authorities, while generally adopting an expansive, human security, rather than a humanitarian, understanding of GBV. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) (2020) defines GBV as an experience rooted in gender inequality, with violence and abuse directed at someone due to their biological sex, sexuality or sexual identity. Generally, the term GBV is most commonly used to refer to actions perpetrated against women by men. This notion holds because, although both women and men (Oladepo, Yusuf and Arulogun (2011), boys and girls, can be and have been victims, evidence shows that women and girls are the overwhelming majority of victims and survivors (Bows, 2017). This recognition drove the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to use the more specific phrase of 'gender-based violence against women' to make the particular gendered causes and impact of violence explicit.

The CEDAW Committee's adopted general recommendation No. 19 on Violence against Women (VaW) in 1992 amplifies GBV "as violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman, or that affects women disproportionately. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats



of such acts, coercion or other deprivation of liberty...” (McQuigg, 2017). The use of this specific phrase counters arguments that advocate a gender-neutral approach to addressing violence. This attempt to maintain the focus on women emanates from fears that men could seek to leverage their superior access to resources to coopt the GBV discourse for their benefit. Another strand of the logic comes from the concern that diluting the focus will entail diverting already limited resources away from women-focused initiatives. As such, for most stakeholders, and especially women organisations and feminist movements, GBV and its focus on women remain very important on their scale of policy preference.

A more comprehensive definition of GBV comes from the African Union (2018). It defines gender-based violence as an umbrella term for harmful acts perpetrated against a person’s will, on the basis of socially ascribed differences between females and males

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(gender). Although varying across cultures, the intensity of GBV is very severe across the global South, and in Africa in particular, where women’s rights concerns still call for great attention. For example, according to the World Health Organisation (2020), over

200 million girls and women across 29 African countries have experienced some form of female genital cutting. Other common examples of GBV include sex-selective killings, forced prostitution and sexual exploitation, sexual assault, rape, sexual mutilation, domestic violence, trafficking, harmful traditional practices such as forced or early marriage, honour killings, caregiver violence, child exposure to domestic violence, dehumanising widowhood practices, deprivation of women's and the girl-child's property rights, emotional, psychological and verbal abuse, and so on.

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### **Definition of GBV terminologies**

There are varieties of terminologies that seek to shed light on the intricacies of GBV. The Western Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children (2020) has documented over 180 terminologies associated with GBV. However, according to UNFPA (2020), these numerous terminologies can be broadly categorised into five. They are:



**I. Sexual violence:** While we acknowledge the existence of numerous applicable definitions of sexual violence in the literature on the subject, in this chapter, we are adopting the definition provided by the WHO (2013), which is “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or act to traffic or otherwise directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.” Examples of sexual violence include, but are also not limited to, the following:

**Rape:** This refers to illegal sexual intercourse with a person who does not or cannot give consent to the activity. According to the National Centre on Sexual Behaviour on Youth (2003), rape involves the sexual penetration of someone unable to give or refuse consent due to age, threat, or incapacitation. The use of force or the threat of its use is central to many definitions of rape. The concept of rape could also differ according to the laws of different countries (Usta, n.d.). In some cases, the definition emphasises forced vaginal penetration, making it difficult to prosecute rape against men and boys. This issue drove the protracted battle and eventually successful expansion of the legislation against gender-based violence in Nigeria to cover both males and females, as enshrined in its description as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP), enacted into law in May 2015 by the Goodluck Jonathan administration. However, data shows that the incidence of rape is much higher among women and girls, with disproportionate effects, although silence among male victims of rape leads to the underestimation of its incidence.

**Sexual assault:** This is any unwanted touching of a sexual nature. It is a crime of violence because the victim is subjected to the aggression of the assailant. Apart from the physical effect, it may also affect a person's sense of safety (Avalon Sexual Assault Centre, n.d). Sexual assault becomes aggravated when victims are wounded, maimed or disfigured. Also, sexual assault could be "drug-facilitated." This occurs when alcohol or other drugs are used to intentionally sedate or incapacitate a victim in order to perpetrate non-consensual sexual assault on them (Western Centre for Research and Education on Violence Against Women and Children, 2020, 2020).

**Sexual harassment:** It is an unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favours and other verbal or physical conducts of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment can either be coercive or subtle. Most times, sexual harassment reflects through an unequal power relation in the workplace, educational institutions, or religious circles. This gesture usually leads to a chilly, intimidating and hostile environment and causes the victim to feel violated and insulted (Usta, n.d.; WHO, 2019).

**Revenge pornography:** It is the disclosure of private sexual content (photographs or films) without the consent of the individual(s) who appear in them, and "with the intention of causing (an) individual distress" (U.K. Parliament, 2015, pp. 34-35 in (Bothamley and Tully, 2018). In most cases, perpetrators who possess these private contents may have obtained them through consent, as in the case of sexual partners, with the understanding of confidentiality. According to Daswani and Pearson (2014), revenge pornography often occurs in the context of the breakdown of relationships. As such, sharing intimate content is "by virtue of trust, later breached by the perpetrator" (Bothamley and Tully, 2018).





**II. Physical violence:** This appears to be the most obvious type of GBV. It is a deliberate attempt to attack a person through the use of force, such as hitting, slapping, beating, shoving, punching, strangling, kicking, burning, abduction and imprisonment. In the south of the African continent or what some refer to as sub-Saharan Africa, Ahinkorah, Dickson and Seidu (2018), in their study titled, “Women decision-making capacity and intimate partner violence among women in sub-Saharan Africa”, report that a significant proportion of both men and women – in the delineated region – approve a man’s right to beat his wife. A nomenclature ascribed to this is “justified abuse”, on the basis of excuses such as the neglect of children’s care and engaging in arguments with the husband. Closely associated with this terminology in this context of GBV is Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), which is the most common form of Violence Against Women (VAW) (WCREVAWC, 2020).

**III. Emotional violence:** This is the repeated use of controlling and harmful behaviours by perpetrators to manipulate victims who, in most cases, are women (Springtide Resources, 2000). According to UNFPA (2020), it is the infliction of mental or emotional pain or injury on another person. It consists of behaviours that are intended to shame, demean and intimidate (Nwaomah and Min, 2019). Emotional violence cuts across almost all known cultures. Examples include stalking, verbal abuse, harassment, forced isolation, unwanted attention, destruction of cherished items, and so on.

**IV. Economic or financial abuse:** Economic abuse and financial abuse are mostly used interchangeably in the literature on the subject (Postmus, Hoge, Breckenridge, Sharp-Jeffs, & Chung, 2018). While there might be disputation about the sameness of the two, Sharp-Jeffs (2015) noted a thin line dividing both terms. Financial abuse constitutes a part of economic abuse, as it focuses specifically on individual money and finances. Simply put, both involve the exploitation of a position of power to subdue the economic interest of a partner (Usta, n.d.). According to Adams, Sullivan, Bybee, and Greeson (2008), they are deliberate patterns of control in which individuals interfere with their partners' potentials of acquisition, use, and maintenance of economic resources. Economic violence can come in many forms: the denial of resources, withholding of access to bank accounts and funds, controlling of household spending, hindrance of obtaining or keeping gainful employment, refusal to pay court-ordered child or spousal support, repeated filing of costly lawsuits, stealing or destruction of a victim's property.

**V. Harmful traditional practices:** There are several traditional practices that are harmful to women, which are considered as part of culture. Most of these practices violate women's physical integrity (Winter and Thompson, 2010; Chika, 2012) and expose them to sexual, emotional and psychological harm. Despite their injurious natures, such practices have endured, spanning several generations. People of the cultures involved see nothing wrong with these practices, in the continued expression of their ways of life, even in the face of global condemnation (Anozie, Ele and Anika, 2018). Examples of such traditional practices are:



**Child marriage:** This is defined as marriage before an individual attains the age of 18 years, upon which s/he becomes legally accountable for his or her actions. Child marriage remains a global issue of concern because of its high prevalence and long-term consequences. Importantly, it undermines the progress of the Sustainable Development Goal 5, which seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Adebowale, 2018). Nigeria is one of the countries in Africa with a high rate of girls married in childhood (Brammah, 2014; Anozie et al., 2018). The consequences of child marriage are steep, with adverse effects that permeate the individual's psychological and physical health.

**Female Genital Mutilation (FGM):** This procedure involves the partial or total removal of the female external genitalia (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008) for non-medical reasons and with no medical benefits. FGM is mostly carried out on young girls between infancy and age fifteen. It can cause severe bleeding and also affect the proper functioning of the urethra. According to the WHO (2020), this can also lead to infections and complications in childbirth and an increased risk of new-born deaths, besides the psychological damages and self-esteem consequences it causes. Despite decades of efforts to discourage FGM, this practice is still evident in many communities in Nigeria.

**Honour killing or murder in the name of "honour":** This is the killing of women and girls due to their lived experiences, which are adjudged as violating family values or expectations. A typical example could be a woman choosing a lover against her family's wishes or reputation. This can be in terms of caste, race, religion or ethnicity (see Patel, 2019). According to Chowdhry (1997). The idea behind honour crimes is that a

family or community's honour is indistinguishably connected with a woman's behaviour, and specifically, her purity, chastity and loyalty to her family.

Other examples of harmful traditional practices include female infanticide, nutritional taboos and traditional birth practices, forced feeding, and gendered burial rites.

### **A Case for Thematic Coverage (TC) of GBV in Storytelling**

The traditional news media, both print and broadcast, constitute some of the most powerful social justice tools, particularly in the global fight against GBV (UNFPA, 2020). They provide outlets for survivors to get their stories out, giving voice to silenced and, otherwise, voiceless survivors. The media wields significant social influence to serve as a vital watchdog of society, in the explicit capacity of advocacy and implicit capacity to frame issues and set agendas.

According to the theories of framing, in addition to agenda-setting and issues framing, the media can “arrange or present [issues frames that are already in the public discourse] in multiple fashions and as such influence citizens' ensuing issue considerations and levels of policy support” (Terkildsen and Frauke, 1997). For example, on the one hand, packaging a GBV story as a question of the victim's behaviour that might have warranted the crime, as well as her believability and credibility, have symbolic and substantive implications for her protection and justice, or the lack thereof. On the other hand, the story can be framed as a question of the perpetrator's criminality and brutality, against the backdrop of an immoral and complicit state and society, with punitive consequences for the perpetrator and demands for justice on the state and society. The media can shape the nature of the public's engagement or disengagement with GBV, in confirmation of its “powerful effects” view, which have long been proven by



numerous experts, including Lippman (1922) and Nwoso et al (1995).

The media effects referenced above emanate from its storytelling, a traditional newsgathering and reporting technique, long considered as best practice in journalism (Bird and Dardenne, 1988; Roeh, 1989). Storytelling “provides audiences with context for newsworthy information through the retelling of individual experiences and by transporting audiences to the scene with combinations of words and audio-visuals.” (Henderson, 2019). However, the imperatives of survival, resulting from increasing

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***Framing issues either thematically or episodically can have direct effects on public attitudes and perceptions (Zhang, Jin, Porter, and Stewart, 2016). For example, while episodic coverage or framing focuses on anecdotal and personal cases that could steer public attention, thematic coverage, in addition to this, underscores the systemic and societal aspects of issues and can also assist and facilitate the development of GBV literacy.***

corporatisation, market-driven change in media production, and as exacerbated by the digital disruption, have increased the tension between journalistic autonomy for storytelling and profitability in reportage. While the information and communication revolution has expanded inclusivity and created non-prohibitive cost opportunities for all groups to make their voices heard, this digital and application diversity has also created specific gaps, especially for information flow accountability, due to the absence of a central

command and ideological commitments. Storytelling is a tool for holding up a mirror to society and is uniquely appropriate for reporting stories of human suffering, like GBV.

However, filing stories about GBV can be challenging, even for journalists with many years of experience. On one hand, GBV can be emotive, such that objectivity might sometimes be compromised. On the other hand, the influence of patriarchal social cultures might lead to the playing down of the intensity and seriousness of GBV issues. Additionally, GBV is rarely discussed openly in many cultures, further perpetuating the misconceptions surrounding it. Literally speaking, a theme puts a spotlight on a central topic and leads to its in-depth discussion. Rather than focusing on the characteristics of events only, as is the case with episodes, themes present cases and pays attention to full details for critiquing them (Wouters, 2015). Analysing an issue thematically unpacks its causes, claims and contexts.

Framing issues either thematically or episodically can have direct effects on public attitudes and perceptions (Zhang, Jin, Porter, and Stewart, 2016). For example, while episodic coverage or framing focuses on anecdotal and personal cases that could steer public attention, thematic coverage, in addition to this, underscores the systemic and societal aspects of issues and can also assist and facilitate the development of GBV literacy. On its own, episodic coverage only favours specific instances, without paying attention to endemic and enduring problems, such as GBV. Hence, reporting on GBV requires a good understanding of its causal and contributing factors, which reporters can achieve through employing a TC strategy.

By definition, TC refers to the presentation of issues through information about their systemic causes, trends and consequences (Iyengar, 1991). The basic focus is to provide contextual and



bigger picture information. As such, it requires more time and effort in background research and data collection. By providing adequate background information, contextual conditions, social indicators and widespread consequences, TC has the potential to alleviate the stigmas caused by the blaming and demonisation of victims and survivors, improve public understanding of systemic risk factors and encourage public support for collective solutions (Zhang, Jin, Porter, and Stewart (2016).

When GBV incidents are depicted in ways that undermine their seriousness or by not adhering to the rigid standards of professionalism, journalists can unintentionally become part of the problem, and this could be more harmful than helpful to the victims, especially when perpetrators are spared the full consequences of their actions (UNFPA, 2020). TC is beneficial in reporting GBV in many ways. First, rather than expressing an episodic micro-focus on the particulars of an incident, the societal noise it generates, the behaviours of proximately involved actors, and a few illustrative cases, the TC of GBV in storytelling provides a diagnostic approach that digs into the structural antecedents of GBV as a societal ill. This approach allows for the verification and validation of the claims of those affected and highlights the particular incident as part of a more extensive system of dysfunction.

TC makes the normalised behaviours that underline GBV visible. It highlights the severity of the perpetrator's crime, calls into question a society's morality and places a demand on the government's *erga omnes* obligation. Ultimately, it recommends possible solutions to address such issues (Wouters, 2015). For example, in analysing GBV, TC makes use of statistical evidence to support the intensity of the problem, "pointing readers to local resources, incorporating expert analysis, exploring risk factors, and unpacking existing myths and stereotypes" (Iyengar, 1996:

Sutherland et al. 2015 in Ellie 2018). Following this particular approach places events in contexts, pays attention to trends and details, and presents general evidence. TC also elicits societal responsibility and attributions by helping victims seek redress and support systems necessary for recovery.

We have purposively selected the two cases below to make a case for thematic coverage by Nigerian media practitioners:

### **Case 1: The Kidnapping of Ese Rita Oruru**

On August 12, 2015, Ese Oruru, a 13-year-old junior secondary school student (JSS 3), was kidnapped at her mother's shop in Yenogoa, Bayelsa State, in the South-South of Nigeria, by Yunusa Dahiru, a tricycle operator and Hausa man from Kano State, in North-Central Nigeria. The incident caught the attention of the media and immediately sparked national outrage, when the first attempt by Ese's mother to rescue her was unsuccessful. The media, non-governmental organisations and several activists across the country monitored the situation closely (Kurfi, 2017). Following a massive campaign, notably by The PUNCH newspapers, Ese and her mother were reunited in Abuja on March 2, 2016 (Jimoh and Abdul-hameed, 2017). At the time of her rescue in Kano, Ese was already five months pregnant. Her case was a composite of several forms of GBV, ranging from kidnapping, child trafficking, statutory rape and sexual exploitation to child marriage. Reports have it that the culprit was eventually caught, tried and sentenced. The sentencing of Yunusa was the last episode of the case reported in the media.





## Case 2: Intimate Partner Violence reported by Ifeyinwa Angbo

In December 2020, a disturbing video circulated on several social media platforms and eventually in mainstream media outlets. Ifeyinwa Angbo, a medical doctor, based in Makurdi, Benue State, in North-Central Nigeria, made a public outcry for help over domestic violence in the hands of her journalist husband, Pius Angbo. Her face, which was battered and bruised in the video, was a clear evidence of intimate partner violence (IPV). In her words:

... I have not known peace in this marriage. It's been from one woman to another. We have four children. I just had a baby. It was a Caesarian section just about four weeks ago. Just because I told him to spend wisely and not on women so recklessly, considering we have four children, that is why I got this beating. He tried to strangle me and all that, sat on my incision, the children were crying. When I was pregnant with this child, when the pregnancy was three months, it was the same thing. He would sit on my stomach, hit me, try to strangle me... (Ifeyinwa Angbo, 06/12/2021).

The cases presented above show how the local news media employ episodic coverage, which divorces GBV from its broader societal breeding and moorings, in some of their stories. The news media's interrogation of Ifeyinwa's experience, for example, lacked in-depth coverage and included little background information about her predicament. While American newspapers, network TV news and cable TV news frame issues such as this more thematically as a problem with societal causes and solutions (Hove et al., 2013), the coverage of these referenced issues were more episodic in Nigeria, only emphasising isolated and personal aspects of the incidents.

More damning, however, was the absence of a framework in the reportage that positioned her case within the context of the long history of similar incidents across the country, the underlying causal and contributory factors, and ill-advised solutions to antecedents, including the lack of accountability and consequences for perpetrators in previous occurrences. While Dr. Angbo eventually reconciled with her husband through the Benue State governor's (informal-based) intervention, the reconciliation process appeared superficial, and akin to a band-aid. There was

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***By exploring numerous peer-reviewed, grey resources and newspaper reports, this chapter unpacks the nature of GBV and the meaning of terms associated with it. Importantly, it amplifies the potentials of thematic coverage of gender-based violence as a strategy that offers a comprehensive approach to unearthing possible causes of cases of GBV, details the experiences of survivors, places issues in a larger social context, and proffers viable and long-lasting solutions.***

also no possibility of replicating such intervention, should a similar case arise elsewhere or there is a re-occurrence in the same case, which is more likely than not, according to existing data on patterns. On the basis of the patriarchal societal norm, it is also not uncommon for people to blame the victim as the architect of her predicament.

GBV is a complex and diverse subject, and evidence of extensive coverage abound on such themes as early marriage, underage pregnancy, sex work and trafficking. Journalists are encouraged



to think about new themes to explore, and new productive ways of reporting the old themes to balance their reportage of GBV experiences and not cultivate unhelpful perceptions. For example, in some countries, there has been a significant focus on sex work among refugees, which has led to an assumption that they are readily available for such work, further making them more vulnerable to rape, sexual harassment, assault and armed violence (UNFPA, 2020).

In addition, the news media can influence public perception and understanding about GBV and implicitly identify its various causes and consequences. Follow-up features also allow for in-depth analysis of GBV issues. However, in both cases discussed above, as in many other cases, there is no evidence of follow-up reports on these reported cases, leaving minimal opportunities for the possibilities mentioned above. Journalists must be intentional and not selective about doing follow-up features on cases. Moreover, journalism requires finding new and informative angles from which a topic can be explored. Therefore, all aspects of GBV must be painstakingly engaged with and reported, while ensuring compliance to ethical reporting principles, including “do no harm” to survivors.

The thematic coverage of GBV can be a challenging task, and time pressures exacerbate the difficulties involved. But journalism is not and has never been a profession for the faint of heart. The results it produces in terms of social awareness and responsibility far outweighs the inputs. As modern corporate approaches to reportage contribute to the erosion of standard practices in contemporary times (Henderson, 2019), adhering to the rigid standards of professionalism and efficient management of personal bias through TC can make reporting GBV produce the needed corrective intervention to the menace.

## Conclusion

GBV remains a global public health and development challenge that requires great attention by governments and other governance structures worldwide, especially in developing countries where women's rights issues remain significantly constrained. The complex nature of its expression requires a good understanding of its terminologies, especially for journalists who play crucial roles in finding long-lasting solutions to it. While one must acknowledge the effort of the media at calling attention to different cases of GBV over the years, the approach employed in telling these stories can either allay the seriousness of the social menace, thereby perpetuating it, or be a powerful force in shaping social norms and beliefs capable of addressing GBV. Effective storytelling that employs the thematic coverage approach by traditional mass media professionals provides strong opportunities for rolling back the social ill of gender-based violence across African societies.

By exploring numerous peer-reviewed, grey resources and newspaper reports, this chapter unpacks the nature of GBV and the meaning of terms associated with it. Importantly, it amplifies the potentials of thematic coverage of gender-based violence as a strategy that offers a comprehensive approach to unearthing possible causes of cases of GBV, details the experiences of survivors, places issues in a larger social context, and proffers viable and long-lasting solutions. The reliance of the thematic coverage approach on extensive research, expert knowledge, and evidence-based data makes it a valuable and credible tool for proffering viable long-lasting solutions to addressing the problem. One way to ensure that media persons are acquainted with the storytelling and thematic coverage is by providing them with training and periodic refresher courses on the coverage of gender-based violence. The benefits of these far outweigh the cost of its absence to society.



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# 4

## How Treaties, Statutes and Case Law Shape the discourse of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Nigeria – the Legal and Regulatory Frameworks of ECOWAS, AU, Commonwealth and UN Instruments

Abiola Akiyode





## Introduction

The issue of gender based violence (GBV) is prevalent all over the world, and one in every three women are said to have experienced it in one form or another in their life experiences. The elimination of GBV has become an issue of international concern, which has been increasingly prioritised in the international community.

Laws play a major role in stating which behaviours are socially unacceptable, in appropriately criminalising gender based violence and codifying the right of women to live free of violence, while the sanctions it provides for offences also serve as a strong form of deterrence.

Some degree of legal protection against GBV now exists in most countries of the world, yet the violence remains pervasive and enforcement weak. Implementing these laws in practice has been neglected by a number of these countries. Nigeria, for example, ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985, but hasn't domesticated it in its laws, as provided for by section 12 of the 1999 Constitution, and there are various practices supported by our laws that are discriminatory till this day. This discrimination cuts across various legislations, from family laws, to labour laws, etc..

This chapter provides information that will enable trainees to understand the legal and regulatory framework for gender based violence. And learners will know more about the GBV laws at the international, regional and national levels.

## Objectives

- To equip participants with the knowledge of national, regional and international mechanisms for Gender Based Violence;
- To discuss the applicability of these laws in the lives of participants and how they can use this knowledge to end GBV.

## Definition of terms

### Gender

These are social roles, relationships, and the values set by society for women and men. Gender is further understood as the social characteristics that are given to an individual's sex, i.e., the specific social identities, circumstances, roles, responsibilities and relationships related to men and women. These circumstances are entrenched in cultures, and that is why they differ. For example, giving birth is a function performed by women on the basis of sex but raising children is a role assigned to women on the basis of gender.

### Survivor

The person who reacts actively and effectively towards the violence he/she has been subjected to.

Other words/expressions used, instead of 'survivor', include 'victim', 'the abused' and 'recipient of violence' to indicate the various phases in which the person subject to violence may go through.

### Gender Based Violence

This is violence directed at an individual on the basis of his or her biological gender or it can be defined as violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately. This includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and psychological violence.

### Convention

This is an agreement between states for the regulation of matters affecting all of them, which they intend to be binding.

### Treaty

This is a formally concluded agreement that has been ratified between states, or a formal and binding written agreement between actors in international law.



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## **International Instruments for the Protection of Human Rights**

**The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948):** It provides for the respect of fundamental human rights of every human being, alongside rights in social, economic, civic, political and cultural areas.

**United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000):** It calls on parties to armed conflicts to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence (GBV), in particular sexual violence. It also emphasises the responsibility of states for ending impunity and prosecuting those responsible for war crimes, crimes of genocide, and crimes against humanity, including crimes of GBV.

**United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1820 (2008):** It demands that all parties to armed conflict should adopt concrete protection and prevention measures for ending sexual violence. It also asserts the importance of women's participation in all processes related to ending sexual violence in conflicts.

**International Covenant On Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966):** It commits its parties to abiding by the civil and political rights of individuals. In Article 3, it provides that the States Parties to the Covenant should ensure the equal rights of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the document.

**International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966):** It commits its parties to working towards the granting of economic, social, and cultural rights to all individuals, including labour rights, and the rights to health, education and an adequate standard of living.

**Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW) (1979):** It aims to eradicate “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.” This Convention was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 and is often called a bill of human rights for women. In 1979, Nigeria signed the Convention



and ratified it without reservations in 1985. The CEDAW is anchored on four principles of Non-discrimination, Non-violence, Equality and Participation.

**Convention On the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989):** It protects the rights of people under the age of 18 by setting standards that need to be attained in health care; education; and legal, civil and social services.

**Beijing Platform for Action and Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (UNDEVAW) (1993):** It recognises that violence against women – including rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy – is an obstacle to equality, development and peace.

**The Rome Statute (1998) of the International Criminal Court** recognises rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilisation, and other forms of sexual violence as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

**Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking In Persons, especially Women and Children (2000)** supplements the United Nations Convention Against Transactional Organised Crime, and calls on states to criminalise and take steps to prevent trafficking, while also committing states to provide, physical, psychological and social support to trafficking victims.

**International Convention on Population and Development (ICPD) (2005):** It calls for women’s reproductive health and rights to take the centre stage in national and global development efforts

## Regional Human Rights Frameworks

### **The African Charter on Human and People's Rights (1986):**

This Charter provides a number of articles on the equality of women in politics, before the law, in education, health, marriage, food, shelter, etc. It provides equal rights for women at all times, and states specifically the right to peace, including participation in all conflict resolution and reconstruction efforts. Article 1 of this document, also known as the Banjul charter, provides that “every individual shall be entitled to the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms recognised and guaranteed in the present Charter without distinction of kind such as race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion, political or any other opinion, national and social origin, fortune, birth or other status.”

### **The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights On the Rights of Women in Africa (2003)(also known as the Maputo Protocol).**

This guarantees comprehensive rights to women, including the right to take part in the political process; to social and political equality with men; to control of the female reproductive health; and to an end to Female Genital Mutilation.

### **African Union Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1990:**

This defines a child as a person under the age of 18 and commits states to protecting children from physical and sexual abuse.

## National Human Rights Frameworks

### **National Policies**

**National Gender Policy (2006):** This seeks to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to ensure the enjoyment of all their rights, as enshrined in the Constitution





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***It calls on parties to armed conflicts to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence (GBV), in particular sexual violence. It also emphasises the responsibility of states for ending impunity and prosecuting those responsible for war crimes, crimes of genocide, and crimes against humanity, including crimes of GBV.***

of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is an important document that deals with key issues such as culture, patriarchy, economic growth, resource allocation and the legal framework, as they relate to women's rights

**National Reproductive Health Policy (2017):** It recognises that gender-based violence in its numerous forms negatively impacts the reproductive health of women and sets the policy on how to protect women's reproductive rights.

**National Policy on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation (2013):** The goal of the policy is to eliminate the practice of FGM in Nigeria, in order to improve the health and quality of life of girls and women.

**The Policy on the Health and Development of Adolescents and Young People in Nigeria (2007)**

This seeks to reduce unwanted pregnancies by 50 per cent and underage marriages among people younger than 18, and to reduce maternal mortality among young women by 75 per cent.

## National Laws

### **The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999:**

This is the grundnorm and supreme body of law of the land. In Article 42(1), it provides that no Nigerian, solely on grounds of their “community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion” shall be “subjected either expressly by, or in the practical application of, any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government to disabilities or restrictions to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religious or political opinions are not made subject.” Chapter IV of the Constitution also provides for fundamental human rights, which are justiciable and enforceable before courts in Nigeria.

**Criminal Code Act 1990:** This provides protection for women and girls against rape, sexual assault and defilement, abduction of a girl under the age of 18, unlawful detention with an intention to defile, amongst others.

**Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015:** This law seeks to eliminate violence in the private and public life, prohibit all forms of violence against persons, provide maximum protection and

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**Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking In Persons, especially Women and Children (2000) supplements the United Nations Convention Against Transactional Organised Crime, and calls on states to criminalise and take steps to prevent trafficking, while also committing states to provide, physical, psychological and social support to trafficking victims.**



effective remedies for victims, and the punishment of offenders, alongside other related matters. The Act is very exhaustive and covers all forms of violence, while having provisions for relevant sanctions.

**Child Rights Act:** This law guarantees the rights of all children in Nigeria. It protects children from all forms of abuse and discrimination, and criminalises child marriage. So far, 24 out of the 36 states of Nigeria have adopted the Act as part of their state laws. Therefore, 12 states in the country are yet to adopt the CRA as part of their legislations.

**Discrimination Against Persons With Disabilities (Prohibition) Act 2018:** It provides protection for people living with disabilities against discrimination, provides awareness about their situation and accessibility for them to physical structures, while also making provision for a Commission tasked with the responsibility of attending to the needs of People Living with Disabilities.

**Trafficking In Persons (Prohibition) Enforcement and Administration Act 2015:** This law criminalises and sanctions trafficking in persons, especially women and children, and establishes a specialised agency (National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons, NAP TIP) that has the responsibility of investigating and prosecuting offenders, and also providing counselling and rehabilitation of survivors.

**The Administration of Criminal Justice Act:** The Act provides for the process of making arrests for, investigating and prosecuting all criminal offences. States such as Lagos, Cross River and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have adopted this Act as part of their laws.

**State Laws On GBV:** Some states have enacted laws to prevent GBV, such as the Prohibition Against Domestic Violence Law

of Lagos State 2007, the Ekiti State Gender-Based Violence (Prohibition) Law 2011, and the laws Prohibiting Withdrawal of the Girl Child from School for Marriage in Kano, Niger, Gombe, Bauchi and Borno States. Also, the Abia State Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (2003), as domesticated in 2004 and the Abolition of Widowhood practices Bill (2017). In Edo State, there is the Female Genital Mutilation Act (1999) and the Inhuman Treatment of Widows (Prohibition) Law (2004).

**Protection Against Domestic Violence Law of Lagos State**

**2007:** It is a law that provides protection against domestic violence, connected purposes and offers a protection order. The law describes the following as domestic violence: physical abuse; sexual abuse; exploitation, including but not limited to rape, incest and sexual assault; starvation; emotional, verbal and psychological abuse; economic abuse and exploitation; denial of basic education; intimidation; harassment; stalking; hazardous attack, including acid bath with offensive or poisonous substance; damage to property; entry into a complainant's residence without consent, where the parties do not share the same residence; or any other controlling or abusive behaviour towards a complainant, where such conduct harms or may cause imminent harm to the safety, health or wellbeing of the complainant.

**Criminal Law of Lagos State 2015:** This law protects women and children against defilement, particularly of a child, and allowing a child to be in a brothel, or the abduction of a girl under eighteen years of age with the intent to have sexual intercourse, unlawful detention with intent to have unlawful sexual intercourse, rape, sexual assault by penetration, attempt to commit rape and sexual assault by penetration, sexual assault, sexual harassment and causing a person to engage in sexual activity without consent.



## How these laws have impacted the discourse on Gender Based Violence in Nigeria

- These laws have sparked some tremendous achievements for women’s interests in the area of seeking justice for survivors of violence. In the FCT, for example, the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act 2015 has been used in several instances and in different capacities by female citizens to pursue justice. These women have employed the language of this law, and its provisions, to bolster arguments against violence meted out to them by perpetrators and they have even gone further to seek redress in courts of law using these laws.<sup>21</sup>
- These laws have criminalised all forms of violence and punished perpetrators accordingly, which is a huge step in the right direction for women and women’s rights advocates.
- These laws and policies serve as documents to hold governments accountable if they fail to meet their obligations under treaties or conventions that they are parties to. Every treaty has a monitoring body, to which governments of state parties that ratified the treaty have a duty to submit periodic reports. CSOs are also encouraged to submit shadow reports to these treaty monitoring bodies, from which the bodies thereafter draw up conclusions. This mechanism helps to keep the state parties accountable.
- In addition to broad prohibitions on gender discrimination, these laws also create in the member states to the treaties/conventions an obligation to confront customs that have the effect of limiting equality.

21 <https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1194&context=ijgls>

## Case Law

### **1. Women Advocates Research and Documentation Centre and Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (on behalf of Mary Sunday) Vs. the Federal Republic of Nigeria.**

The instruments relied on include the rules of procedure of the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice, the ECOWAS Court Protocol (the protocol), the revised treaty of ECOWAS, Supplementary Protocol, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment Or Punishment, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The application was as a result of the violation of Mary Sunday's fundamental human rights by the defendant. It concerned the failure of the Nigerian Police to conduct an independent, impartial and effective investigation into the gender based violence against Mary Sunday, carried out through an attack on her by Corporal Isaac Gbanwuan, a Police officer acting in his private capacity, which resulted in the violation of her right to life, non-discrimination, prohibition of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, liberty and security of persons, health, work and effective remedy, as guaranteed under the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria. The plaintiff was able to prove her case and judgment was given in her favour. She was awarded a monetary compensation and the Federal Republic of Nigeria was compelled to prosecute the case.



## 2. Dorothy Njemanze & 3 Others Vs. The Federal Republic of Nigeria:

Some of the instruments relied on here were the CEDAW, African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, Rules of Procedure of the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice, the Revised Treaty of ECOWAS, and the Supplementary Protocol (a/sp.1/01/05) Relating To the Community Court of Justice.

Some women namely Dorothy Njemanze, Edu Ene Okoro, Justina Etim and Amarachi Jessyforth were abducted and assaulted sexually, physically and verbally, and unlawfully detained at different times between January 2011 and March 2013 by the Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEPB) and other government agencies, such as the Police and the military. They were arrested and accused of being prostitutes simply on the grounds that they were found on the streets at night. The Court subsequently found that there were multiple violations of their rights, as contained in the CEDAW, ACHPR and other human rights instruments and judgment was given in their favour.

At Training Sessions for GBV Reporting	
1. Ask participants to reflect on the importance of laws in ending GBV.	What are the laws you know that prohibit GBV?
2. Divide participants into two groups and each group should discuss and present on a flip chart what can be done to end GBV, and what laws they think need to change in this regard.	What can be done to reduce incidences of GBV?

# 5

## Ethical Imperatives In Media Reporting On Gender-Based Violence In Nigeria

Charmaine Pereira







Whilst gender-based violence can be targeted at any person because of their gender, it is far more often directed at women and girls, given their subordinate status, relative to men and boys, particularly within the same social group. According to official figures, nearly one-third of women and girls (between 31.9 per cent and 28.2 per cent) aged between 15 and 49 years have experienced physical violence in Nigeria since they were 15 years old. These levels of violence are unacceptably high. The figures for sexual violence are lower, between 7.2 and 10.6 per cent.<sup>22</sup> However, the actual figures are likely to be much higher, given the stigma surrounding sexual violence, the lack of seriousness with which such violations are often treated, including by state institutions with mandated responsibilities to respond to them, and the reactions of denial on the part of many families and communities.

The figures above point to *widespread tolerance* of gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria. This makes it incumbent on the media – print, radio, television; traditional or new – to be particularly mindful of how they report such violations. Reporting is referred to broadly here to cover news, features, opinions/columns, editorials, documentaries, panel discussions, call-in programmes, and the like. Conventional news reporting, which depends largely on materials provided by others and on the coverage of a given scenario as it exists at that moment, is not best placed to interrogate social and other forms of injustice. Investigative journalism, by contrast, involves playing a critical role as a watchdog in society, throwing new light on matters that are taken for granted, exposing what is deliberately or accidentally concealed, and exerting pressure

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22 National Population Commission – NPC/Nigeria and Inner City Fund (ICF). 2019. Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018. Abuja, Nigeria, and Rockville, Maryland, USA: NPC and ICF. Available at <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR359/FR359.pdf>

on the relevant actors to change the status quo.<sup>23</sup> The difference is particularly relevant when it comes to reporting sexual and gender-based violence (GBV), in view of the concerted social and institutional efforts to either cover up their existence or to treat them as unworthy of serious investigation.

How can the media report on gender-based violence in a way that is ethical and responsible?<sup>24</sup> Investigative journalists have a very important role to play in uncovering hitherto silenced dimensions of gender-based violence. In doing so, they challenge the public tolerance of GBV and activate possibilities for change. When we talk about ethical imperatives regarding the media, we are concerned with what informs and justifies decision-making and practice when confronting questions of potential harms and conflicting values.<sup>25</sup> The ethical landscape and practice in the media is shaped by multiple zones of influence – individual, institutional and cultural. What is critical in ethical media reporting

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23 See Hunter, M.L. with Hanson, N., Sabbagh, R., Sengers, L., Sullivan, D., Svith, F. and Thordsen, P. 2009. *Story-Based Inquiry: A Manual for Investigative Journalists*. Paris: UNESCO. Available at <http://wayback.archive-it.org/10611/20160906193350/http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001930/193078e.pdf>

Hunter, M.L. ed. 2012. *The Global Investigative Journalism Casebook*. Paris: UNESCO. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000217636/PDF/217636eng.pdf.multi>

24 See Impe, Anne-Marie. 2019. *Reporting on violence against women and girls: a handbook for journalists*. UNESCO. Available at <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371524>

Nigeria Union of Journalists, Chitra Nagarajan and Laurat Umar Abdulsalam. 2020. "Media Guidelines on Gender-Based Violence."

Sonke Gender Justice and Health-E News. 2017. *Reporting on Gender-Based Violence: A Guide for Journalists and Editors*. Sonke Gender Justice and Health-E News. Cape Town: South Africa. Available at <https://genderjustice.org.za/publication/reporting-gender-based-violence/>

Ghosh, Asmita and Pasricha, Japleen. 2019. *Gender-Based Violence in Media #GBVINMEDIA: A Media Ethics Toolkit on Sensitive Reportage*. Feminism in India. Available at <https://genderjustice.org.za/publication/reporting-gender-based-violence/>

25 Plaisance, P.L. 2016. "Journalism Ethics". *Oxford Research Encyclopedias*. Available at <https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-89> See also Society of Professional Journalists, Code of Ethics. Available at <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>



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**Conventional news reporting, which depends largely on materials provided by others and on the coverage of a given scenario as it exists at that moment, is not best placed to interrogate social and other forms of injustice.**

on GBV is that it should not perpetuate patriarchal orientations and the normalisation of sexual and gender-based violence. The emphasis in this chapter is on the normative realm, which prescribes ethical principles and practices concerning media reporting on GBV. These prescriptions apply whether the person reporting is a trained journalist, a citizen journalist, or an activist working to eliminate gender-based violence. Key principles of ethical media reporting on gender-based violence are discussed, first, before considering how these principles can be put into practice.

## **I. Principles of ethical media reporting on gender-based violence**

This section outlines four key principles of ethical media reporting on gender-based violence. They include: (a.) knowledge of issues concerning GBV and commitment to communicating them effectively; (b.) prioritising safety and minimising risks to survivors and those supporting them; (c.) respect for the autonomy, rights and dignity of survivors; and (d.) addressing impunity.

### **a. Knowledge and commitment**

Ethical media reporting on GBV requires seeking knowledge of the issues and a commitment to communicating them effectively

***How can the media report on gender-based violence in a way that is ethical and responsible? Investigative journalists have a very important role to play in uncovering hitherto silenced dimensions of gender-based violence. In doing so, they challenge the public tolerance of GBV and activate possibilities for change.***

in reporting and in shaping the agenda on gender-based violence. This principle underpins all others in this section. The framing of media content on GBV is crucial to the way in which it is understood by the society; it can make the difference between portraying an act of rape in a way that places blame on the survivor, as opposed to affirming the right of women and girls to freedom from violence. The existing framing of GBV by the media tends to treat it as a series of isolated and unrelated singular incidents, i.e. as “a few bad apples”.

The widespread acceptance of GBV is a more deeply-rooted problem, which is embedded in social, political and economic arrangements that are patriarchal. This does not mean that individual perpetrators do not bear responsibility for their actions; what it means is that the tolerance of perpetrators’ actions is supported by institutions - such as state agencies, families, schools and other parts of the education system, alongside communities, whose workings tend to cast such actions as “normal”. These institutions are marked by patriarchal norms, which reinforce men’s dominance over women by treating them as superior and entitled to privilege. Women, on the other hand, are expected to be subservient to men and provide multiple forms of labour in order to be seen as “good”, and worthy of marriage.



More appropriate media reporting on GBV should frame it as a structural issue, rather than an *individual matter*. Instead of focusing only on individual incidents, media reporting should address the **broader societal contexts** in which incidents take place e.g. violence in the society as a whole or in a particular part of it, increasing militarisation, and the like. People who are already experiencing exclusion or discrimination on the basis of their class, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, are also more likely to face gender-based violence. Hawkers, for example, are often at risk of sexual assault, as are women with disabilities. Both groups face enormous challenges in getting help, being believed and reporting GBV. The implications for different categories of women can be highlighted by including analyses from researchers, activists and practitioners working in the field. Available statistics on GBV may be used but these should be qualified by examining their validity and pointing out that gender-based violence is considerably underreported. By making connections across different structural dimensions, it becomes easier to see that the society as a whole needs to change, not just individual perpetrators.

### **b. Prioritising safety and minimising risk**

Survivors of gender-based violence have often experienced considerable trauma and they re-live that pain when their experiences are publicised inadvertently, as well as when they decide to tell their stories. The risks to survivors, of their personal experiences becoming more widely known, include threats and further violence from perpetrators and their associates. Survivors can also face stigma and blame from their families and communities in such situations. All of these add to the emotional and psychological challenges of recovery, in addition to any physical consequences of GBV that survivors have experienced. Journalists reporting on GBV are responsible for prioritising safety

and minimising risk to survivors and those supporting them.

Contemporary Nigerian contexts are marked by a proliferation of violent conflicts, whether due to insurgency, abductions, rural banditry, and so on. Women in conflict zones are often the target of violence, particularly rape and sexual assault. The media reporting of GBV in these situations becomes more charged and the need for awareness and sensitivity on the part of media actors is even greater. Journalists need to be aware of changing dynamics within conflict-affected communities, since these have a considerable bearing on safety. Media reporting on gender-based violence in such contexts should preserve “the safety, confidentiality and dignity of survivors, their families, their communities and those who are trying to help them”.<sup>26</sup>

When attention is drawn to gender-based violence primarily in the context of conflict, and less so in other contexts, this leads to an overemphasis on spectacles of violence as exemplars of GBV. The national and international attention paid to the mass abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls by Boko Haram in 2014 is one example. Such a focus results in a tendency to erase the connections between gender-based violence in these more attention-grabbing situations and what is taken for granted, such as patriarchal and other norms inherent in GBV during times of “peace”.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, the experiences and responses of women and girls to violence are not always and necessarily about being subjected to violence in such contexts. Women exercise agency in caring for and defending their communities and, importantly, in peace building; these should also be the focus of media reporting.

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26 Media Guidelines for Reporting on Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Contexts, Global Protection Cluster. Available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GBV-Media-Guidelines-25July2013.pdf>

27 See Pereira, C. 2018. “Beyond the Spectacular: Contextualising gender relations in the wake of the Boko Haram insurgency”, *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 17 (2), 246-268.



### **c. Respect for autonomy, rights and dignity of survivors**

Gender-based violence can take place in many sites – at home, in schools, in offices, on the street, in religious institutions, in political spaces, in fields, and so on. Across the board, the perpetrator is someone who is more powerfully positioned than the person

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violated. There may be multiple sources of power at work here – economic, institutional, generational and more. Even when the site of violence is public and there are witnesses, the voice of the survivor is likely to carry less weight than that of the perpetrator. This situation is exacerbated when gender-based violence takes place in spaces considered private.

Although media reporting of gender-based violence in Nigeria seems to be on the increase, there are still many obstacles to survivors being able to report their experiences of this. It thus becomes even more important that survivors' accounts of gender-based violence are heard and that the culture of silence surrounding GBV should be unravelled. Media reporting needs to give voice to those who are otherwise silenced by their experiences of violations. The survivors' best interests, rights and dignity are

***Journalists need to be aware of changing dynamics within conflict-affected communities, since these have a considerable bearing on safety. Media reporting on gender-based violence in such contexts should preserve “the safety, confidentiality and dignity of survivors, their families, their communities and those who are trying to help them”.***

central to ethical reporting on GBV and must be prioritised. This needs to be based on informed consent, and respect for privacy, anonymity and the confidentiality of information about survivors.

Since gender-based violence involves power relations, this should be uppermost in the media framing of the issues. Cases of rape and sexual assault, for example, are instances of coercion and the abuse of power, not about sex. Referring to those who have experienced gender-based violence as ‘victims’, rather than ‘survivors’, tends to convey a sense of passivity and lack of strength. Images accompanying media reports of sexual violence tend to show tearful women shrinking away from looming attackers, reinforcing the notion of helplessness. Instead of this stereotypical depiction of women’s weakness, more appropriate images would be ones that challenge sexual predation, such as images from protests and women organising against sexual violence.

#### **d. Addressing impunity**

Media reporting on GBV needs to hold those in positions of power and authority accountable for how they abuse that power.





Addressing impunity is critical. Sources of information and analysis of GBV are important here. Activists and members of civil society organisations working on gender-based violence are more likely to pay attention to the power relations inherent in such violations than the police and legal authorities. Recognising the significance of rape culture – the social and cultural beliefs and practices that normalise rape and sexual violence – is critical.

Given the widespread societal tendency to blame women and girls for sexual violence, the attention in media reports of GBV tends to be focused on details of the violence, rather than on the perpetrators. Often done in a sensationalist manner, this only reinforces inappropriate attention to the targets of violence, rather than those responsible for the violence. Instead of highlighting what the journalist thinks the survivor did “wrong” (e.g. by giving inappropriate details of their dress, behaviour, past or current relationships), more attention should be paid to the perpetrator/s of GBV and the practices that support impunity.

Impunity is strengthened by practices that trivialise the significance of gender-based violence and/or justifies such violence. Using phrases such as ‘sex with a minor’ minimises the offence of statutory rape. Referring to lecturers who engage in sexual harassment of their students as ‘randy lecturers’ deflects attention away from the offensive character of such unethical practice. Generating sympathy for a perpetrator of gender-based violence by references to his good character, and attributing such violence to rejection from a woman, a difficult childhood or other such reason, amounts to justifying the violence. Journalists should be conscious of the effects of such practice and the role it plays in shoring up impunity.

## II. Ethical media reporting on GBV – from principles to practice

The principles of ethical reporting of gender-based violence outlined above can be applied by addressing the following areas of practice:

### a. Safety, rights and dignity of survivors

- Respect for the safety, rights and dignity of survivors should underpin and inform the relations between journalists and survivors in reporting on GBV.
- Media reporting on GBV should protect the safety, confidentiality and dignity of survivors, as well as their families, their communities, and those who are trying to help them.
- Female survivors should preferably be interviewed by a woman, rather than a man.
- Reporting should not result in harmful effects on the physical, social or psychological wellbeing of survivors. The potential harms and benefits of the media reporting to survivors must be fully considered. Reporting that leads to unnecessary physical or mental harm, stress or risk should not be carried out.
- Survivors have the right to choose whether or not they want to be interviewed or involved in any way, in media reports on GBV. They also have the right to change their minds or withdraw any informed consent previously given, at any stage of the reporting, without being pressured to give a reason.



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- Survivors relive the pain of their experience/s of GBV when telling their story, so an interviewer has to be sensitive to this, listen actively and be mindful of the questions asked.
- Allowing enough time for the survivor(s) to feel secure enough to tell their story is critical.
- Survivors should also be informed that they can skip questions they do not want to answer or take a break when the interview becomes upsetting.
- A non-judgemental attitude to hearing the survivor's story is essential.
- Avoid judgemental language in the report itself. This includes language that implies the blaming of survivors for actions or inactions, disbelief that gender-based violence took place, or that GBV amounts to a violation.
- Journalists should not resort to coercion, deception or withholding of essential information, or promise unrealistic benefits as a consequence of their reporting.

## **b. Informed consent**

- Getting informed consent for reporting GBV entails certain responsibilities on the part of journalists. In many cases, exposing the identity of survivors, their communities, villages or neighbourhoods in the media report could have an adverse effect on the survivors themselves or those resident there. Journalists should ensure that survivors are not identified or made identifiable in their reports.
- A survivor's consent to participate in any media reporting on GBV is informed and voluntary, only if it is based on sufficient briefing of the details of the intended reporting. This should be given verbally and in writing, simply and clearly, in a language that the survivor knows and understands. The details should include the following:
  - The purpose of the media report
  - Who is doing it – the name of the reporter and his/her media institution;
  - Any others associated with them;
  - The harms and benefits – direct and indirect – as anticipated by the reporter. Harms include physical risks, discomfort, and unpleasant emotional experiences that may be triggered in the process of recalling the violence experienced by the survivor;
  - Where the interview will be published and in what form i.e. local, national or international news, in what language, in print or in digital media;
  - Survivors have a right not to participate and to withdraw at any stage;



- o Survivors are free to say No to cameras or audio recording equipment;
- o Discuss and agree with the survivor on how to refer to her;
- o Where an interpreter is necessary, this should be a woman. She should be briefed about the need for confidentiality and agree to it before meeting the survivor. The interpreter should also have the necessary vocabulary for the interview.
- o Share the final version of the report with the survivor so that she can correct mistakes or misinterpretations, if necessary, and so that she knows what to expect when the report is published.
- In certain communities, there may be the need to get permission or consent from the community leaders/gatekeepers in order to gain access to survivors. The consent from the gatekeepers is not equivalent to informed consent from the survivor. Journalists should not accept any conditionality by the gatekeeper, which requires that any information obtained from the survivor should be shared with the gatekeeper as a precondition for gaining access to the survivor.
- Media reporting that involves observation, without identification of survivors, does not require informed consent.

### **c. Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality**

- Survivors have a right to privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. It is important to remember that the right to remain anonymous or to be identified lies with the survivor, not with the reporter, their editor or anyone else. This is all the more critical in media

reporting on GBV, since violations are likely to be sensitive and traumatising for survivors and they are the ones generally stigmatised in the society at large, rather than perpetrators.

- Where a survivor has given informed consent for an interview, this should be held in a secure and private place that s/he has chosen. A survivor's trusted confidant can also attend. Onlookers should not be present.
- Interview notes should not include the survivor's name, not only because this information will not be used in the report but also to prevent accidental exposure of the survivor's identity, due to theft, confiscation or loss of notes.
- Details of the interview that could identify the survivor should not be shared with friends, family members or other persons.
- Not revealing the identity of survivors is necessary, not only to protect their privacy but also to ensure that they are not subjected to further risks by telling their story. This means paying attention to any visual information that may accompany the text, as well as the text itself. Photos should not reveal faces or items of clothing that could identify the survivor. The text should not specify the survivor's occupation, location or other details that could be pieced together, so as to reveal the survivor's identity. It is imperative not to report details that could expose survivors to even greater risk.

#### **d. The need for follow-up**

- After interviews with survivors, journalists should make themselves available for follow-up.
- Follow-up reports on incidents of gender-based violence are important and necessary; they make the point that such violations are serious and that the persons responsible should



be held accountable. This means finding out whether the survivor was seen by health personnel, whether the incident was reported to the police, how it was treated, whether it went to court, the attitude of the judiciary, whether the perpetrator/s was/were identified and if so, what happened subsequently.

- Journalists can draw attention to the systemic character of gender-based violence by reporting on the work that activists and practitioners do in challenging such violence and in efforts to provide remedies for survivors. Highlighting this work not only points to what actions are currently being taken against GBV but importantly, what more needs to be done.

#### **e. Recognising trauma**

- Reading about or listening to survivors give their accounts of GBV is emotionally harrowing and survivors, in particular, may be triggered by information in such reports. Readers/viewers need to be warned about disturbing content beforehand.
- At the end of an interview with a survivor, provide information on local support services and organisations that are addressing GBV in that context and for those that have consented, provide contact details. These include service providers, as well as civil society organisations.
- Do the same at the end of reports on gender-based violence.
- Journalists reporting on GBV may experience vicarious trauma as a result of hearing survivors' accounts of the violations they have suffered, especially if they themselves are survivors. If possible, set up a support group to discuss your work and your responses to it, without going into details that could identify survivors and those close to them.

# 6

## The intersectionality of GBV and social inequities in the construction of media narratives

Kole Shettima







## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to what many in the women's movement call a pandemic within a pandemic, while others characterise it as the shadow pandemic. This relates to the increase in the number of incidents of gender-based violence (GBV) as a result of the restrictions occasioned by the coronavirus pandemic. This problem has been described as not only a Nigerian concern but also a global one, as there has been an exponential increase in the cases of sexual assault, intimate partner violence and rape, worldwide. However, could it be said that there has been more reportage of cases or that there has been an actual increase in the cases of GBV across geographies? The answer may actually be both.

The coronavirus lockdown has let loose child predators haunting for innocent girls across neighbourhoods, while partners who had previously been living in tension are subsequently forced to live closer to each other. As such, there is no escape for women and girls who have been routinely assaulted, either by strangers or those close to them. It looks like while GBV has increased during the COVID-19 lockdowns, common neighbourhood criminality like thefts have decreased. The increase in the number of sexual assaults, rape, intimate partner violence on one hand and the decrease in common criminality, on the other hand, is a marker and differentiation between GBV and generalised violence. The former is focused on a socially constructed attitude to a segment of society, women and girls, while the latter is not specifically directed or focused on a particular gender.

If there has been an increase in the reportage of GBV, it is important to interrogate how this has come to be and how it is being carried out. How is it being analysed? How can journalists avoid conscious and unconscious biases in the work that they

do? How can they avoid perpetuating gender oppression? How should they be conscious of not portraying women through negative stereotypes, amplifying victim-blaming, and elevating gender-discriminatory norms in storytelling? Equally important is the need to interrogate the relationship between GBV and other forms of social inequities in our society. Importantly, GBV is embedded in other forms of inequities and therefore unveiling the intersectionality of these various forms of oppression is critical. The other forms of inequities could be cultural, race, class, ethnic, age, or on the basis of disability. It is in the interconnectedness of these inequities that we can find a grounded understanding of GBV.

### **Conceptual clarification**

What is gender-based violence (GBV)? GBV is recognised as any form of violence against women and girls due to the socially constructed and normatively justified superiority of men and boys over them. Some of its manifestations include intimate partner

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violence (including marital rape), non-partner sexual assault, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation (including sex trafficking) and abuse, whether child abuse, female infanticide,



or child marriages. Fundamentally, GBV is about human rights, women's rights, children's rights and gender rights. It reflects and reinforces existing forms of gender inequalities and power relations.

GBV can be differentiated from generalised violence by asking questions pertaining to: Who the victims are, how the violence was enacted, by whom, and what response followed, etc. The manifestation of GBV depends on the context; does gender matter? Who are the most likely victims of different forms of violence? For example, a recent research on the coverage of rape in two Nigerian newspapers with dedicated crime pages, *The Punch* and *The Sun*, found that of the 331 rape cases reported, over 90 per cent of the victims were women and girls, while 99 per cent of the rapists were men and boys.

The concept of intersectionality gained currency following the criticism of the feminist movement by black feminists. Mainstream feminism was critiqued for homogenising the experiences of all women, who were presented as being all the same. Black feminists draw attention to gender, which is multiplied by race, as differently situated women experience inequality differently. In other words, oppression is not single but multiple and simultaneously includes race x class x caste x gender x ethnicity x sexuality x disability x immigration status x geographical location, among others. Thus, there are multiple intersecting levels of discrimination and oppression that some individuals go through, in a manner that multiplies, are simultaneous and intertwined with identities.

### **Intersectionality of GBV and Social Inequities**

The #MeToo and its northern Nigeria variant #ArewaMeToo movements have amplified the issue of GBV in public discourse. Many of the issues once discussed in hush tones are now fully in the public glare. What is critical is how the issues are presented to

the public, especially by journalists. The fact that there is #MeToo and #ArewaMeToo is an illustration of the contextualised and differentiated lived experiences of GBV. This contextualisation may be due to class, ethnicity, culture, disability, and geography, among others. Put differently, all woman and girl in Nigeria, irrespective of class, age, ethnicity, culture, disability, and geography, are at the risk of GBV, yet there was a reason for a separate #ArewaMeToo movement – the contextualised GBV experience of women in the northern part of Nigeria.

I will present two examples to illustrate the intersectionality of GBV and social inequities. *The Premium Times* of December 7, 2020, like many other papers of that day, reported the intervention of the governor of Benue State, Samuel Ortom, in a wife battery case against a journalist with Channels TV. The governor was said to have helped in settling what was described as “family issues”, and the battered wife, a medical doctor, was reported to have forgiven her husband, following the mediation.

Similarly, *Premium Times* of September 30, 2019 carried the story of the death of a 13-year old girl in Benue State, due to complications arising from serial rape for over five years by her guardian and his son. She had developed Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), and later died on October 17, 2018.

In both stories, the common denominator is being female and being abused by a trusted male. However, the lens of intersectionality will unravel the differentiated nature of the victims and perpetrators. In the first story, both the victim and the perpetrator are middle class and in fact the wife may be of a higher stratum of the middle class, being a medical doctor, in comparison to the husband, who is a TV journalist (I am not suggesting that journalists are necessarily of lower status than medical doctors). The perpetrator, despite probably being of a lower status, was ‘empowered’ by socio-



cultural norms to beat his wife, who is likely of upper social status. But the response to the battery is also instructive; the governor of the State mediated for both of them! It is not unimaginative that the governor also settled the matter financially, hence the Police did not intervene, the State Ministry of Justice did not intervene

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***The concept of intersectionality gained currency following the criticism of the feminist movement by black feminists. Mainstream feminism was critiqued for homogenising the experiences of all women, who were presented as being all the same. Black feminists draw attention to gender, which is multiplied by race, as differently situated women experience inequality differently.***

and the State agency responsible for sexual assault, if there is any, did not intervene. The social class of the victim and the perpetrator matters!

In the second story, the victim was of a lower class, who worked as a house help and because of her social status and gender norms, even the son of the main perpetrator participated in serially raping her for five years. Her economic status pushed her to be a domestic worker, who was essentially treated as a sex-slave. The fact that she died of VVF is further illustration of the lower class status of the victim: VVF is predominately a disease of poor women and girls. The response to her case is another clear illustration of the class nature of GBV. No governor intervened in her case. In fact, the government was pressurised before the initial charges against the alleged perpetrator was amended and made to be steeper. However, the case continues to linger within the justice system.

How do we treat women living in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps? First, only poor people, and in this case poor women, are in IDP camps. Many are women with children because their husbands died in conflict. The bodies of these widows are exploited by men

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***How do we treat women living in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps? First, only poor people, and in this case poor women, are in IDP camps. Many are women with children because their husbands died in conflict. The bodies of these widows are exploited by men in authority for access to provisions to feed themselves and their family members.***

in authority for access to provisions to feed themselves and their family members. The alternative is starvation. These women and widows become the victims of sexploitation and physical assault by their neighbours in the camps, due to their vulnerabilities. Also, their daughters might equally need to exchange sex for food. There is virtually no state response to their situations, and where it exists, it is feeble.

Disability is a compounding factor in GBV. Disability x class x gender are major vulnerabilities. If the disabled also live in IDP camps, then their situations are remarkable worsened. Disable women are vulnerable and weak, and therefore predators easily take advantage of them. They are also likely to be from poor backgrounds. Many of them roam around the streets begging for what to eat, and this exposes them to sexploitation. Their living arrangements are likely to be in uncompleted buildings or



spaces, where there is no privacy. Certainly, there is likely to be no response to their predicaments, because disability is associated with worthlessness in some places.

Cultural practices such as widowhood rights, sleeping with guests, and child marriages are embedded in class, ethnicity, customs, and religions. In some communities, women go through widowhood practices as part of cleansing rites that are dehumanising, while in other communities, women are used as objects of pleasure for guests. Child marriage is an indicator of social norms that place a premium on virginity, and the victims are usually very poor because rich people don't give out their daughters in marriage as children, although some of them marry other people's daughters at very young ages. Poor parents who are not able to feed their daughters find it expedient to get them married at early ages, as this is sanctioned by religion, culture, social norms, and it has a material basis.

## **Conclusion**

GBV is widely reported by the media. At times stereotyping, conscious and unconscious biases and sensationalism distort and reinforce gender oppression, while trivialising the issue. On many occasions, undue attention is given to high profile cases of GBV, and little or no attention to the intersectionality between GBV and social inequities. I have attempted to make the point about the importance of intersectionality and how that approach brings a different perspective to GBV. Essentially, GBV makes sense within specific contexts, which include gender x class x disability x culture x religion x geography, among others. Individuals have many identities and it is within this multiplicity of identities that we can fully analyse persons and individuals who are victims of GBV.

# 7

## Prioritising the Safety and Dignity of Survivors

Ene Obi







## Definition of Victim Blaming

Victim blaming has been given numerous definitions by a number of scholars and commentators. Victim blaming occurs when the victim of a crime or any wrongful act is held entirely or partially at fault for the harm that befell him or her<sup>28</sup>. Victim blaming is a devaluing act that happens when the victim(s) of a crime or an accident is/are held responsible — in whole or in part — for the crimes that have been committed against them.<sup>29</sup> Victim blaming often ensues in the context of rape.

Many people victim blame, such as the police, lawyers, judges, and perhaps the most damaging to victims – their friends and families.<sup>30</sup> Victim blaming behaviour may be based on unequal attitudes towards men and women. While victim-blaming can undoubtedly occur in a variety of situations, it appears to be particularly strong in evaluations of sexual assault.<sup>31</sup>

Researchers have suggested that there are two sorts of sexism: hostile sexism, which refers to negative sexism (e.g., women are inferior to men), and benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism is more complicated, as it tends to be positive and include prescriptive ideas about women, but still may have negative repercussions. For example, one item from the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory developed by Glick and Fiske (1996) is that women are more moral than men. Although this initially seems like a positive thought at first glance, it may undermine women in everyday situations, such as the workplace<sup>32</sup>.

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28 Canadian Resource Center For Victims of Crime, (2009), Victim Blaming

29 Andrew, B., Brewin, C. R., & Rose, S. (2003). Gender, social support, and PTSD in victims of violent crime. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, (4), 16, p.421-427.

30 Maier, S. L. (2012). Sexual assault nurse examiners' perceptions of the revictimization of rape victims. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27, 287-315

31 . Bieneck, S. & Krahé, B. (2010). Blaming the victim and exonerating the perpetrator in cases of rape and robbery: Is there a double standard? *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 26(9), 1785-1797

32 Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70, 491-512

*This is a theoretical framework positing that sexism has two sub-components: “hostile sexism” and “benevolent sexism”. Hostile sexism reflects to overtly negative evaluations and stereotypes about a gender (e.g., the ideas that women are incompetent and inferior to men). Benevolent sexism represents evaluations of gender that may appear subjectively positive (subjective to the person who is evaluating), but are actually damaging to people and gender equality more broadly (e.g., the ideas that women need to be protected by men).*

## **Factors Promoting Victim Blaming**

There are several social factors that affect the concept of victim blaming, some of which include the following:

### **1. Ambivalent sexism**

This is a theoretical framework positing that sexism has two sub-components: **“hostile sexism”** and **“benevolent sexism”**. Hostile sexism reflects to overtly negative evaluations and stereotypes about a gender (e.g., the ideas that women are incompetent and inferior to men). Benevolent sexism represents evaluations of gender that may appear subjectively positive (subjective to the person who is evaluating), but are actually damaging to people and gender equality more broadly (e.g., the ideas that women need to be protected by men).<sup>33</sup>

Although benevolent sexism is often not viewed as harmful,

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33 Todd, D.N. (2016), “Handbook of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination”



there is a growing body of evidence suggesting that it contributes highly to victim blaming behaviours.<sup>34</sup> Not only does the gender of the victim matter for victim blame, but so does the gender of the observer. A large body of evidence suggests that men victim blame more than women<sup>35</sup>.

## 2. Just World Theory

The just world hypothesis is based on the belief of individuals that the world is a safe, just place where people get what they deserve. These individuals believe that the social system that affects them is fair, legitimate, and justifiable<sup>36</sup>. And their perception is that good things happen to good people, and bad things to bad people<sup>37</sup>.

## 3. Attribution Error

This occurs when individuals overemphasise personal characteristics and devalue environmental characteristics when judging others, thereby resulting in victim blaming. People who make this error view the individual victim as partially responsible for what happened to him or her and ignore situational causes. So-called “internal failings” take precedent over situational contributors in the judgment of the subject. On the contrary, these people may have the propensity to attribute their failures to environmental attributes, and their successes to personal attributes.<sup>38</sup>

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34 Crippen, M., “Theories of Victim Blame” (2015). Senior Honors Projects. 66. <http://collected.jcu.edu/honorspapers/66>

35 Blumberg, M. L., & Lester, D. (1991). High school and college students’ attitudes toward rape. *Adolescence*, 26, 727-729.

36 Kay, A.C., Jost, J.T., & Young, S. (2005). Victim Derogation and Victim Enhancement as Alternate Routes to System Justification. *Psychological Science*, 16 (3), 240-246

37 Idisis, Y., Ben-David, S. & Ben-David, E. (2007). Attribution of blame to rape victims among therapists and non-therapists. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 25, 103–120.

38 Johnson, L. M., Mullick, R., & Mulford, C.L. (2002). General Versus Specific Victim Blaming. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 142(2), 249-63.

#### 4. Sexism and the Rape Myth Acceptance

The common rape myths are four: **“She asked for it”**, **“He didn’t mean to”**, **“It wasn’t really rape”**, and **“She lied”**. The myth **“She asked for it”** emphasises the victim’s responsibility for rape, considering that her behaviour had invited the sexual assault. The dimension **“He didn’t mean to”** reflects the belief that the perpetrator did not actually intend to carry out the rape. The third myth, **“It wasn’t really rape”** denies that sexual assault had happened, and either blames the victim (who did not physically resist or fight back) or justifies the offender. Finally, the myth **“She lied”** reflects the disbelief of rape claims, and the assumption that the victim fabricated the assault <sup>39</sup>

Rape attitudes are strongly connected to other deeply held and pervasive attitudes, such as sex role stereotyping . For this reason, a relevant focus of research on the link between the acceptance of rape myths and other ideological beliefs has been the endorsement of sexist attitudes <sup>40</sup>.

#### 5. Burden of Proof in Rape cases.

Nigerian criminal law puts the onus of the burden of proof on the victims and prosecution, which provides a fertile atmosphere for victim abuse/shaming. In most cases, when victims put on their armour of bravery and try to prove their cases, they end up being ridiculed by members of the Nigerian Police Force and health professionals who should serve as sources of comfort and protection to them.

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39 McMahon, S., & Farmer, G. L. (2011). An updated measure for assessing subtle rape myths. *Social Work Research*, 35(2), 71-81.

40 Abrams, D., Viki, G. T., Masser, B., & Bohner, G. (2003). Perceptions of stranger and acquaintance rape: the role of benevolent and hostile sexism in victim blame and rape proclivity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 84(1), 111-125.



## The Role Of The Media In Victim Blaming

Victim blaming in the media can have numerous negative effects on the victims of crime. For one, the media can be callous and

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***The media's methods in discussing and portraying sexual gender based violence cases/stories can also be described as a foundation on which the concept of victim blaming stands today; instead of focusing on the perpetrator of a crime, more attention is given to the victim for the sake of sensationalising the story.***

insensitive when discussing what happened to a victim. They may paint the victim in a negative light by portraying that they somehow deserved what happened to them, or perhaps that they were not really the victim but the offender.<sup>41</sup> Victim blaming effectively states that a victim deserved a crime that s/he endured. Crime is often about violence, power, and control; it needs to be clear that no one deserves it. Most importantly, the victim blaming approach is neither effective in resolving problems of violence, nor in protecting victims from further victimisation, nor in protecting future generations from continuing the cycle of abuse.<sup>42</sup>

The media's methods in discussing and portraying sexual gender based violence cases/stories can also be described as a foundation on which the concept of victim blaming stands today; instead of focusing on the perpetrator of a crime, more attention is given to the victim for the sake of sensationalising the story. The details that are put in the headlines and stories by the media, in reporting

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41 The Canadian Resource Center for Victims of Crimes (2009). Victim Blaming.

42 Zur, O. (1994). Rethinking "Don't Blame the Victim." Journal of Couple Therapy, 4(3/4), 15-36

***Stigmatisation has been identified as one of four key dynamics explaining the link between sexual abuse victimisation and negative emotional and social consequences for victims. Research has since documented that feelings of shame enable high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Hence there is need for some delicacy in the identification of victims in the media.***

cases of gender based violence, play a significant role in how the public perceives the victim(s) and the perpetrator(s) of a crime.

The media has so much power that it can single-handedly change society's perception of gender-based violence and protect women and girls in the society.

## **How Can Victim Blaming Be Avoided In Media Reporting**

The utmost concern of the media should be the protection of victims and ensuring their safety. The media can avoid victim blaming through the following;

### **1. Sensitisation and Training**

Various media houses should go through orientation/training workshops on gender based violence, run by GBV experts, to ensure that their reporters are better informed on the acceptable word constructs to be employed in reporting such sensitive cases.

### **2. Advocate for Offender Accountability**

The media can engage in advocacy campaigns for the



prosecution of offenders/perpetrators of GBV cases, as many of them slip through the fingers of the Nigerian judiciary system.

### **3. Restriction on Victim Information Released To the Public**

As mentioned, the media should pay better attention to the word constructs used in reporting GBV cases. Certain details of victims should not be contained in stories; for example, what a victim was wearing, previous consensual encounters between a victim and a perpetrator, and the identity of the victim.

### **4. Creating a Non-Victim Blaming Narrative**

By paying more attention to perpetrators and their actions, the media can create a non-victim blaming narrative, such as not focusing their report on details such as whether the victim is a sex worker, or if she was scantily dressed, or in a drunken state when the violence occurred, etc.

## **Appropriate Ways of Handling the Identification of Victim/Perpetrators**

Stigmatisation has been identified as one of four key dynamics explaining the link between sexual abuse victimisation and negative emotional and social consequences for victims<sup>43</sup>. Research has since documented that feelings of shame enable high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)<sup>44</sup>. Hence there is need for some delicacy in the identification of victims in the media. The use of code names can be employed to protect the identities of the victims, as opposed to the publication of their full identities, which often lead to stigmatisation and, in some cases,

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43 Finklehor D, Browne A (1985) The traumatic impact of child sexual abuse: a conceptualization. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 55(4): 530–41.

44 Feiring C, Taska LS (2005) The persistence of shame following sexual abuse: a longitudinal look at risk and recovery. *Child Maltreatment* 10: 337–49.

exposure to violent attacks from their communities and the public. The question of where a society's right to know ends and an individual's right to privacy begins is one of journalism's thorniest ethical dilemmas<sup>45</sup>.

Some may be of the opinion that the public's right to know should be considered, but in such a sensitive matter, the victims right to privacy must be upheld at all costs.

In the case of perpetrators, their full details/personal information should be published publicly to serve as deterrence to potential offenders in the society. The Nigerian criminal system has taken a laudable step in this regard by the creation of the Nigeria Sexual offenders Register. In this regard, the media should readily publish the full identities of perpetrators as a tool for fighting GBV in Nigeria.

## **Conducting Safe Interviews for Survivors and Avoiding Re-victimisation**

The manner in which a story is presented in the media or the fact that a crime is not covered at all can unintentionally inflict secondary victimisation on the victims or survivors of crime by exacerbating their feelings of violation, disorientation, and loss of control. Some may feel humiliated by the community, knowing what has happened to them, or could be made to feel insignificant by the lack of coverage of their ordeals.<sup>46</sup>

The media can ensure the safety of victims during interviews and avoid their re-victimisation by using the following tips:

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45 Thomason, T., and A. Babbili. 1988. *American Media and Crime Victims: Covering Private Individuals in the Public Spotlight*. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University.

46 *Victims of Violence*. (2008). *Media and the Criminal Justice System*





- Conduct interviews in locations conducive for both the victim(s) and the interviewer(s);
- Explain the interview processes to victims, who must, in turn, give informed consent for the interviews to hold;
- Allow victims to give unadulterated/uninfluenced accounts of the incidents in question;
- Avoid conducting interviews at inappropriate times. For example, immediately after a crime, during the subsequent trial, and at times when victims may feel numb, confused or most vulnerable;
- Avoid documenting negative details about victims;
- Avoid questions that appear to blame a victim or bear a hostile approach;
- Be conscious of a victim’s fragile nature due to the sensitivity of the matter;
- Avoid the publication of the victim’s name or address;
- Avoid printing things said about the victim during the court process, which a family may not believe is accurate;
- Desist from aggressive or insensitive reporting that might impact on a victim’s ability to grieve with dignity and a sense of personal safety;
- Refrain from delving inappropriately into a victim’s past.

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**Andrew, B., Brewin, C. R., & Rose, S. (2003).** Gender, social support, and PTSD in victims of violent crime. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, (4), 16, p.421-427.

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**Idisis, Y., Ben-David, S. & Ben-David, E. (2007).** “Attribution of blame to rape victims among therapists and non-therapists.” *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 25, 103–120.

**Johnson, L. M., Mullick, R., & Mulford, C.L. (2002).** “General



Versus Specific Victim Blaming.” *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 142(2), 249-63.

**Kay, A.C., Jost, J.T., & Young, S. (2005).** “Victim Derogation and Victim Enhancement as Alternate Routes to System Justification.” *Psychological Science*, 16 (3), 240-246

**Maier, S. L. (2012).** “Sexual assault nurse examiners’ perceptions of the revictimization of rape victims.” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27, 287-315.

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# 8

## Reporting On Women and Girl's Experience Of Gender-Based Violence

Benedine Azanu





The role of the media in socialisation is critical for changing negative narratives and representations of women and girls in relation to gender-based violence (GBV). The prevalence of sexism in the news media worldwide demands that news content producers, especially journalists and editors, incorporate strategies in the news production processes that change the negative representations of issues of gender-based violence towards contributing to the creation of gender equal societies. This chapter discusses guidelines for reporting GBV through a re-examination of the journalistic values of news gathering and writing principles, in order that they might more effectively capture the complexities of GBV as an issue of humanity that requires attention like any threatening health issue. By so doing, journalists are empowered to not only mainstream gender in their journalistic and media work but also treat the subject of GBV against women and girls as proactive opportunities to conduct in-depth investigative reports and write more complete stories. As an outline, this chapter continues with a consideration of ethical journalism in relation to gender issues and prescribes specific things that journalists must do in order to be ethical in their reporting of the GBV experiences of women and girls, and then discusses an approach that mainstreams GBV in selected news gathering values and writing principles, to aid the centring of the experiences of women and girls. Finally, the chapter discusses the practice of the safety of women and men journalists and survivors of GBV.

## **Gender and ethical journalism**

Ethical journalism is one that is representative of women and men in the societies in which it is practiced. This means that news and media content must reflect the voices and the realities of the various groups of people, especially women, girls and other

***This chapter discusses guidelines for reporting GBV through a re-examination of the journalistic values of news gathering and writing principles, in order that they might more effectively capture the complexities of GBV as an issue of humanity that requires attention like any threatening health issue.***

vulnerable and marginalised groups in these societies. The media mistreatment of women, which Tuchman (1978) calls symbolic annihilation (exclusion, trivialisation and condemnation) is a failure of the media to reflect the social realities of women and girls in general and the scourge of GBV in particular. As such, trivialising and condemning women's experience of GBV is unethical. To be ethical, journalists are obliged to be sensitive and effectively represent the voices of victims/survivors of GBV on one hand, and educate audiences to enable the interrogation of policies and proposals that aim to curb the incidences of GBV on the other hand. Critical to ethical journalism is the centring of the problems of women and girls, the writing of stories and counter-stories in the news media through the lens of gender, as well as those of marginalised groups.

Achieving ethical journalism that responds to the effective reportage of GBV against women and girls requires journalists to be well informed in order to do the following, among others:

- Understand deeply, and clearly articulate the complexities and forms that GBV take.
- Frame and ask the right questions to elicit right responses from survivors.



- Understand the communities/contexts within which GBV cases occur.
- Understand the effects (visible and invisible) of GBV on the society.
- Know, understand and keep abreast with civil, traditional and criminal laws (national and international) that protect women and girls against GBV.
- Develop knowledge and self-protection skills to stay safe and ensure safety of survivors of GBV.

Specifically, male journalists can do the following:

- Understand that women experience life differently, and therefore do not go into interviews with preconceived ideas about the GBV incidents involving them. The aim is to uncover and tell a story that centers on the lived experience of women and girls involved.
- Choose story angles that focus on what men and boys can do to alleviate the scourge of GBV.
- Use women as news sources.
- Elect or choose to cover GBV stories from the perspectives of women and girls.
- Be aware of your positions as men in relation to women and girls, and be able to read the gender dynamics in the prevailing issue of GBV you are attending to.
- Understand the importance of gender in journalism in general and how women and girls are disadvantaged, in terms of their treatment in news, especially those of GBV.
- Write stories that challenge myths and negative views of male opinions leaders about GVB. Such men tend to accept challenging opposing views from males.
- In the workplace, demonstrate through actions that you support and value the work of female colleagues.

Doing so enables the telling of alternative stories that:

- Are proactive, in-depth and informative investigative pieces.
- Prioritise the safety of survivors.
- Use background information and statistics to support everyday reactive news on GBV.
- Emphasise the impact of GBV on communities, especially the invisible impact (damage to society, trauma, etc.).
- Recognise persons affected by GBV as sources (with their informed consent).
- Detail the effects of GBV on all aspects of the lives of women and girls (independence, productivity and health).
- Present GBV as a social phenomenon and a concern for humanity, rather than an issue that just relates to women.
- Use precise words and appropriate vocabulary.
- Avoids the use of negative stereotypes and constructs discriminatory gender roles that reinforce negative femininities and masculinities.
- Include male leaders who are gender advocates as sources.
- Use language that demonstrates value for the roles of women and girls.
- Use non-judgmental language.
- Use gender-neutral language, where possible.
- Avoids the use of language that blames and/or stigmatises, shames and demonises GBV survivors.
- Counters myths and negative male opinions on GBV.
- Enables the development of knowledge and provides support for GBV prevention.
- Adopts an intersectional approach that allows distinctions to be made among different groups of women and girls for identification of the particularities of the GBV that affects them.
- Are cautious about the use of images, especially original





ones, and are mindful of conventional privacy methods of pixilation, and scrambling voices, which sometimes fail and reveal the identities of anonymous sources.

- Label images clearly to avoid misrepresentation.
- Involve male survivors of GBV.
- Involve women as perpetrators of GBV.
- Explain in-depth when, where and how violence against men and boys occur in order to show their vulnerabilities.
- Explain why males disproportionately are perpetrators of GBV.
- Reveal male-on-male sexual violence. Such coverage depicts GBV as male problem, as well as a dimension of GBV.
- Reveal negative effects of GBV on men and boys.
- Report all sides of the story.

## **Centring the Experiences of women and girls in the news media**

Mainstreaming GBV against women and girls into news values and news writing principles creates opportunities to bring the experiences, knowledge and interests of women and girls to bear on news media content. In general, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (1997) defines gender mainstreaming as follows:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality. (para 2)

**Galtung (2002 as cited in Lee, 2008) advocates for peace journalism, arguing that while war journalism is modelled on sports journalism, which focuses on a zero-some game win, peace journalism is modelled on health journalism, where the “... good health reporter describes a patient’s battle against cancer and yet informs readers about the disease’s causes as well as the full range of cures and preventive measures”.**

This section discusses a rethinking of selected news values and how journalists and editors can centre women and girls’ experiences of GBV as newsworthy events.

### **Conflict**

Often GVB issues make news as a result of their inherent conflict news value. More importantly, women and girls experience violence daily. Journalists must rethink the usual angles and focus on those that centre on women and girls as sources of their own experiences, if they elect to do so. Furthermore, the usual conflict stories like war can offer opportunities to closely examine GBV issues against women and girls, especially as research has shown that war increases vulnerabilities and creates fertile environments for greater incidences of extreme violence. Additionally, taking an angle that draws on examples across countries and regions will enable audiences understand the scope and patterns of GBV.

Galtung (2002 as cited in Lee, 2008) advocates for peace journalism, arguing that while war journalism is modelled on sports journalism, which focuses on a zero-some game win, peace journalism is modelled on health journalism, where the “...



good health reporter describes a patient's battle against cancer and yet informs readers about the disease's causes as well as the full range of cures and preventive measures" (p. 258). Similarly, the good journalist reporting on GBV will describe the survivor's experience, provide context for the issue of GBV, explain the causes, as well as present solutions, preventive measures, and provide information regarding where to get help and support. In this way, journalists will enable society to value deliberate and non-violent responses to conflict (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2006).

### **Impact**

Impact as news value brings home a news story to audiences and deals directly with how the story affects them. Often found in the lead, impact as news value tells the audience how the subject affects their lives and the consequences of the news. Focusing on the impact that varying forms of GBV has on women, girls, men and boys (socially, physically, emotionally) and its pervasiveness provides a plethora of opportunities for news angles.

### **Proximity**

While the usual focus on events and situations in the specific locality where the news is being told, as a determinant of newsworthiness, can lead to the selection of GBV stories, other conceptions of proximity might bring GBV closer home and make it matter to audiences. For instance, making careful comparisons between local GBV cases and those further away while clarifying nuances, enables audiences to appreciate the scourge of GBV more.

### **Practice of safety**

Worldwide, the safety of journalists has come under scrutiny, regarding the dangers they encounter while engaged in news gathering processes. A reflection of the safety of journalists in the context of GBV allows for a consideration in two ways: personal

safety of journalists (women and men) and advocates, and the safety of survivors of GBV. While gathering information for GBV stories, journalists must ensure the safety, security, privacy and confidentiality of the subjects of their news stories, especially GBV survivors, as well as themselves.

Subjects (survivors) must give informed consent (written or recorded) to journalists, including details of use of materials concerning them. Journalists and other media workers must be prepared for survivors of violence presenting symptoms of post-traumatic stress during interviews. Hence, help and support must be available to them on site, especially for minors. Journalists must be familiar with and adhere to legal guidelines for reporting GBV involving minors. Similarly, journalists themselves may be subjected to and suffer post-traumatic stress.

Women journalists, like other women, are not exempt from the risk of experiencing abuse, especially as they are seen as challenging social norms. While they go about their work, women journalists are at the risk of sexual violence, sexual harassment, threats of violence – including death, online harassment and reprisal attacks (IWMF, 2018; Reporters Without Borders, 2018). Furthermore, women journalists are often affected by online violence, consisting of trolling, doxing and cyber-stalking (Reporters Without Borders, 2018).

Male journalists are also victims/survivors of GBV. For male journalists, sexual violence often occurs in detention or captivity. Other situations where GBV against men occurs include workplaces where men predominate, subordinate positions in all male workplaces, and all male institutions (McCann, 2005 as cited in Klinger, 2011). Thus it is important that male journalists are aware of their vulnerabilities and knowledgeable about situations



and settings that expose them to violence in general and to become victims/survivors of GBV. Furthermore, men who are considered effeminate and weak are more likely to be subjected to GBV. Male journalists who are gender egalitarian and support feminist movements can be seen as betraying men and may encounter verbal abuse and attacks.

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***Journalists and other media workers must be prepared for survivors of violence presenting symptoms of post-traumatic stress during interviews. Hence, help and support must be available to them on site, especially for minors. Journalists must be familiar with and adhere to legal guidelines for reporting GBV involving minors.***

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed sensitivity to gender as part of ethical journalism, particularly in the coverage of GBV stories. Additionally, mainstreaming gender into some news gathering values and writing principles as an approach to centring the experiences of women and girls' has been presented. The valuing of women and girls as sources for GBV and how it enables the telling of more complete and alternative GBV stories has also been presented. Furthermore, various issues that journalists and editors must consider in the preparation of news media content have been elaborated upon. Ways in which women and men journalists and GBV advocates can ensure their own safety and safeguard the safety and privacy of survivors of GBV have also been discussed.

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# 9

## When Children Become Victims of Gender-Based Violence

Audrey Gadzekpo



## Introduction

Several African cultures convey the value of children through names or sayings such as, “a person who has children does not die” (Nigeria) or, “a child is better than riches” (Ghana). Despite this manifest affirmation of their worth, many children continue to face violence on a daily basis and in spaces in which they ought to feel safe and protected, such as the home, neighbourhood and school. Data from UNICEF shows that worldwide about 15 million adolescent girls, aged between 15 and 19, have experienced forced sex; more than one in three students, aged 13 to 15, have experienced bullying; as much as half of all teenagers are confronted with violence in or around their school premises; some 10 per cent of the world’s children are not legally protected from corporal punishment, and about three in four children, between the ages of two and four, are regularly subjected to violent discipline by their caregivers (UNICEF, 2020).

These sobering statistics are reflected in a national survey on violence against children conducted in Nigeria (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2014), which indicated a high prevalence of the problem. At the time the survey was conducted, six out of 10 children had experienced some form of violence, especially physical violence. The survey also showed that a significant number of girls (one in four) and boys (one in ten) experience sexual violence, and many children experience emotional violence by a parent, caregiver, or adult relative. Perpetrators of violence against children, according to the survey, were mostly people they knew, such as parents, teachers, adult relatives or neighbours (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2014).

Children’s vulnerability to violence is further compounded in situations of instability and conflict. UNICEF estimates that world-wide, one in four children live in countries where there is





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conflict and disaster and as many as 28 million children have been forced to flee their homes as a consequence of war and insecurity (UNICEF, 2020).

### **Why the Media Matters**

While violence against children is not always on the top of the media agenda, it is to the media that we often turn to sound the alarm on the magnitude of the problem. Stories bearing headlines such as, “Another couple caught for causing grievous harm to daughter in Enugu” and “Amidst COVID-19 lockdown, Nigeria sees increased sexual and gender violence” can influence how people make meaning of such societal problems. This is mostly because public perceptions are largely derived from the news media, and the quality of such reports can either reproduce or challenge existing attitudes and shape societal opinion and policy. This chapter provides guidelines on how the media can improve coverage of children who are victims of gender-based violence. It is also aimed at strengthening the capacity of journalists to produce the kind of stories that can compel stronger policy action to achieve Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16.2, “to end all forms of violence against children” and forms of violence, such as child marriage, female genital mutilation (SDG 5.3), child labour and recruitment, and use of child soldiers (SDG 8.7). The chapter

clarifies key concepts often used in reporting about children who are victims of violence; provides a brief critique of media coverage and guidelines on how to cover violence-related stories involving children; and ways to help journalists to improve their coverage.

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## **Definition of Children and Adolescents**

A child is a human being below the age of eighteen years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier (UN Convention on the Rights of Children 2003), and an adolescent refers to anyone between 10 and 19 years of age (UN).

## **Definitions of Violence**

Children are subjected to a wide variety of violence, some of which are gender based. Gender-based violence (GBV) is defined as “harmful acts directed at an individual based on their gender,” which is “rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms” UNHCR (2020). Other terms related to gender-based violence often found in news coverage include:



- 1. Domestic Violence:** Sometimes described as domestic abuse or intimate partner abuse, domestic violence has been defined by the UN as “as a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abuse is physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions that influence another person.” The term is often used to depict the abuse that adults suffer at the hands of their intimate partners, but we must bear in mind that children are also often victims of domestic violence.
- 2. Physical violence:** This is “(t)he intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (Violence Prevention Alliance/ World Health Organisation (WHO), 2010). A 2014 survey conducted on violence against children in Nigeria identified various forms of physical violence they were subjected to, such as hitting with fists, kicking, whipping, beating with objects, choking, smothering, trying to drown, burning intentionally, and using or threatening to use guns, knives or other weapons on them (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2014).
- 3. Psychological Violence:** This pertains to “(a)ny intentional conduct that seriously impairs another person’s psychological integrity through coercion or threats or any act which causes psychological harm to an individual. Psychological violence can take the form of, for example, coercion, defamation, verbal insult or harassment” (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2007).
- 4. Emotional Abuse:** This is often conflated with psychological abuse, as most people see little difference between the two

terms, although some argue that emotional abuse is more wide-ranging and includes psychological abuse. Emotional abuse involves using tactics to attack or manipulate a person's emotions, such as hurtful criticism, humiliation and certain forms of control. Forms of emotional abuse of children identified in the 2014 survey conducted in Nigeria included, "being ridiculed or put down by a parent, adult caregiver, or adult relative; being told...they were unloved or do not deserve to be loved, or that they wish they were dead or had never been born" (National Population Commission of Nigeria, 2014).

5. **Verbal Abuse:** This is sometimes used interchangeably with emotional abuse but here too there are fine distinctions, with the term 'verbal abuse' often used to describe the use of language to hurt someone or to speak to him or her aggressively, violently or in a threatening manner.
6. **Sexual Violence:** Violence or abuse of a sexual nature encompasses a wide range of behaviours involving the use of force or taking advantage of someone to obtain sex. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines child sexual abuse as, "the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society." Also, for the WHO, any sexually gratifying activity between a child and an adult or another child who, because of their age or level of development, are in a position of responsibility, trust or power over the initial child, fits that definition. The WHO warns that children are often reticent about revealing sexual abuse immediately it happens due to a variety of reasons. The 2014 Nigerian survey on violence against children indicates that girls are significantly more likely to experience both sexual violence



and physical violence than other kinds of violence, and that one in three girls, in comparison with nearly one in six boys, experienced their first incident of sexual violence between the ages of 14 and 15 years. It is important to note also that child marriage is now recognised in international law as a form of GBV, which puts girls at risk of sexual, physical, and psychological violence. Under the Child Rights Act (CRA) of 2003, child marriage is illegal in Nigeria, despite its prevalence in certain communities.

- 7. Economic Violence:** This type of violence is broadly defined as “any act or behaviour which causes economic harm to an individual” (European Institute for Gender Equality). Examples of economic violence include damaging a person’s property; refusal to live up to economic responsibilities, including child support; and restricting access to financial resources, and education.
- 8. Cyberbullying:** This is defined by UNICEF, 2020, as “bullying with the use of digital technologies.” Much like physical bullying, cyberbullying is gaining recognition as a form of violence that has adverse impacts on both children and adult victims. It occurs on digital platforms such as mobile phones, social media and gaming platforms, and is aimed at shaming, threatening, scaring or provoking its victims.

## Problems and Challenges

Violence, conflict and death are staple fare of most news organisations but how the media covers issues of gender-based violence and violence against children has sometimes come under criticism by academics, policymakers and even the public. The most common critiques of media coverage are the facts that they sensationalise stories; create and perpetuate fear in the manner

they select and frame news; stereotype victims and perpetuate gender myths; are insensitive to the effects that reporting can have on already traumatised persons; and often fail to offer solutions in their stories.

Reporting on children who are victims of gender-based violence requires strict adherence to professional standards and ethics. Most international and national ethical codes on journalism and media practice have provisions on how to handle children when reporting the news, however much too often media reportage on children who are victims of GBV falls short of the standards. It bears reminding that article 8 of the “Code of Ethics for Nigerian Journalists” states that, “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,” while article 9, which specifically addresses children and minors, stipulates that “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 offences, crimes and rituals or witchcraft either as victims, witnesses or defendants.” Yet, examples of journalistic infractions of these provisions abound in actual practice and are a source of concern for media regulators.

### **International Guidelines on Reporting on Children**

Associations such as the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and child-centered organisations like UNICEF have provided guidelines on how journalists should report on children, and these recommendations provide a professional and ethical framework on how Nigerian journalists should report issues related to children and violence. The IFJ guidelines, issued in Seoul, Korea in 2001, established some fundamental principles, including the need for journalists to maintain the highest ethical and professional standards and promote the International Convention on the



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Rights of the Child. The guidelines affirm the right of children to privacy and remind media organisations to treat as important and worthy of public debate, “the violation of the rights of children and issues related to children’s safety, privacy, security, their education, health and social welfare and all forms of exploitation” (IFJ, 2003). Included also is a statement expressing concern about paedophilic Internet sites, and certain media that publish or broadcast classified advertisements promoting child prostitution. Specifically, the IFJ guidelines state the following:

- Journalists and media organisations shall strive to maintain the highest standards of ethical conduct in reporting children’s affairs and, in particular, they shall
- strive for standards of excellence in terms of accuracy and sensitivity when reporting on issues involving children;
- avoid programming and publication of images which intrude upon the media space of children with information which is damaging to them;
- avoid the use of stereotypes and sensational presentation to promote journalistic material involving children;
- consider carefully the consequences of publication of any

material concerning children and shall minimise harm to children;

- guard against visually or otherwise identifying children unless it is demonstrably in the public interest;
- give children, where possible, the right of access to media to express their own opinions without inducement of any kind;
- ensure independent verification of information provided by children and take special care to ensure that verification takes place without putting child informants at risk;
- avoid the use of sexualised images of children;
- use fair, open and straight forward methods for obtaining pictures and, where possible, obtain them with the knowledge and consent of children or a responsible adult, guardian or carer;
- verify the credentials of any organisation purporting to speak for or to represent the interests of children.
- not make payment to children for material involving the welfare of children or to parents or guardians of children unless it is demonstrably in the interest of the child.
- Journalists should put to critical examination the reports submitted and the claims made by Governments on implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in their respective countries.
- Media should not consider and report the conditions of children only as events but should continuously report the process likely to lead or leading to the occurrence of these events.

Similar to the IFJ, the UNICEF (2020) provisions on journalism and the coverage of children reiterate fundamental principles such as:

- The dignity and rights of every child are to be respected in every circumstance.
- In interviewing and reporting on children, special attention is





to be paid to each child's right to privacy and confidentiality, to have their opinions heard, to participate in decisions affecting them and to be protected from harm and retribution, including the potential of harm and retribution.

- The best interests of each child are to be protected over any other consideration, including over advocacy for children's issues and the promotion of child rights.
- When trying to determine the best interests of a child, the child's right to have their views considered are to be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.
- Those closest to the child's situation and best able to assess it are to be consulted about the political, social and cultural ramifications of any reportage.
- Do not publish a story or an image which might put the child, siblings or peers at risk even when identities are changed, obscured or not used.

The UNICEF guidelines also contain specific provisions on reporting violence, such as:

1. Do not further stigmatise any child; avoid categorisations or descriptions that expose a child to negative reprisals – including additional physical or psychological harm, or to lifelong abuse, discrimination or rejection by their local communities.
2. Always provide an accurate context for the child's story or image.
3. Always change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as:
  - a. A victim of sexual abuse or exploitation,
  - b. A perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse,
  - c. HIV positive, or living with AIDS, unless the child, a parent or a guardian gives fully informed consent,

- d. Charged or convicted of a crime.
4. In certain circumstances of risk or potential risk of harm or retribution, change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as:
  - a. A current or former child combatant,
  - b. An asylum seeker, a refugee or an internal displaced person.
5. In certain cases, using a child's identity - their name and/or recognisable image - is in the child's best interests. However, when the child's identity is used, they must still be protected against harm and supported through any stigmatisation or reprisals.
6. Confirm the accuracy of what the child has to say, either with other children or an adult, preferably with both.
7. When in doubt about whether a child is at risk, report on the general situation for children rather than on an individual child, no matter how newsworthy the story.

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***The IFJ guidelines, issued in Seoul, Korea in 2001, established some fundamental principles, including the need for journalists to maintain the highest ethical and professional standards and promote the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.***

Furthermore, the guidelines provide direction on how journalists ought to go about interviewing children when doing stories on violence by recommending that:



1. Do no harm to any child; avoid questions, attitudes or comments that are judgmental, insensitive to cultural values, that place a child in danger or expose a child to humiliation, or that reactivate a child's pain and grief from traumatic events.
2. Do not discriminate in choosing children to interview because of sex, race, age, religion, status, educational background or physical abilities.
3. No staging: Do not ask children to tell a story or take an action that is not part of their own history.
4. Ensure that the child or guardian knows they are talking with a reporter. Explain the purpose of the interview and its intended use.
5. Obtain permission from the child and his or her guardian for all interviews, videotaping and, when possible, for documentary photographs. When possible and appropriate, this permission should be in writing. Permission must be obtained in circumstances that ensure that the child and guardian are not coerced in any way and that they understand that they are part of a story that might be disseminated locally and globally. This is usually only ensured if the permission is obtained in the child's language and if the decision is made in consultation with an adult the child trusts.
6. Pay attention to where and how the child is interviewed. Limit the number of interviewers and photographers. Try to make certain that children are comfortable and able to tell their story without outside pressure, including from the interviewer. In film, video and radio interviews, consider what the choice of visual or audio background might imply about the child and her or his life and story. Ensure that the child would not be endangered or adversely affected by showing their home, community or general whereabouts.

***It is important that journalists do good research to inform and educate them, to examine their own biases and identify sources who will help illuminate the magnitude and impact of the problem, not only on the individual but also on societal well-being and economic development.***

### **How to improve on coverage**

While the tenets of the IFJ and UNICEF guidelines on children, and relevant sections of the Nigerian ethical code should lead to better coverage, it would be ideal if newsrooms encourage and train journalists to specialise in reporting on children and violence-related issues. Journalists working on such stories should be introspective, recognising that violence, exploitation and abuse of children manifest in multiple and complex ways, some of which are deeply-rooted in cultural beliefs, attitudes and practices they may subscribe to. For example, studies show that the most prevalent form of violence against children is corporal punishment (Salazar et al., 2014; Montgomery, 2008), which in Africa is widely considered a justifiable corrective measure.

It is important that journalists do good research to inform and educate them, to examine their own biases and identify sources who will help illuminate the magnitude and impact of the problem, not only on the individual but also on societal well-being and economic development. Journalists must strive to give voice to children to tell their stories and provide an accurate account, while being mindful of sensational re-telling of traumatic events in children's lives at the same time.

Journalists must also mind their language, avoiding judgmental



adjectives and expressions or euphemisms that minimise the severity of the incident. In providing background, stories can refer to international conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of Children and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children, as well as national laws, to remind policymakers of their obligations to children. It would also be useful to include in news reports national and international policies such as the target of eradicating violence by 2030, and other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that Nigeria and other African countries have committed to.

Finally, one of the critiques of media coverage has been the failure to offer solutions in much of the stories produced on children caught up in violence. Journalists should address this lapse by improving on how they report on engagement and social dialogue of stakeholders working to bring about the needed change and soliciting the voice of experts who can illuminate more clearly the how, why and so what of stories on children who are victims of violence.

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# 10

## Gender-Based Violence and Reportorial Models

Abigail Odozi Ogwezzy-Ndisika



## Background

The United Nations (UN) defines gender-based violence (GBV) as any act of violence that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, girls, men, and boys, as well as the threat of such acts, coercion, or the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. But it is mostly committed against girls/women. Hence, the UN's definition of violence against women recognises that violence is “gendered” because in all societies, to a greater degree, women and girls are more subjected to it, and it cuts across lines of income, class and culture (United Nations, 2006). Violence is about controlling a person mind and emotions, as much as hurting his/her body,

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and this can leave the victim scared and confused. Specifically, in terms of domestic violence, there is the economic dimension, as Article 16 (23) of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that men's abrogation of their family responsibilities can be considered a form of violence, and coercion, which is also against women, who are left with the burden of providing for their families. It is in this context that this chapter derives its entry point, while, however, not ignoring or diminishing men's experiences of violence (Guardian, 2017b).

Gender-based violence (GBV), or violence against women and girls (VAWG), is a global pandemic that affects one in three





women in their lifetimes; and indeed, the numbers are staggering. Global estimates published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) indicate that about one in three (35 per cent) women worldwide has experienced either physical and/or intimate partner sexual violence, or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. It further states that much of this violence is intimate partner related. Similarly, worldwide, almost one-third (30 per cent) of women who have been in relationships report that they have experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence from their intimate partners; and globally, as many as 38 per cent of murders of women are committed by intimate male partners. Also, 200 million women have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting (Ogwezzy, 2002 and World Health Organization, 2017).

In Nigeria, NDHS (2018) states that 31 per cent of women between the ages 15 and 49 have experienced physical violence and nine per cent have experienced sexual violence. Overall, 33 per cent of women from the age of 15 to 49 have experienced physical or sexual violence in Nigeria: 24 per cent have experienced only physical violence, two per cent have experienced only sexual violence, and seven per cent have experienced both physical and sexual violence (NPC, [Nigeria] and ICF, 2019). Similarly, NDHS (2013) stated that seven per cent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 reported that they had experienced sexual violence at some point or the other; and the experience of sexual violence ranged from the rate of six per cent for women between the ages of 15 and 19, to nine per cent among women from the ages of 20 to 24 (NPC [Nigeria] and ICF, 2014).

Again, amid the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, sexual assault spiked in Nigeria to the extent that the erstwhile Inspector General (IG) of Police Mohammed Adamu stated that there were 717 reported cases of rape in the country between January and May,

2020, and 799 suspects have so far been arrested, while 631 cases have been sent to court. Yet, 52 cases are still under inquiry. Similarly, on June 11, 2020, the Lagos State Police Command stated that 32 separate cases of defilement, forced sexual assault, incest, and sodomy were reported by residents of the State in the last six months. (*The Guardian*, 2020).

The spike in the cases of sexual assault amid the COVID-19 pandemic in Nigeria sparked off various protests and all the 36 governors in the country agreed to declare a state of emergency on sexual violence and other forms of GBV, particularly against women and children. Similarly, President Muhammadu Buhari declared that his administration was determined to fight GBV. Specifically, on the COVID-19 pandemic, while experts opine that stress, the loss of income and isolation have exacerbated the risk of violence against women, the Nigerian Minister of Women Affairs, Mrs Paulin Tallen attributed it to women and children being locked down with their abusers in homes because of the virus. This increased vulnerability of women has shown the extent to which women's human rights have been threatened; and as the incidence of sexual assault escalates, females in societies will increasingly live in the fear of randy males (*Guardian*, 2020).

As such, given that the media has the potentials to significantly alter people's perception of the world around them, in addition to shaping their opinions and attitudes, it can be used to set agenda for eradicating GBV, because through various mass media messages such as news stories, features, editorials, commentaries, etc., the media can sensitise various stakeholders about GBV. Furthermore, the media, through debate and discussion programmes, could provide the platform to allow for the formulation of pressing questions of the public towards eradicating GBV. In addition, through its reportorial models i.e. the



angle/frequency of reportage and framing of GBV, the media can motivate professionals, social workers, civil society organisations, law enforcement officials, national and international governments on the need to address GBV, in the effort towards eradicating it (Ogwezzy-Ndisika and Faustino, 2016; Ogwezzy-Ndisika et al, 2017 and Ogwezzy-Ndisika et al, 2020). Hence, in the calculus of eliminating GBV, this chapter examines the issue, using reportorial models as lenses, and then delves into the causes and government response to GBV, and its effects.

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### **Causes and Government Response to GBV**

The causes of GBV range from social-cultural, economic, physical, and political factors to legal barriers. Generally, violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between women and men. It is exacerbated by traditional and customary practices that accord women the lower status in the family, workplace, community, society, and by social pressures.

**through its reportorial models i.e. the angle/ frequency of reportage and framing of GBV, the media can motivate professionals, social workers, civil society organisations, law enforcement officials, national and international governments on the need to address GBV, in the effort towards eradicating it**

Thus, females around the world have lived experiences of GBV that are different from those of men, and which are informed by norms that perpetuate gender inequality. According to, the NPC [Nigeria] and ICF (2019), the increase in the rate of violence against females is occasioned by gender inequality, which underpins the multiple forms of violence that women and girls are exposed to.

Other factors that enable the perpetration of the ill include the culture of condoning domestic violence as a family affair, and not as an offence that appropriately deserves to be reported to the authorities as a crime. Also, what is considered in society as the shame of the separation and divorce of, particularly, women from marriages, as many believe that there is prestige in remaining in a violent marriage, rather than encouraging the victim to flee from the aggressor. This possibly explains why women who flee from domestic violence are negatively framed and perceived, which is also why the enforcement of GBV laws is largely limited. Furthermore, Article 16 (23) of CEDAW rightly observes that the lack of economic independence forces many women to stay in violent relationships. As such, economic hardship occasioned by poverty and the loss of income, i.e. women's low economic status, make women vulnerable to violence.



Again, some have argued that society, to a large extent, enables GBV, since, among other factors, victims often meet brick walls at hospitals, police stations and courts. Therefore, GBV may be on the rise because the police hardly gets to know about incidents, and even when reported, the matter usually gets withdrawn for settlement shortly thereafter, allowing for a culture of condoning violence as a family affair, not deserving to be reported and treated as a crime. There is also the belief that the police may fail to prosecute the crime, while there are also allegations of police extortion, and the making of derogatory comments for reporting gender-based violence at the police station, as victims are either vilified for their dressing, being at the wrong place at the wrong time or accused of making up claims of GBV. Equally, there is the lack of prosecution of offenders; limitations to the enforcement of the laws on perpetrators; and dearth of laws that effectively prohibit violence against women in all states of the federation (States not adopting relevant laws that effectively prohibit violence against women). Even the few that exist, there is low level of awareness about the laws/inadequate efforts on the part of public authorities to promote awareness of and enforce existing laws; women's lack of access to legal information, aid or protection; and delay in the administration of justice - timeline for justice delivery characterised by unnecessary adjournments; slow and lenient punishment for offenders, which may not deter others; lack of trust in the judicial process; absence of a national template for victims' trauma response; and the absence of educational and other means of addressing the causes and consequences of violence, among other reasons.

Specifically, pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic, experts opine that stress and isolation have exacerbated the risk of violence against women, because many times women and children have been locked down with their abusers in homes.

Hence, it may be argued that these scenarios enable offenders to perpetrate more of such crimes and become serial offenders with impunity, and may also be the reasons for the poor success recorded in the fight against the GBV thus far, despite efforts by several government agencies and civil society organisations to mitigate the social ill. Therefore, when a society tolerates and accepts violence against women, the eradication of violence becomes more difficult.

This may account for why Lagos State government blazed the trail with the Protection Against Domestic Violence Law of 2007, which seeks to safeguard men, women and children against physical abuse. Another comprehensive law that makes effort to eliminate violence in private and public life, while prohibiting all forms of violence against persons, and ensuring maximum protection and effective remedies for victims and punishment of offenders is the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP Act), which was passed into law on May 25, 2015 by the former President of Nigeria, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2015). In addition, Nigeria is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Guardian, 2017b).

However, although Nigeria is a signatory to CEDAW and has passed a comprehensive law against all forms of violence, including sexual violence, this ill is still on the rise against females - from seven per cent incidence in 2013 to nine per cent in 2018 (Guardian, 2017a). Thus, despite legislation and continuous efforts to protect women and vulnerable populations against violence, much remains to be done in protecting victims and prosecuting perpetrators (NPC [Nigeria] and ICF, 2019), who through their violent acts have left victims with social, physical, health and psychological consequences; and even led to their deaths.



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### **Effects of Gender-Based Violence**

The effects of gender-based violence on victims are numerous, with some of the consequences being social, physical, healthwise, psychological, and even leading to death, as mentioned earlier. Gender-based violence dehumanises the victims and devalues their senses of self-worth. This is of a great concern, not just from a human rights perspective, but also economic and health viewpoints. In addition, this form of violence lowers a woman's self-esteem and image in society, leading to her disempowerment; not discounting the social stigma that accompanies being identified as a victim of GBV (Guardian, 2017b).

The health consequences include genital tract traumas, which could lead to bleeding, fistulas, abnormal vaginal discharges, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies which may result in unsafe abortions, as well as sexual disorders, mental illnesses and other psycho-social problems, besides the social stigma that accompanies being identified as a rape victim, as earlier mentioned. The situations may also lead to

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morbidity and mortality. The question at this juncture is: To what extent are the causes and effects of GBV reported in the media? In order to answer this question, this contribution examines GBV through the lenses of reportorial models, delving into how to avoid judgmental, stereotypical and language pitfalls, and wraps it up with how to tackle the sensationalism involved.

## **Reportorial Models and GBV**

**The Victim-Blaming Model:** This reportorial model does not consider or dismisses with a wave of hand, most social influences/environmental toxins, and ignores the connections between individual behaviour, social norms and reward. It serves as legitimisation for the retrenchment from rights and entitlements, in relation to the social causation of GBV and its functions as a colossal masquerade. Adopting the victim-blaming model in reporting GBV promotes the view that women are killed or maimed in the context of intimate partner violence, because they do not take the necessary action to protect themselves: By not reporting the violence, not filing charges or not leaving the relationship (Ogwezzy, 2013). It pushes the blame on the victims and instructs them to be individually responsible for what happened, at a time they were less capable of controlling their environments. This is one of the most enduring myths that have been sustained – that





women living with abusive and violent partners are responsible for the violence they encounter because they do not leave the relationships. Essentially, the ideology of individual responsibility however inhibits that understanding and substitutes it instead with an unrealistic behavioural model; it also ignores what is known about human behaviour and minimises evidence about environmental assault on GBV.

Although some media reports on GBV that adopt the victim-blaming model have sympathetic tones, as they capture the voices of the victims, either as the main subjects of the stories or spokespersons involved, as well as personal experiences and eye witness accounts, yet using this model, which sees GBV as occurring due to the victim's personal failure, reinforces the historically unequal power relations between women and men. And also the traditional/customary practices that accord women lower status in the family, workplace, community and society. As such, while it is commendable that reporting GBV through the victim-blaming model shows sympathy and captures the voices of the victims, which may signify a favourable disposition to their concerns, our argument is that the model is weak because using media reports as a tool in combating GBV requires challenging cultural and social norms that condone, tolerate or excuse GBV.

As such, what should be questioned in our stories are both the effectiveness and the political uses of focusing on victims/changing the victims' behaviours without changing the social structures and processes that are promoting GBV. Media personnel should recognise that combating GBV is not solely humanitarian, but an essential component of social justice.

In addition, the individual approach to tackling GBV may yield marginal improvements. As such, strategies that focus on the victim as the cause should remain secondary to environmental

approaches, including changes in the physical and social environments in our media contents.

Therefore, blaming women who were killed or maimed by offenders and circulating images that portray them as the causes of violence, without looking at the longstanding customs that put considerable pressure on women to accept abuse, sustains deeply embedded cultural biases, which should be avoided in media reports because they are judgemental and do not present GBV in the larger context of events – the causes and effects on the victim and society. The victim-blaming model reinforces cultural and social norms about gender and the agency of women in GBV.

**The Ecological Model:** Generally, media reports on GBV present occurrences and reactions to these, thereby missing the links between sexism and gender inequality, which are exacerbated by the low social and economic statuses of women, and community attitudes. The ecological model emphasises the role of community level socially constructed gender norms in shaping attitudes toward GBV (World Bank Group, 2019). This model focuses attention on both the victim/survivor and perpetrator (individuals) and social environmental factors as issues in the equation of GBV (Ogwezy, 2013). It addresses the importance of interventions directed at changing interpersonal, organisational, community and public policy factors, which protect the victim and punish the perpetrator.

The ecological-model recognises that social issues are interconnected, and using it as a professional and qualitative reportorial model for GBV would establish the critical connections among GBV, its root causes and social justice (UNESCO, 2019). For instance, reports should sensitise parents to school their children to respect the institution of marriage. Also that while couples should ensure that peace reigns in families - just as a woman builds her home, the man should lay the foundation for



home-building by not shirking his responsibilities, and showing love and care. Also, media reports should educate organisations to have grievance response mechanisms (GRM) and helplines; encourage traditional and religious leaders to sermonise against GBV; counsel and sermonise on the restoration of family values, mutual love and respect, while harping on the need for families to bind together in good and bad times, because both African and orthodox religious values converge on the need to have peaceful families.

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Reports should counsel relevant ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) of government to develop and implement gender sensitive policies that will ensure zero tolerance for GBV, and entrench equity between men and women. In addition, reports should emphasise the necessity of the education of policy makers that policies focusing on prevention need to deal with the underlying causes of men not providing for their families; and the necessity of social protection for victims of violence who flee from perpetrators. More so, reports should raise awareness about the criminal aspect of violence; provide information about support services and protective laws; and encourage citizens to break the

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culture of silence by reporting cases of violations and pursuing criminal litigation to punish offenders and aim at serving as deterrent to perpetrators, to ultimately prevent and protect people against violence. This should be alongside the amplification of the voices of survivors and activists/advocates, which hopefully will empower more women to speak out against violence and seek redress, thereby subverting myths and promoting gender equality.

Equally, reports should track why victims are not pressing charges against perpetrators by following the timelines for justice delivery (the cases in court should be tracked until judgement is delivered) and issues around this, such as delays in taking evidence from the Investigating Police Office (IPO) early, before possible transfers that may stall the prosecution; and also delays in taking the alleged perpetrators' evidences, because most often than not, once they are granted bail, they are no longer traceable. Reports should also focus on the capacity of police officers to handle GBV cases, by thoroughly investigating and pursuing them to their logical conclusions, and highlight the need for capacity building for police officers to reskill on the handling of cases of GBV in the 21st century, in order to strengthen their effectiveness and give



victims the confidence to report violations, rather than trivialise the offence by letting perpetrators go free. Reports should point victims to where they can get help, such as support groups and human rights focused NGOs that can help them pursue litigation to punish offenders, as a source of deterrence to this abhorrent behaviour (Guardian, 2020, 2017b and 2017a).

Hence, to effectively deploy media reports as a tool for combating GBV, journalists should adopt the ecological model of reporting, which recognises that decreasing GBV requires a community-based, multi-pronged approach, and sustained engagement with multiple stakeholders.

## Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has established that to eliminate GBV and live in a society that is responsive and protective of human dignity requires media advocacy. It sheds light on the causes and effects of GBV and wraps up by describing two reportorial models. It concludes that media professionals should focus on the behaviour of the abuser, not that of the victim, and adopt the ecological model in reporting GBV. This is a reportorial model that can be used to set agenda, formulate pressing questions, and frame GBV in a way that can motivate professionals, social workers, civil society organisations, law enforcement officials, and national and international governments to intervene and address GBV, in a manner aimed at eradicating it.

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# 11

## Navigating Constraints and Permissions In (Audio-Visual) Reporting/Storytelling On Gender Based Violence

Rotimi Sankore







## Introduction

Why is reporting on gender-based violence important?

The media, in general, and individual journalists have an important mandate to report on human rights and development issues, with gender-based violence being one of them.

For the purposes of this chapter, gender-based violence (GBV) will be assumed to be violence against women and girls (VAW/G). Although some women perpetrate violence against men, the overwhelming majority of GBV is against women and girls.

As VAW/G is a violation of women's rights, this makes it a key rights issue affecting approximately half of any population. i.e. women's rights are human rights.

Most forms of VAW/G also impact on the developmental rights of women and girls, such as the rights to health, especially reproductive and sexual health, education, equal economic aspiration and opportunity, and equal political representation. In other words, VAW/G impacts on the development of entire communities and countries.

Global data demonstrates that in all the countries at the top of the International Human Development Index, women and girls' rights are better protected, including the right to be free from violence. In countries at the bottom of the Human Development Index, the violation of the rights of women and girls is more widespread.

The media's obligation to report on these issues includes public education on what VAW/G is, and why it does not have a place in any society.

Reporting on VAW/G must always elaborate on what rights have been violated, the punishment for the crimes committed (or lack of), including, where appropriate, embedded calls to action. E.g.

a reporter should not just report that a woman was beaten by a man; the report should state that she was beaten, in violation of her rights.

## **Understanding the Spectrum of Violence Against Women and Girls**

A crucial pre-requisite for improved reporting, media coverage and story telling on violence against women and girls is a clear recognition of the entire spectrum of VAW/G, an understanding of its drivers, and implications for individual women/girls, and society as a whole.

While this is necessary for all forms of reporting and story telling on VAW/G, audio-visual coverage is more immediate, usually short (well under 10 minutes, unless in documentary form) and as is self-evident, requires audio-visual interaction with victims/survivors and the environment in which it is happening, or happened.

***A journalist who does not understand, in advance, the circumstances under which VAW/G is more likely to happen, or does not recognise it when it is happening, or has happened, cannot hope to report on it appropriately, in any form - let alone audio-visually.***

***It is worth restating that audio-visual reporting is about voices and images, which have immense representative power.***

It is also of utmost importance to understand that VAW/G is sometimes a process, rather than just one specific action. Understanding the process facilitates better interventions by means of reporting, news coverage and story telling.

**The VAW/G categories and spectrum includes (but are not limited to):**



1. **Institutional and Structural Impunity:** This includes laws and frameworks (such as Nigeria’s Penal Code) or ad-hoc regulations that provide ‘legal’ or official cover for violence, by allowing what is described as “chastisement”, and absurdities that don’t apply to men, such as virginity testing requirements by some institutions.
2. **Negative and Discriminatory Practices that Inflict Violence:** This consists of forced child ‘marriages’, which commoditise women/girls, and their consequences, including life-long sexual violation, domestic work slavery, social control, adolescent pregnancies, and the sexual and reproductive health consequences, such as fistula and maternal mortality; and widowhood rituals involving the locking away of widows, forcing them to drink water used to wash the body of their dead husbands; and Female Genital Mutilation and Cutting, which can also cause pregnancy-related injury or death.
3. **Family-Based Violence:** Involves assumptions that husbands or male relatives in the lives of women and girls (especially fathers and brothers) have a right to inflict violence as a form of punishment, such as honour beatings or killings, for perceived offences, including the so-called disgracing of the family, or insulting behaviour.
4. **Intimate Partner Violence:** This includes emotional abuse, intimidation, physical (hitting and beatings) or sexual violence, denial/restriction of resources by mostly men to break the spirits of women partners, impose control, or ‘resolve’ issues.
5. **Violation of Bodily Autonomy:** This involves rape (non-consensual penetration of vagina, mouth or anus with bodily

part or objects); and sexual assault (forced/unwanted kissing, fondling, including attempted rape); and rape in marriage, forcible impregnation, based on assumptions that husbands and partners have rights to bodies of women under any circumstance.

**6. Community Enforcement of So Called Gender Roles:**

Violence in the community aimed at restricting Development and Human Rights of Girls & Women such as: Political violence to discourage participation; OR Violence against Girls/Women in Education; OR Violence against Women in certain jobs that require late shifts, or interaction with Male 'strangers'; OR violence to discourage Women from playing general leadership roles in society.

**7. Economically Motivated Violence:** Violence against Girls and Women over Inheritance rights, Land ownership; OR Seizure of earnings; OR Trafficking of Women and Girls for Sexual Exploitation/Enslavement of Domestic Work Slavery etc;

**8. Abuse of Power Or Exploitation of Vulnerable Girls/Women:** Sexual exploitation for food or medicines in IDP camps; OR Sex for grades; OR Work based situations especially positions of servitude such as Domestic Workers or House Helps. Prevalence of beatings, and sexual violations/abuse are much higher in situations of near complete control.

**9. Sexual Or Other Violence In Conflict:** Rape as a weapon of war; OR abduction of girls and women as spoils of war.

**10. Group Predatory Behaviour:** Groping of Women and Girls in public places such as markets by groups of Men.



- 11. Law Enforcement Obstruction of Access To Justice:** Police appeals or urging to 'settle' violence as a family matter; OR Judicial officers highlighting what Girls or Women were wearing as reasons to justify violence.
- 12. So Called Purchased Entitlement:** Assumptions that acceptance of gifts or dates are a justification for Sexual intimacy, and Violence that follows refusal.
- 13. Religious/Superstitious or Belief Based Violence:** Violence following accusations of Witchcraft OR Demonic possession (Floggings, Incarcerations etc.)
- 14. Son/Male Child Preference:** Involving – discrimination in care, opportunities, development – and in some communities involving Female Infanticide.
- 15. So Called Corrective Violence:** Violence aimed at forcing Women/Girls to conform with preconceived notions of appearance, behaviour or orientation in line with assumptions of what femininity is or should be. E.g. To prevent Women/Girls from playing football, Wearing trousers or Low cut hair.

**Recognising and understanding the spectrum of VAW/G is crucial because the risk of and impunity is much higher where it is normalised.**

Failure to recognise the above listed and others, is the biggest obstacle to improved reporting on Violence Against Women and Girls. While Male journalists are mostly guilty of this due to negative socialisation and indoctrination, many Female journalists are also similarly affected.

Consequently the prevalence or scale of VAW/G is often seriously misjudged and under reported.

## Context and Language Are Everything

### Context:

**An important reason for recognising and understanding the spectrum of VAW/G is that without context there is no story.**

**At best the story is incomplete.** Without context, the focus is on the victim. With context, the focus is on the perpetrator, and nowhere is this more crucial than in audio-visual reporting.

**Be Clear and Specific About Violations:** For example, stating that a report is about “early marriage” provides little or no context. Early marriage could be a young lady getting married at 18 or 21 years of age, with modest qualifications/jobs skills and no income.

However, describing the report as “forced child marriage’ provides an immediate context. It is by force, it is sexual violation of a child, and it is not a legitimate marriage, despite what some people may claim about religion and culture. (\*See section below on Women’s Human Rights).

### Language:

**In general, language is not neutral. In news reporting or story telling, this could be a serious problem.**

**Judgemental Language:** A report on sexual violence which states or emphasises that the victim/survivor was wearing a ‘sexy dress’, was in a man’s car or place at night, and had just been given a gift, begins to suggest that the man was entitled and would have been ‘cheated’ if he was not allowed to have his way.

**Accurate Description:** Likewise, the actions of perpetrators have to be highlighted. “She died during a fight” is not the same as “she was beaten to death.”

This is especially crucial because in many forms of reporting and



story telling, especially the audio-visual one, it is the reporter's voice being heard.

## **Understanding Women's Human Rights/Legal and Policy Frameworks**

***A journalist who does not understand or accept that women's rights are human rights cannot effectively or appropriately report on violence against women/girls.***

Most reasonable people will recognise as rape, sexual violation by a 'stranger' or non-stranger who has grabbed a woman/girl of the street or lured her to the place of the crime. But many will become confused, or even more accepting, if told that a woman/girl was betrothed to a man she has never met (by her father/family) and sexually violated by the so-called husband.

Similarly, most reasonable people will recognise as rape, sexual violation by, say, a neighbour. But they will become confused, or even accepting of sexual violation by a husband.

However, an understanding of comparative cultures, traditions and international law will help with better understanding. For instance, a former Nigerian governor (now a senator) was a perpetrator of forced child 'marriage' and claimed that he was entitled to do so on religious grounds. But there are several countries where the same religion is practiced that have legislated against forced child 'marriage' on grounds that it violates human and developmental rights. Even the country he cited as custodian of the religious rules subsequently increased the age of consent and marriage for girls to 18 years.

Some journalists could even be taken in by suggestions that cases of violence against women/girls can be settled as 'family' or 'personal' matters. For instance, as recently as 2020, the governor

of a state in Nigeria ‘reconciled’ a violently battered woman with her husband live on multiple television channels.

Disgracefully, the matter was reported as if the governor was within his rights to effectively obstruct justice, whereas he should have been ensuring that the law was upheld to its fullest extent. The message, more or less, to perpetrators was that the governor is on their side. By not reporting the implication of the governor’s actions, the media, and in particular the broadcast media, especially the television, undermined the rights of women and girls to be free from violence.

Gender, class, race/ethnicity, religion or other forms of statuses are often factors in abuse or violations. These must not be overlooked or mentioned in a way that suggests anyone is a lesser human being.

## **Training, Capacity Building and Supervision**

*As a rule, journalists are unable to, or incapable of reporting accurately, appropriately or effectively, on subjects that they do not understand, or subjects affected by their socialisation and belief systems. The human and developmental rights of women and girls fall into this category.*

Because most people are subjects of socialisation, negative cultural or religious beliefs around gender equality and women’s rights, media houses cannot take it for granted that journalists have an automatic understanding of violence against women and girls and have to adopt a deliberate policy of training and awareness on these issues.

**At ‘best’, journalists who are not trained and equipped to report on gender-based violence will walk past the story.** At it’s worst, such journalists may even go into automatic victim





blaming, negative stereotyping and discrimination mode, or even end up stigmatising victims of gender-based violence.

Training or capacity building is recommended for every reporter (whether covering, the judiciary, education, or communities). **Media houses should also go further in ensuring that there is a designated GBV Reporting Supervisor versed or trained on women's rights in a position to guide, and ensure follow ups.**

**If a reporter, supervisor or editor is opposed to gender equality and women's rights on ideological, religious, social or other grounds**, such a person should not be assigned to cover sectors or issues where violence against women and girls is more likely to occur or feature.

## **Big Picture Reporting and Story Telling: Impact On Access To Justice and Developmental Rights/Social and Economic Prospects of Communities**

Poor reporting on violence against women and girls has serious consequences on not just access to justice for individual women and girls, but also for developmental rights, social and economic prospects of communities, and entire countries.

### **Access to Justice**

For example: A lack of understanding of forensic tools required by the Police to investigate and prosecute sexual violence may suggest that it is not possible for the Police to successfully prosecute and convict for such crimes.

However, the problem could be that the media/reporting is not emphasising that **non-inclusion of specific budget lines in Police budgets for forensic tools means that sexual crimes, which are amongst the most common form of violence against women**

***and girls, go unprosecuted, not for lack of evidence but due to the lack of resources, tools and capacity to collect, store and use evidence for prosecution.***

## **Developmental Impact**

Consequently, women may start avoiding specific activities or professions, such as Medicine or nursing, which involve night shifts and late travel that may put them at the higher risk of gender-based violence. Cumulatively, this may have a bigger impact, for instance, on increasing maternal mortality due to the shortage of or unavailability of female doctors, nurses or midwives, at certain times or locations.

## **Social and Economic Impacts**

On a state-wide or nation-wide social scale, the impact of gender-based violence on the social and economic prospects of communities and entire countries could be wide ranging.

For instance, systematic forms of violence against women and girls, such as forced child ‘marriage’ or mass abductions of school girls, could have such a negative impact on access to education, such that millions of under-age mothers would end up lacking basic alpha-numeric literacy skills, which in turn impacts on their children in multiple ways, especially the increase of infant and under-five mortality.

It could also reduce the availability of female teachers by excluding girls from education, with the overall impact of reducing the numbers of teachers available to certain communities, which in turn means only a limited number of schools can be available for learning, leading to high numbers of out-of-school children, and consequently widespread poverty and more recruits available



to bandits or other extremists. This ends up increasing violence against women and girls, among other social ills. In other words, Big Picture Reporting not only chronicles events, but also their consequences and policy remedies.

## **Staying On The Story/Follow Up Reporting: What Are the Limitations of Police and the Judicial Process?**

A sad feature of the current reporting capacity on violence against women and girls is the very short shelf lives of reports. This applies to all categories of VAW/G but is especially painful in relation to cases of sexual violence.

***Almost every month there are cries of 'Justice for Girls and Women' raped and murdered. But unless there are confessions or the perpetrators are caught in the act, they will almost certainly go free and be able to commit more crimes.***

Media houses and individual journalists can help in preventing this through a deliberate policy of *staying on the story and follow up reporting*.

But this requires an understanding of the investigation and prosecution processes, from the Investigating Police Officer to the prosecution lawyer, the judicial process, and, importantly, current problems of the Police not budgeting for forensic tools for the collection, storage of and use of evidence.

For instance in 2020, a female undergraduate in Edo State, Uwa Omozuwa was raped and murdered in a church, where she had gone to read (for lack of investments in libraries).

Has that story and similar ones evaporated? What have the Police done about these cases over the past year? How should journalists be reporting and following up on such tragedies?

**The media did not highlight that the Police was not able to collect and store semen samples from her body, then collect DNA samples from the suspected men who had access to the church at non-service hours.** Sadly the perpetrator/s is or are likely to get away with this crime. However, constant reporting on the shortcomings of the Police, their back-end budgeting process, and the need for both judicial and legislative action on this, will make a difference and prompt necessary action.

We can contrast the earlier case with that of Iniobong Umoren, who was raped and murdered in Akwa Ibom State in 2021 after going for a fake job interview. In this latter situation, a suspect was apprehended (and he reportedly confessed to the crime) through crowd-sourcing efforts, after details of her last known destination were made public. Could the Police have followed up successfully on this case if left to them alone?

Reporting on cases like this have to highlight the capacity limitations of the Police training and tools to work on specialised crimes, such as sexual violence and murder. Reporting also has to highlight the process of prosecution, so that the public has a clear understanding of what is expected to happen next, and the people to be held accountable if there is no successful prosecution.

Without follow up reporting that includes shortcomings of the Police investigation, prosecution and judicial process, there will be few, if any, successful prosecutions of sexual crimes.

The media should also be able to follow up with the interviews of the families and friends of victims through calendared reporting, to highlight the lack of closure and that the criminals are still free to commit more crimes.

Importantly, audio-visual reporting and storytelling, especially, can report on the gaps and circumstances that increase the



vulnerability of girls and women by interviewing other persons that may have been in similar circumstances, such as having to go to read in isolated places, as in the case of Uwa. Highlighting circumstances that increase the possibility of crime can help in reducing repeat or copycat offences.

## **Best Practice On Permissions and Reporting of Violence Against Women/Girls**

Audio-visual reporting (unless in the long form documentary format) often requires packing into a very few minutes all the key elements of a story (the what, who, where, when, why etc), including the appropriate use of voices and images.

In general terms, audio-visual reporting is best when voices or images, other than those of the reporter (survivors/witnesses) tell a story, or are combined with that of the reporter.

Nevertheless, media houses and journalists have to be versed in global best practices. Some of these apply to all reporting, and they include but are not limited to:

**Gender Considerations:** Always try and ensure that interviews are done by persons of the same gender with the victims, or in the presence of persons of the same gender with those involved in the story.

**Minors:** Where a minor is involved, always ensure that a parent or guardian is present during the interview. If a minor discloses other cases of abuse or violations during an interview, ensure that the law enforcement authorities are notified.

**Distress:** Do not press ahead with an interview when a person involved is in distress.

**Identifiers:** Do not mention or use images that are special identifiers, such as house number (unless absolutely necessary),

or the ethnicity or religion of those involved (unless these are motivating factors for the violence) etc.

**Vetting of Interpreters:** Interpreters should be vetted to take account of biases and the understanding of issues around VAW/G, including the vocabulary used. This is especially crucial in settings where literacy is low.

**Prejudice:** Do not report in a way that can expose the victims/survivors to abuse.

**Dignity and Respect:** Always treat victims/survivors with dignity and respect. Do not cause further trauma.

**Misrepresentation:** Avoid the editing of voices or images/representations that suggest the victims are responsible for the crimes.

## Applicable To Audio/Radio

With audio the complications are less, in that the voices of, for instance, victims/survivors can be used with less risk of public identification and stigma, especially in relation to minors.

Voices can be powerful tools of narration, but they must be used with care. Interviews must be conducted under a clear set of guidelines, just like the use of the content produced.

**Tone:** Special care must be given to tone during audio-only interviews. A question such as “What were you doing there?” or “Why were you there at that time?” can easily come across as accusatory, rather than a point of clarification.

## Applicable To Visual/Film and Photographs

**Permissions:** Always obtain permission before taking/recording or using pictures or footage.



**Respect:** Do not use unflattering images to spice up or sensationalise a report.

**Dignity:** Avoid using images that portray victims in an undignified manner.

**Risk of Further Harm:** Protect victims/survivors from potential vengeance by protecting their identities. Ensure the person is either backing the camera or his/her face is blurred. This is especially crucial in the case of vulnerability E.g the abuse of IDPs or their exploitation for food.

**Bias:** Images and visual representation used should not promote gender-based biases or stereotypes, or even suggest that the victim got what was coming to her – especially where there are questions around morality, e.g. the rape and/or murder of a sex worker.

## Recommended Audio-Visual Reporting Tips and Format (Short Report)

### General Tips and Notes

- Spoken Script. Active voice. Short simple sentences.
- Writing/reporting for EAR or writing/reporting for EYES (+ images) = Spoken script
- Remember print journalism is for the literate. Broadcast is for everyone.
- Broadcast has to do more with less.
- Radio reports are often shorter than TV.
- Television can show. Radio can only describe.

## Key Elements For Broadcast Reporting On VAW/G

Remember your 5 W's, H & C

**What happened? When and Where? Who was or is responsible? Why did it happen? How did it happen? And the Context.**

**The What (Should include violation):** E.g 100 girls have been abducted/an undergraduate has been raped and murdered (always state the numbers affected).

**The When/Date and Where / Location:** Reportedly happened yesterday morning around 9 a.m. in Abuja (State specific locality/ area and environment e.g. a school, a church, etc.).

**The Whom/Perpetrators, if known:** Extremist group, known as Boko Haram/Man that advertised fake job opportunities for women (include whether apprehended or at large).

**The How: Often Testimony / Witness Accounts:** Lucky escapees/Observers/Passers-by/Parents/Friends/Relatives.

**The Why: E.g. Law enforcement response / Accounts / Corroboration:** This may differ (if yes, state so). Ask/state what their next line of action is. (Also, this often includes the What)

**The Context: Expert Opinion / Big Picture / Supporting Data:** Has this happened before? Is there a trend? Motives and drivers? What should government or police response be? Have there been successful prosecutions or rescues, etc.?



# 12

## Data Gathering and Gender-Based Violence Reporting: Dimensions in Language Use, Sensationalism, Images and Stereotypes

Abigail Odozi Ogwezzy-Ndisika



## Background

Reporting, a process of giving an account of events through a medium to an audience, consists of data gathering through careful observation, interviewing and data mining from secondary sources; and reasoning, verifying and organising facts gathered into a news story, with a view to giving a mass media audience a good idea of what transpired (Nwabueze, 2011). In reporting, sometimes a journalist may be gender insensitive, which is commonly manifest in language and image use, unfair portrayal through appeals to stereotypes and/or even engaging in sensational news presentation. Hence, the need for gender-sensitive reporting.

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According to IPC (2018), gender-sensitive reporting connotes the rights of all persons, irrespective of gender, in a context, to be given fair and equitable access in the media space and representation. However, as it has been cited in various situations, media reportage (space and representation) is often skewed in favour of males, which may be a function of the patriarchal nature of some societies, including Nigeria. In addition, studies show that media representation reinforces the patriarchal system through language and image use, stereotypical portrayal and/or sensational news presentation.



In particular, looking at the reporting of gender-based violence (GBV), some recent headlines in the media reveal different shades of violence, which cut across different demographic divides – “battered wife stabs husband to death”, “househelp from Benin Republic denies killing employer’s mother”, “man stabs couple’s only child to death over N200” and “Lagos pastor loses marriage to domestic violence”. There is also physical violence that happened in the corporate world: “Company driver strangles accountant for refusing him sex”, etc. These headlines may be sensational, and similarly, some of the commentaries are judgmental and stereotypical in the presentation of victims/survivors, which reinforce the norms that perpetrate GBV, instead of demystifying these norms in order to combat GBV.

Thus, this chapter looks at how to report GBV, which the United Nations (UN) defines as any act of violence that results in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, girls, men, and boys, as well as threats of such acts, coercion, or the arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life; but mostly committed against girls/women (United Nations, 2006). It presents ‘solutions’ to the use of language and images that reinforce GBV, instead of demystifying the norms in order to combat GBV; delves into how to avoid judgmental and stereotypical language/image use; highlights how to report GBV without sensationalism; and suggests how reporters can cover GBV in a way that is effective, accurate, respectful of victims/survivors and ultimately gender-sensitive. This chapter systematises these issues and promotes the application of development media to combating GBV in Nigeria, due to the important role of the media in sensitisation, influencing public opinion, forming attitudes and policy formulation. This is against the backdrop that several international conventions to which Nigeria is a signatory, as well as national laws, policies and frameworks have not gone a long

way in reducing GBV, as many women are still victims of the menace. The next sub-section focuses on data gathering and language use in GBV reporting.

## **Data Gathering and Gender-Sensitive Reporting of GBV: Avoiding Language Pitfalls**

In data gathering and the reporting of GBV, words must be carefully selected to give an accurate reflection of GBV realities and their contexts, while demystifying the norms that reinforce GBV. Gender-based violence should never be referred to as a “relationship problem.” Violence is a tool that a batterer uses to keep a victim under his/her control; it is not a way of handling problems in a relationship. Do not focus on why the victim of violence did not leave, but on why the batterer chose to continue abusing her or him. Reports should avoid proclamations that perpetuate hegemonic masculinity when GBV occurs. The language of reportage should take cognisance of cultural interpretations and be devoid of adjectives and stereotypes that promote male dominance. Journalists should avoid language that misrepresents, excludes or offends the sensibilities of victims and survivors (Institute for Media and Society, 2018)

**During data gathering**, particularly when interviewing a victim of violence, remember that in addition to physical trauma, individuals who have been victims of GBV may feel, guilty or be prone to blaming themselves for the abuse, to question their own judgment(s), and/or feel a sense of personal responsibility/betrayal. As such, when interviewing alleged victim(s), avoid the use of words that could insinuate fault on their part. For example, avoid questions about what the victim did to provoke the attack, etc. Gender-based violence is about power and control; it is not a crime of passion or anger, rather it is one of the means by which a perpetrator dominates and humiliates the victim. As such, asking



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what the victim did to provoke the attack is a type of victim-blaming; whether the victim was drinking alcohol or taking drugs at the time of the assault should not be the focus of the information gathering, unless it was directly at issue. Gender-based violence is a crime. Period. A victim whose house was burgled would not be quizzed about if s/he were intoxicated prior to the crime. Therefore, journalists must refrain from referring to an alleged incident in ways that imply that the abuse was mutual; and they must be very careful when interviewing the families, friends, and neighbours of either the victim or the accused, and make sure that their statements do not blame the victim or attempt to exonerate the accused. For example, statements by witnesses that the perpetrator “is such a nice guy” or “would never do something like that” do not add to the facts of the story and only further traumatise the victim and call his or her credibility into question. A finding of “not guilty” in a GBV case does not mean that a crime was not committed and that the accused is “innocent”. It simply means that a jury believes that there is some reasonable doubt

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in the presentation of the case (The South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, n.d.). Language use should avoid normalising (even glamorising) such aberrant behaviours as violence. In this way, we can build a system of trust and accountability in which victims are encouraged to speak out, and potential perpetrators are discouraged from committing future acts.

Furthermore, the views of gender experts, especially from the civil society, on gender-sensitive perspectives to GBV, should be obtained.

In writing the story, the language use and completeness are critical variables in striking the right chord. Keep your language simple and concise, and use short sentences. A good use of language helps to demystify the norms that reinforce GBV. To achieve this, the journalist must be ethical. All reports should be true, unbiased, and unprejudiced. Remember that: “Journalism entails a high degree of public trust. To earn and maintain this trust, it is morally imperative for every journalist and every news medium to observe the highest professional and ethical standards. In the exercise of



these duties, a journalist should always have a healthy regard for the public interest” (Nigerian Press Council. 2009: Para 2).

Reports should be factual and truthful, accurate and devoid of inconsistencies or discrepancies between what took place and what is documented. This enhances the credibility and reliability of the report. Accuracy is achieved through the careful, precise, impartial, and honest documentation of all relevant information. The report should be clear, and there should be no doubt or confusion on what the report is saying. The use of appropriate language and a logical order of presentation help in achieving clarity. Again, reports should be brief, yet contain all relevant information for the reader. Wordiness can make a report less readable and therefore less effective. Reports should avoid verbosity and be sensitive to the attention span of the readers. Therefore, journalists should mine data, paraphrase and interpret them. Notwithstanding, accuracy, completeness, or clarity should never be sacrificed for the sake of brevity. A good report must contain all the relevant information and facts that the readers will need. It should present a complete word–picture of a GBV case, ensuring that descriptions are comprehensive; physical conditions are noted; and readers are able to visualise a GBV victim scene (Ogwezzy-Ndisika, 2020).

Reports should avoid the use of technical and vague words. If unavoidable, the meaning of such words should be given without necessarily interfering with the smooth flow of the message i.e. the journalist must simplify complex information. Achieving this requires: explaining technical words or concepts by relating them to concrete things and everyday experiences of the reader; and using descriptions to help readers understand technical issues. Again, literary devices, analogies, scene setting, anecdotes, metaphors and similes are useful in relating abstract technical

issues to the experiences of the audience (Ogwezzy-Ndisika, 2020) .

Journalists may also consider using proverbs, anecdotes, and illustrations, which will help in achieving the interest of readers. As such, the writer could use graphs to show the number of GBV victims; pictures of someone at the scene of an alleged crime and relatives of the GBV victim; and relevant sections of supporting documents as an illustration for the story. In terms of television reports, quotations from the document can be run across the screen as the story is being narrated; also, on radio and television, the actual tapes of interviews should be used, if this is available. However, if the interviewee prefers to remain anonymous, perhaps his or her silhouette should be filmed or the sound of their voice should be changed electronically (Ogwezzy-Ndisika, 2020).

For completeness, the actions taken by parties and duty bearers should be reported – the actions should be described, while decisions are justified and statements regarding probable causes are presented. It is important to ensure and recognise that there are no questions left regarding the GBV issue, as key information regarding the what, when, where, who, how, and why would have been documented; and the facts are presented, while statements are supported by details and the order of occurrences is clear and easy to follow. For completeness, all the sides of a GBV case should be presented, in terms of both supporting and conflicting information. Information that may conflict with stated conclusions or actions must also be included, noting that investigators, prosecutors, etc. can only determine the merit of information that they are aware of.

Personal comments should be avoided, as a way of not inputting personal opinions into stories. For instance, one may be writing a story about someone who was responsible for the death of a





pregnant woman and one might come to hate the person, but this must not be expressed. If you show in your story that you hate the person, that could be seen as malice, which will destroy your defence against defamation. Just show your readers, viewers, and listeners the facts. If the person is bad, the facts will lead your audience to that conclusion without you telling them what to think. Handling this requires that you anchor the story as if you are one of the people who have been accused of incompetence or negligence (The South Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, n.d.).

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### **Tackling Sensationalism**

Most often, government ministries, departments and agencies, especially, and other actors, call press conferences, host luncheons, roundtables, etc., to present data on reported cases of GBV and showcase activities to mark activism against the phenomenon; and they usually utilise big media events that raise the expectation of victims that their lives are about to change for better. However, after those funfairs and pronouncements, GBV takes a back seat as the momentum is not sustained, cutting short the expectations of victims (Nwuneli, 1993 cited in Ogwezzy-Ndisika et al, 2020).

**Personal comments should be avoided, as a way of not inputting personal opinions into stories. For instance, one may be writing a story about someone who was responsible for the death of a pregnant woman and one might come to hate the person, but this must not be expressed.**

These powerful news sources end up successfully manipulating the news on GBV and making them episodic and narrow. The headlines around these activities – based on reporting that often led to sensationalism and the trivialisation of GBV in the news media – are written to catch attention, while the stories are disconnected from their complex social histories and environments. In fact, from these, yesterday appears unconnected to today, hence people are unable to see trends in GBV. This is mainly what I would call activity-based reporting, which promotes the tendency of the news media to report issues at the surface level. This has made the news incapable of covering complex and complicated social issues (causes and effects) pertaining to GBV. This may account for why Nwuneli (1993), cited in Ogwezzy-Ndisika et al (2020), stated that some studies in Africa, for example, suggest that after the initial use of journalists and the media to create awareness about an issue, the media subsequently did very little to follow up on these issues, especially using a gender lens. Reporting GBV requires follow up and journalists should follow-up on GBV reports to ensure wider coverage of steps to contain the violence, provide succour to victims and bring duty bearers to account. The cases that are in court should be followed up until judgement is delivered on them.

As such, cognitive-based reporting should be encouraged. This reportorial style is interpretative. It goes beyond news reporting;



a journalist can create understanding of the news on GBV through interpretative reporting, which involves knowing the causes (immediate and underlying) and effects of an issue. So, the journalist must ask the question why? In terms of the causes, motives, antecedents, significance, implications and consequences of the issue. Interpretative reporting, which involves knowing the causes and effects of an issue as earlier mentioned, is within the domain of the ecological model, which recognises the connection between one event and others, as issues are not isolated, but linked in a chain. Interpretative reporting goes beyond just stating the facts, but putting them in context, providing background, offering explanation and interpretation to give them holistic meaning. It is a report based on investigation, going beyond the episodic coverage of GBV, thereby highlighting events, to address the root causes of GBV, in order to give audiences a more rounded understanding of issues in GBV. It therefore discourages the event-oriented and activity-oriented approach to journalism in favour of the cognitive-based approach.

Furthermore, most media reports on GBV are reactive and not preventive. As such, the media should effectively carry out its surveillance function and send out early warning signals that should prevent and mitigate GBV, to uphold its description of “fourth estate of the realm”. The media should therefore mirror and promote peace, while motivating audience and citizens to actively prevent and mitigate GBV.

### **Handling Image Pitfalls and Eliminating Stereotypes**

Furthermore, sometimes sharing certain images of GBV victims may lead to even more problems for them if they continue to live in their erstwhile areas; and it can also exacerbate other problems, such as the tendency to blame the victim, and not the perpetrator of the crime. Often, in reporting GBV incidents, the media presents

unnecessary details about the clothing worn by the female involved, or about her being out alone after midnight – all of which are telltale pointers to the erroneous fact that somehow the victim was to blame for the attack she experienced. There are many such cases where slight errors of judgment, or the wish to add a little spice to the news leads to tremendous problems for the victim and society (Dad, 2013). In Nigeria, the case of the report by a ThisDay journalist about a “Miss World Beauty Pageant” led to violence. Since media news reaches a large number of people, such issues can lead to attacks of or the public alienation of victims. For instance, in the aftermath of the failed assassination attempt on Malala Yousufzai, one image of the young lady not wearing a dupatta (head-scarf) was widely circulated in the media; and the image outraged many local religious factions.

Again, GBV reporting devoid of a gender lens may stereotype victims/survivors. While media contents often present women through a stereotypical point-of-view, the media needs to go beyond such stereotypes if its reporting of GBV is to be accurate, neutral and solutions-driven. This does not mean that the local culture should not be respected. As such, it is important to utilise creative approaches, while being careful not to hurt local sensibilities (Dad, 2013). For the media to accurately mirror society for GBV, and produce coverage that is complete and diverse, it is critical that its contents reflect the world as seen through the eyes of women, as well as men. With growing evidence that men are also victims of GBV, it is important to go beyond the vulnerability of the framed and portrayed weaker sex, as women are also perpetrators and actors, alongside being victims. Essentially, despite the perception of women as the ‘weaker’ sex, keepers of the home, nurturers and teachers of children, there is now a changing role as women and girls are not always victims of GBV (Ogwezy-Ndisika et al, 2020). All journalists, male and female,



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can help to change attitudes by portraying women as they really are, rather than re-enforcing gender-based stereotypes.

Notwithstanding, journalists and spokespersons, in particular, should be more sensitive to the needs of the most vulnerable segments of society, such as women and girls, because violence is gendered. They should highlight the needs of these segments at every opportunity, so as to give a more balanced view of the enormity of the challenges they face in the hands of GBV perpetrators and duty bearers. Thus, for solutions-driven reportage of GBV, journalists and spokespersons of duty bearers should shun negative stereotypes in GBV reporting and information sharing; they should encourage the pursuit of gender awareness, rather than pandering to sexual identities. For gender-sensitivity, journalists should strive to give an expanded view of events by looking beyond the familiar or the narrow confines of their own gender. They also need to show more gender-sensitivity in the reporting of GBV, knowing that some pieces of information will be better accessed from sources by one gender than another. Journalists should also recognise the various challenges that GBV victims face in trying to seek justice. Similarly, media reports should give voice to the voiceless; and make the society responsive and protective of human dignity.

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### **Summary and Conclusion**

All said, GBV is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. It reflects the extent to which women's human rights are threatened, while also violating and impairing or nullifying women's enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Thus, there must be no place in our society for perpetrators of GBV. We have to collectively wage war against GBV in order to transform our society to one in which equality, respect, and dignity for all reigns! Hence, continuous sensitisation and media advocacy is imperative in order to combat GBV. As such, in the absence of media support in a challenging environment, which continues to reproduce various forms of GBV, the eradication of this menace will continue to be elusive. Therefore, the media should pay attention to the clamour for the eradication of GBV through its products and contents, by reshaping, re-orientating and refocusing public attitude in their contents, towards the eradication of GBV, through the use of language to demystify the norms that reinforce GBV, the avoidance of being judgmental and stereotypical, and/or merely reporting for sensationalism.



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# 13

## Gender-Based Violence In the Gambia – Leveraging Media Power For a Lasting Solution

Morolake Omowumi Adekunle







## Introduction

In issues of social and national development, the media plays a pivotal role. Whether operating under an authoritarian regime or a democratic one, in line with its social responsibility mandate, the media must bridge the communication gap between the government and the people by providing information, education and analysis on government policies and programmes, to enable the people grasp the implications for their existence and conceptualise their expected roles and responsibilities.

The media must also hold the government accountable to fulfilling its campaign promises and obligations to the nation. This role of the media cannot be over-emphasised in developing nations with large illiterate populations characterised by poverty, scientific/technological ignorance and immersion in traditional cultures, which render them highly resistant to change. As such, many African nations contend with development issues that require the media's intervention to take the people through the whole spectrum of behavioural change communication; equipping the people with adequate knowledge, presenting sufficient real life experiences to accomplish attitudinal change, and engaging in the degree of perseverance that will eventually generate behavioural transformation.

However, for the media institutions to be the active agents of development communication envisaged, certain factors limiting the media must be given consideration. Importantly, media institutions face challenges from both their internal and external environments. Externally, they contend with governance cultures, economic constraints and barriers posed by socio-cultural norms. Internally, they are driven by economic goals, values, technology, and organisational structures, which altogether determine their effectiveness. All these constraints affect the vibrancy of media

***With specific reference to The Gambia, in spite of the fact that gender-based violence (GBV) is a very serious violation of human rights, The Gambian media, for various reasons, has not been able to meet it with the robust response required.***

operations in many African nations. With specific reference to The Gambia, in spite of the fact that gender-based violence (GBV) is a very serious violation of human rights, The Gambian media, for various reasons, has not been able to meet it with the robust response required.

## **What is GBV?**

Gender-based violence (GBV) has been described as violence directed against a person because of that person's biological sex/gender or violence that disproportionately affects persons of a particular gender.

It is 'any harm that is perpetrated against a person's will; that has a negative impact on the physical or psychological health, development, and identity of the person; and that is the result of gendered power inequities that exploit distinctions between males and females, among males, and among females.' (EYCB) 1

Gender-based violence, as a phenomenon, is an expression of gender inequality arising from the patriarchal structure and orientation of societies; it has been one of the most pervasive human rights violations in all societies.

Earlier in the literature, the term 'gender-based violence' was used to imply male violence against women, but currently it now encompasses all forms of violence that are related to social



expectations and social positions based on gender and non-conformity to socially accepted gender roles. In this way, according to the European Youth Centre, Budapest (EYCB), gender-based violence, “is increasingly a term that connects all acts of violence rooted in some form of ‘patriarchal ideology’, and can thus be committed against both women and men by women and men with the purpose of maintaining social power for (heterosexual) men”. In other words, GBV is perpetuated as an exercise of power to subordinate a person or group of people.

According to the United Nation’s Population Fund (UNFPA), one in three women have experienced physical or sexualised violence in their lifetime. That is not inclusive of emotional, financial, or verbal abuse. In spite of its high prevalence, there is an under-reporting of GBV, which is caused by the fear of stigmatisation and the lack of access to resources and support systems. (2)

Gender-based violence can be sexual, physical, verbal, psychological (emotional), or socio-economic. It can take many forms such as murder, rape, early/forced marriage, female genital mutilation, trafficking in persons, workplace sexual harassment and gender discrimination, loss of control over one’s reproductive health choice or any other vital life choice, internet attacks of any form, and hate speech on a channel of mass communication.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is the cutting or removal of some or all of the external female genitalia. This violates the sexuality of women.

Forced marriage is closely linked to early marriage, whereby a person is coerced into marriage against her will. Workplace sexual harassment is the act of unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal, non-verbal, physical or virtual conduct of an undesirable sexual nature.

Online violence is an umbrella term that describes all sorts of illegal or harmful behaviours against women on the internet. These can be in terms of illegal threats, stalking, offensive or sexually explicit emails or messages, and the sharing of private images or videos without consent.

GBV can be perpetrated by anyone: A current or former spouse/partner, family members, work colleagues, schoolmates, friends, complete strangers, or people acting on behalf of cultural, religious, state, or intra-state institutions. Gender-based violence, like other types of violence, is an offshoot of power relations, whereby the party that perceives itself as superior in the family, work, school, community or society as a whole tries to assert the superiority of their power.

GBV impacts negatively on the individual, the family and the society as a whole. At the individual level, it causes physical and psychological harm and low productivity; at family level, it causes disintegration, insecurity and economic loss; and at societal level, it causes low productivity, resulting in economic loss.

## **Legal Prohibition of GBV**

There are several international legal documents prohibiting violence against women. Articles 2, 5, 11, 12 and 16 of the Convention on all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1989 require its States parties to act to protect women against violence of any kind occurring within the family, the workplace, or in any other area of social life.

The 1999 Vienna Declaration and Programme for Action 1:18 states that, “Gender-based violence and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation, including those resulting from cultural prejudice and international trafficking, are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person, and must be



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**According to the United Nation’s Population Fund (UNFPA), one in three women have experienced physical or sexualised violence in their lifetime. That is not inclusive of emotional, financial, or verbal abuse. In spite of its high prevalence, there is an under-reporting of GBV, which is caused by the fear of stigmatisation and the lack of access to resources and support systems.**

eliminated. This can be achieved by legal measures and through national action and international cooperation in such fields as economic and social development, education, safe maternity and health care, and social support.”

Article 4 of the Declaration specifies that the measures to end violence against women shall target the structures, contexts, social and cultural patterns, which constitute the root causes of this type of violence.

The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) urges various actions on the part of member nations to prevent and sanction violence against women.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Article 7g) designates acts of rape and other forms of sexual violence as “Crimes Against Humanity” when committed in a widespread or systematic manner, whether or not in times of armed conflict.

The International Framework for Action to Prevent Trafficking in Persons Protocol (2009) spells out the actions to be taken to prevent and sanction trafficking in persons, especially women and children.

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The Gambia has a strong legislative framework derived from both international and domestic legal documents to address GBV. The nation is a member of the global body, United Nations (UN); the regional body, African Union (AU); and the sub-regional body, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It has ratified the human rights legal instruments of these bodies of which it is a member, thus making it binding on her to adhere to the standards laid down in the documents. These international documents include, among others: the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); International Labour Organisation (ILO) Convention 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation), 362 U.N.T.S. 31; the UNESCO procedure for human rights violations in UNESCO's fields of mandate; and the African Union's Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

The domestic legal provisions that can be evoked to sanction GBV include Section 28(1) of The Gambian Constitution 1997, which states that women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men; Section 222(3) of the Constitution, which affirms that 'A public officer shall not, in the course of his or her official functions and without lawful excuse, do or cause to be done any



action which is prejudicial to the rights of any other person'. This is prohibitive of workplace sexual harassment.

Section 126(3) of The Gambian Criminal Code states that, “Whoever intending to insult the modesty of any woman, utters any word, makes any sound or gesture, or exhibits any object intending that that word or sound shall be heard or that such gesture or object shall be seen, by such woman or intrudes upon the privacy of such woman, is guilty of misdemeanour, and is liable to imprisonment for one year’.

Also, the Women’s Act 2010, in Part 11, 6(1), says that, “Every woman shall be protected against any form of physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm, suffering or violence whether occurring in public or private life.”

Significantly, The Gambia outlawed female genital mutilation (FGM) in 2015 and this is reflected in Section 32A and 32B of Amendment to the Women’s Act

The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education established the ‘Policy Guidelines and Regulations on Sexual Misconduct and Harassment in Gambian Educational Institutions’. In Section 3.2 of the policy document, it is stated that sexual harassment among teachers and staff, as well as between teachers and students throughout the entire educational system, is prohibited and will attract penalties stipulated in civil service regulations, national laws, international conventions and the policy itself.

The Gambia Civil Service, General Principles of Conduct number 6 states that: “Civil Servants should not because of their sex, religious or ethnic origin discriminate, favour, victimise or wilfully abuse their authority to harass subordinates or the public.”

Also, The Gambia’s Domestic Violence Act declares that, “Sexual harassment means, excluding married couples, sexual contact

without the consent of the person with whom the contact is made, repeatedly making unwanted advances, repeatedly following, pursuing or accosting a person or making persistent, unwelcome communication with a person and includes:

- Watching, loitering outside or near a building where the harassed person resides, works, carries on business, studies or happens to be.
- Repeatedly making telephone calls or inducing a third party to make telephone calls to the harassed person whether or not conversation ensues.
- Repeatedly sending, delivering or causing the delivery of letters, telegrams, packages, facsimiles, electronic mail or other objects or messages or messages to the harasses person's residence, school or workplace and
- Engaging on any other menacing or threatening behavior.

The Gambia, though strong in the legislative framework for combating GBV, is weak in the implementation structures. As such, perpetrators often get away with the offence. The police claim that because perpetrators are usually family members, complainants drop charges and dispose of their phones' SIM cards so the police are unable to pursue cases.

## **GBV In The Gambia**

Like most African nations, The Gambia is a patriarchal society with strong religious values. Some perpetrators of GBV claim religious and cultural values as justification for some forms of GBV like FGM, marital rape, forced/early marriage, sexual harassment, and violation of women's reproductive health rights. Currently, there is no legislation against marital rape.





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According to The Gambia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2018, cited by Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA), “75 percent of girls between the ages of 15 to 19 have undergone FGM. 34.4 percent of girls between the ages of 15-19 think the practice should continue, while 49 percent think it should stop. 46.7 percent of girls at the age of 18-19 believe that a man should beat his wife.”

In a survey conducted in 2020, the IHRDA documented the ordeal of some survivors of GBV in The Gambia, parts of which are excerpted below:

“At the age of 3, I left my hometown to live with my aunt in Bundung. For twelve (12) years, I faced a lot of maltreatment living with my aunt. At the age of 10, I was sexually harassed and raped by my Islamic teacher who had told me, “If I don’t have sex with you, I will tell your aunt that you are not doing well in your studies and that you follow men around.” As a result, I let the Islamic teacher do as he pleased.”

“At the age of 15, I was forced to get married to a 40-year-old

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man. My father had threatened to divorce my mother if I didn't get married to the man. My aunt also threatened to throw me out of the house if I refused the marriage. This thus affected my education, as I was not able to go back to school that year until the following year.

### **Survivor 1**

I was raped by a construction worker who used to buy water from me. This happened when I was eleven (11). I had resisted going to sell water at the hospital, but every time I did, my mum would beat me up, and later she decided not to support my education.

I then decided to play football, but eventually moved to the provinces to live with my uncle. On my first day, I was also raped by my uncle. I couldn't report the matter to my father because I felt he won't believe me. I got pregnant, but it was aborted by my grandmother. After a year, I returned to school but my mum insisted that I continue selling water at the hospital. I did with the belief that the construction worker who had raped me would no longer be there. I was raped again by the same man and got pregnant again. I lost the pregnancy again, this time due to stress. I was in a coma for a month."



## Survivor 2

In 2019, Fatou Toufah Jallow made revelations alleging rape by former President Yaya Jammeh. This triggered allegations of similar experiences by several other women in the hands of the same predator, drawing scrutiny to this long-standing menace in The Gambia.

### **The Media and Development in The Gambia**

In The Gambia, like in many other parts of the world, newspapers play a very significant role. Since the first newspaper in The Gambia, the Bathurst Times, debuted in 1871 during the colonial era, the media has been influencing national life. Radical newspapers that were critical of the colonial government were sanctioned, with the publishers sometimes getting incarcerated. After independence in 1965, The Gambia media under the regime of Daoda Jawara enjoyed some degree of freedom of expression, which was eroded after the 1994 coup d'état that ushered in a 22-year authoritarian regime. In 2016, the authoritarian government was voted out of power, once again creating a freer atmosphere for the media to operate.

Sad to say, though, the 22 years of repression took its toll on the media. Investigative journalism could not develop sufficiently in depth and scope. The socio-political climate of those years fostered a tradition of reluctance to release information, while media practitioners could not hone their investigative journalism skills. To a large extent, the media in The Gambia can be described through the African image of a chicken which had been long tied down, and on being released yet remains on the same spot, unable to internalise the reality of its freedom.

At present, The Gambia has four dailies, a tri-weekly, 33 radio stations, six television channels and many new websites. It ranks

87th out of 180 countries and regions in Reporters Without Borders (RSF)'s 2020 World Press Freedom Index.

The following parameters spelt out for media development in the UNESCO 2008 'Media development indicators: a framework for assessing media development' show that The Gambia has a huge task ahead in vitalising the media through:

- A system of regulation conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media;
- Plurality and diversity of media, a level economic playing field and transparency of ownership;
- Media as a platform for democratic discourse;
- Professional capacity building and supporting institutions that underpins freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity;
- Infrastructural capacity sufficient to support independent and pluralistic media.

A study carried out on the media in The Gambia identified some limitations of the media thus: 'The analysis of print, broadcast and online media confirms that the sector has responded to the change of government with an unprecedented boom in independent content and the diversity of publicly expressed opinions. This analysis, however, notes the deficiencies in professional skills and technical and financial resources that limit the media's capacity to disseminate accurate information and fulfil their role as watchdogs of political and economic power" (Media4Democracy EU, 2017).

Recently, the RSF, while commending The Gambian government for the subsidy made available to media organisations as palliative for COVID-19 set-backs, identified challenges faced by the media as including the yet-to-be-repealed draconian laws introduced under former dictator Yahya Jammeh on fake news, defamation



and criminal defamation, and ‘the often violent behaviour of the security forces in their relations with journalists (RSF, 2020).

Some of the limitations of The Gambian media, indicated by the aforementioned agencies, were re-affirmed in key informant interviews with some veteran journalists in The Gambia in the course of compiling this report. The respondents expressed the opinion that media organisations in The Gambia have not engaged

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the problem of GBV with the degree of attention required. According to them, professional capacity for investigative journalism is low due to the preference of media owners for under-qualified staff requiring low pay. Worse still, the high attrition rate has not allowed media organisations to benefit maximally from capacity building programmes offered by international agencies, local NGOs and The Gambia Press Union. The staff members of media organisations who have benefited from such training programmes generally tend move on to greener pastures thereafter.

Importantly, cases of GBV reported in the police stations are not followed up by journalists to ensure the subsequent dispensation of justice in the courts. Follow up on cases are impeded by the bureaucratic bottleneck. The police would ask journalists to secure information on cases from their headquarters in Banjul, when the

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cases might not have been transferred there yet. When cases are transferred to the courts from the police stations, they may take months to come up for hearing, making journalists lose track of the cases.

Moreover, most of the incidents of GBV occur in the provinces, necessitating sufficient mobility on the part of journalists covering the cases. Generally, the culture of silence in relation to GBV cases has placed great limitations on its coverage by the media. A woman was asked that if a family member violates her daughter, would she take such a family member to court? Her response was, “No, when we come back from court, are we going to stop being family? We should settle the problem among ourselves.”

The problem of the media organisations lies partly in their internal composition, as their structures do not reflect diversity, and specifically there is gender disparity in the leadership of the media. This is underscored by the absence of a female chief editor of any newspaper in The Gambia.

The structure of a media organisation must reflect equality and pluralism for it to be well-positioned to represent the marginalised in the society. Quite unfortunately, media organisations, more



often than not, replicate the patriarchal structure of the society with a limited number of women being allowed in leadership positions. More women in media leadership positions means greater attention and sensitivity to gender issues.

The media's response to GBV in The Gambia has been more in the form of giving good coverage to the activities of agencies that are involved in advocacy activities in this regard. However, The Gambia Press Union has been intensifying efforts to empower journalists through the organisation of sensitisation and training programmes on GBV. It has also created a policy document on sexual harassment for all media workplaces in The Gambia.

In conclusion, in view of the fact that attitudinal changes to age-long cultural practices are not easily achieved, The Gambian media must utilise all platforms to advocate against GBV, share survivor's experiences and engage civil society activists, relevant government officials and gender-focused males regularly for public education on GBV. GBV cases must also be tenaciously followed up to ensure the prompt dispensation of justice. All these necessitate the building of the capacity of media practitioners to be quick in identifying and responding to cases of GBV.

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# 14

## Media Reporting of GBV In Conflict Spaces: Lessons from Sierra Leone

Isata Mahoi



Gender-based violence and rape is a huge problem in Sierra Leone, with the World Health Organisation estimating that one in three women would experience rape within their lifetime. The issue of domestic violence in Sierra Leone remains a very serious challenge, which the government and development partners are fighting to tackle in diverse ways.

At the national level, a number of legislative and policy frameworks have been developed since the end of the eleven-year conflict from 1991 to 2002, which establish a supportive and conducive environment for addressing GBV in the country. In 2007, the government of Sierra Leone adopted three Gender Acts – the Domestic Violence Act, the Devolution of Estates Act and the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act. In 2012, a new, more stringent Sexual Offences Act was passed

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to help end the culture of impunity pertaining to sexual crimes, to prevent sexual and domestic abuse against women and girls, and to punish perpetrators. This demonstrated the political will and commitment to reduce GBV. As was recommended by the country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which sat between 2002 and 2004, these Acts were significant steps



forward in efforts to ensure the fight against domestic violence yielded the relevant impact for women and girls, as they provided them with more legal protection. However, these Acts are yet to stop the high rate of gender-related abuse, rape, etc., against women and girls in the country.

Presently, the continued advocacy of civil society organisations (CSOs) and international partners have seen the First Lady, Fatima Bio, launch a campaign titled “Hands off Our Girls”, which is aimed at mitigating sexual related gender based violence (SRGBV) against women and girls, including sexual penetration, domestic violence, early marriage, etc.

Also, the recent proclamation by President Julius Madaa Bio is seen as a great move towards mitigating the problem. He declared rape and sexual violence as a “National Emergency” that attracts life imprisonment for perpetrators who attack minors, following an outcry over the level of sexual violence in the country. He further highlighted measures that the Sierra Leonean Parliament debated and subsequently passed into law on Thursday September 19, 2019, as The Sexual Offences Amendment Act, 2019. This amended The Sexual Offences Act of 2012 and provides for the increase in the maximum penalty for the rape and sexual penetration of a child, from fifteen years to life imprisonment, while also making provision for the introduction of the offence of aggravated sexual assault.

The poor and marginalised women and young girls of Sierra Leone have serious challenges in accessing justice, especially owing to financial constraints. Essentially, legal aid and relevant services are generally accessible only to the segment of the population that can afford to pay for legal services and representation. Despite their established needs, the poor, women and youths do not consistently have state representation. They are also less likely

to seek and receive legal support and services when before the courts or in the judicial system. This lack of a culture of legal aid and rights is further compounded by the absence of a coordinated system to extend the reach and expand the coverage of legal services to locations including outside Freetown, even as these services remain inadequately accessed.

Despite several advances in women's rights in Sierra Leone, violence against women and girls remains one of the most pervasive human rights abuse in the country, and its occurrence in the home or by an intimate partner is its most prevalent form. Domestic violence is a human rights violation experienced across all social strata and cultural groups in Sierra Leone. 60 per cent of the population of Sierra Leone is women, yet women suffer disproportionately from gender-based violence, because of societal values and a general acceptance that violence against women and children is a fair game.

Over the years, numerous sensitisations, advocacies and capacity building activities have been implemented to address issues relating to gender rights and the empowerment of women and girls. These include activities against sexual offences and domestic violence, which continue to be at the epicentre of Sierra Leone's development agenda. However, not much progress has been registered in spite of these interventions. Women and girls continue to suffer from all forms of gender-based violence (GBV), be it physical, economic, emotional or sexual. Gender-based violence (GBV) has serious implications for the development of girls and the advancement of women, as well as their contributions towards national development. Coupled with these is the weak capacity of institutions to provide redress to victims of GBV and how issues of GBV are reported by the media.

The media in Sierra Leone has been very much instrumental in carrying news headlines about gender-based violence in



communities, yet the challenge is that most times reporters attach more emotions to reporting the issues involved. Also, considering the fact that boys or men too can be victims, the news is most times biased towards reporting about women, even though the female is actually more vulnerable to gender-based violence.

Awareness-raising by media houses and other institutions about

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GBV and the Sexual Offences Act 2013, alongside the Domestic Violence Act 2013, is still a challenge. Media houses and reporters should be provided with the necessary support to enable them cover stories about victims of GBV, without letting out the identity of these victims, which the media has not properly handled in the past years. To further reduce the vulnerabilities of women and girls to violence and enhance their decision-making capabilities, evidence has shown that there is need to invest more on economic justice, capacity building and skills development for journalists, to further strengthen their efficient management of GBV cases.

Radio discussion programmes on GBV prevention and response – funded by UNFPA, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs – have been going on in some districts, and they

***In some rural communities, particularly where traditional patriarchal power structures remain strong, cases of GBV are not reported. Therefore, the media does not have access to such information. GBV violations are often mediated by respected relatives and community elders, who are typically men (Denov and Maclure, 2006).***

have disseminated key messages on GBV to approximately 30 per cent of community members <sup>47</sup>.

Also the rate of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in Sierra Leone remains high, with 85 per cent of adult women in the country having experienced the social ill. Young women and girls can face social exclusion, especially in rural communities, if they have not gone through the traditional rites of FGM. In 2019, 83 percent of women and young girls aged 15 to 49 years had undergone FGM in Sierra Leone, 89 per cent in rural areas, and 76 per cent in urban areas. This is a very difficult topic to discuss on radio and many media practitioners prefer not to discuss this on air or carry it on their news outlets. The Sierra Leonean National COVID-19 Response Secretariat has put a ban on all traditional practices, including FGM, and this can serve as an entry point for international aid agencies to continue the dialogue with authorities for these practices to remain banned.

However, in a country as desperately under-resourced as Sierra Leone, still struggling with a war-ravaged infrastructure and post-Ebola virus disease, there are serious limits to what legislation can achieve. Moreover, in terms of law enforcement to implement this

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<sup>47</sup> <https://sierraleone.unfpa.org/en/topics/gender-based-violence>



legislation, research and studies show that household violence is rarely considered a matter for the police. It is difficult to know how many cases of gender violence go unreported, but many in Sierra Leone agree that the country faces a serious problem (McKay, 2004; Park, 2006; Shaw, 2007).

In some rural communities, particularly where traditional patriarchal power structures remain strong, cases of GBV are not reported. Therefore, the media does not have access to such information. GBV violations are often mediated by respected relatives and community elders, who are typically men (Denov and Maclure, 2006). In addition, very few cases of gender-based violence are charged to court, and they are mostly compromised by community stakeholders. Many a time, the media gets access to information from court cases and these are the ones mostly reported for public consumption; others are not discussed at all as already stated above.

During and after the war and Ebola, women's organisations responded to the disruption of social services and community-based structures by developing networks and alternative coping strategies to deal with problems such as food scarcity, sexual violence, and shortfalls in health and education provision. However, these organisations have had very limited resources and capacity for sustaining the implementation of these projects on the long-term, making government and donor support critical to their on-going activities.

Although women have traditionally been denied rights to property under customary law, women's rights to property are now protected by the Constitution of Sierra Leone and other international laws. There have been important changes in the laws governing women's property rights, and it is important that people are able to learn about the new laws. Customary laws that

are discriminatory and restrict women's rights to property have real and serious impacts because they affect the day-to-day lives of women, including their ability to support themselves and their children, and to confront poverty. Often, women are the most socio-economically disadvantaged in our society, with limited access to justice, especially in rural areas. Many people in Sierra Leone are subject to customary law, but often people are not aware of, or do not understand the laws and their rights, as developed in the Constitution. This requires a lot of media engagements and awareness raising campaigns, to inform the general public.

One of the most talked about and momentous incidents in newspapers and on the radio was the case of a five-year old girl (as represented by the Justice for Kadijah movement) who died in June 2020, allegedly raped and killed by her relatives. Nearly every media house, including social media networks, covered and reported the story. The matter has presently been referred to the high courts and after several months of laying in the morgue, she was finally buried in January 2021. Many other cases of gender-based violence remain underreported.

## **Interventions for Promoting Accurate GBV Reporting In Sierra Leone**

It is true that journalists and other media professionals play a critical role, not only in awareness raising campaigns on GBV related issues, but also in counteracting the myths and societal norms or traditions that persistently increase the vulnerabilities of women and young children. Media practitioners and journalist play key roles in bringing attention to policy makers about the security of survivors and the need to raise the awareness of communities to the positive stories as well, by helping to reduce stigma among GBV survivors, who often act as advocates and agents of change.

What is also very common in the fight against GBV in Sierra





Leone is when the victim or survivor is termed as the ‘accuser’ who provoked the situation. This is totally out of place and it is recommended that journalists should avoid the use of words like “alleged” rape or sexual assault. Again, oftentimes, journalists report on radio and news outlets, critical information describing the certain specifics of a GBV incident and the physical characteristics of the survivor. This is why many people shy away from reporting GBV-related issues, thereby putting survivors and those helping them at risk. In order to avoid this, technical training on reporting GBV issues is necessary.

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To help mitigate gender-based violence in communities and accurately report GBV issues, there is great need to invest in data gathering. This will help to get concrete information, through proper data management of the evidence. Other interventions should include the mapping of cases of GBV, establishment of strategies that will motivate victims of domestic violence to attend counselling sessions, and organisation of trainings of family counsellors and community agents in identifying and reporting domestic violence. However, any effort to document GBV for purposes of media reporting must first prioritise the safety and best interests of survivors.

***It is recommended that there should be strategic trainings of law enforcement personnel on gender-sensitive digital safety, so that they are able to address complaints of online gender-based violence and to provide adequate information and timely technical assistance, counselling, and support to women who choose to report, and build the confidence of those who find it very difficult to report because they do not trust the system.***

It is recommended that there should be strategic trainings of law enforcement personnel on gender-sensitive digital safety, so that they are able to address complaints of online gender-based violence and to provide adequate information and timely technical assistance, counselling, and support to women who choose to report, and build the confidence of those who find it very difficult to report because they do not trust the system. This will help to prevent gender-based violence, protect the victims of GBV, and support communities with social and psychological reintegration of survivors. It is also important that Sierra Leone reinforces the institutional capacity for the treatment, identification and resolution of GBV-related problems, while utilising education and communication as tools for behavioural change and the eradication of such ills in society. It is also important to identify the social and community factors responsible for driving the incidence of GBV.

Accurately reporting the stories of survivors is very crucial in the fight against GBV. It is illegal to use a survivor's name, especially without the person's consent. GBV stories should be accurately covered and reported without leaving out crucial information as



part of the evidence to corroborate incidents. Journalists should be trained on how to avoid being targeted for sexual assault. This requires a different approach that should focus on individual reporters. The training should involve using situational awareness to avoid becoming targets and to also learn personal skills in safely navigating sexual aggression, which can help prevent them from becoming victims themselves.

Media personnel, journalists, civil society organisations and other advocacy groups should continue to campaign for the adoption of stringent laws that are implemented, which will eradicate domestic and gender-based violence in communities. Most times, GBV-related stories reported by media sources are skewed, biased and end up naming and shaming the survivors or victims, instead of the perpetrators. Therefore, a masterclass on GBV, involving an open learning space needs to be established. This will afford the traditional media and journalists the opportunity to gain knowledge from specialists on the impact of gender-based violence on the economy, and the health care system. From this, they will learn how to accurately accurate report GBV related issues and deviate from the old and primitive way of reporting, which puts survivors at risk, to a more advanced approach. Training journalists and other media personnel on how to cover gender-based violence better can help challenge the status quo and change the dominant narratives.

# 15

**Staying On the Story:  
Following-up reports until  
something happens in cases  
of GBV**

Motunrayo Famuyiwa-Alaka





When the Wole Soyinka Centre for Investigative Journalism (WSCIJ) started its Report Women project in 2014, it was based on the trend we had followed for nine years in the media regarding women in the news and in the newsroom. Our objective looked simple, at least on paper. We planned to increase the quantum and quality of reports about access and abuse, as they related to girls and women in the Nigerian media. There are four keywords that require some unpacking here – quantum, quality, access and abuse.

The number of reports about girls and women in news reports were very scarce at the time. According to a media monitoring of 12 national news publications over a period of three months, conducted by WSCIJ in 2019, of 6,344 stories on women, 55.74 per cent were news stories, and headlines about women were rare. A closer look at the types of stories showed that most of the girls and women who made the news did so because they were victims.

Soon, we were faced with the realities of the last three words – quality, access and abuse. We realised that there were huge gaps in reporters' understanding of issues of the rights of the girl-child and women, reporting through a gender lens, fighting negative stereotypes, the use of pictures, and on the need to avoid re-victimising survivors of abuse, among other issues. We successfully increased the number of published stories in the media (there were 39 stories in six months) and highlighted salient issues, but the persistent knowledge gaps meant that achieving high quality reporting was a continuous struggle.

The last part of our discovery was that the issues of access and abuse that affected girls and women were generally in relation to stories of inequality and denial of rights on all fronts. We dealt with access to education, health care, political power, economic access and the likes. However, the challenge of abuse, all kinds of

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gender-based violence, including rape, female genital mutilation, domestic violence, displacement, sexual harassment, deleterious widowhood practices and more, were constantly at the root of the denial of access but these were hardly referenced in media reports. In WSCIJ's media monitoring exercise on reports by 12 news organisations on girls and women within a period of three months in 2019, 4,960 out of 6,344 stories were about access, while 1,384 were about abuse.

It is true that girls, women, and sometimes boys, are victims of society, whether consciously or unconsciously. Media, as a mirror of society, has a duty to reflect this. But the media can do more than mirror society; I am persuaded of this. From the #MeToo movement, to the present fight against COVID-19, evidence abound to support this position. I have spent the last six years conceptualising the idea of a media that **Reports Until Something Happens (RUSH)**. I got a chance to dedicate a year to thinking more deeply about and studying the concept further through many explorations at Stanford University, as a John S. Knight Fellow between 2019 and 2020. I am more convinced that, indeed, the media can do more than merely reflecting the society.

The media is a leader in the civil society, and building urgency through follow-ups to news stories is one of the ways it can



perform its leadership role better. The media can, and should, stay on any issue, including gender-based violence (GBV), until the change we seek is achieved.

## **The RUSH Strategy and GBV**

The Report Until Something Happens (RUSH) strategy is based on three critical premises. One is that the media is a force for change. The second is that the media is a leader in the civil society space, with an immense convening prowess. The third is that if the media stays on an issue long enough, using its capacities for news gathering and reporting, alongside the edge that technology and digital media provides, and its strategic collaborations with other stakeholders, it will make more impact in society.

RUSH is about the journalism of follow-up, which is primarily hinged on expanding initial reports to explore other aspects of a story. RUSH is an in-depth, nuanced, human-interest reporting and advocacy strategy that acknowledges sources as stakeholders, who are reservoirs of knowledge. RUSH is replicable for all issues, including GBV. It goes beyond numbers and digs into the big ‘... so what?’ question. It seeks to make the report of single incidents of GBV the beginning, rather than the end, of conversations and pushes for the change that abused people deserve and society clearly needs.

The necessity of following-up is clear and the impact is outstanding. One of the most outstanding stories on GBV that I have encountered was written by Peter Nkanga, a press freedom advocate who was a reporter with the defunct 234next newspaper. It was titled, *The Pregnant Prisoner*. The story was a seven-part series, which showed the tenacity of the reporter to see to it that the girl involved, who was raped until she got pregnant by an uncle, who had promised educational support to

take her away from her parents and later framed her by accusing her of theft to get her jailed, despite her condition, got justice. Peter Nkanga, who won the online category of the 2010 Wole Soyinka Award for Investigative Reporting, followed up until the young girl was released from prison and supported by the Lagos State Government. Her uncle was jailed instead.

Unlike Peter Nkanga's story, most media reports are one-off reports documenting the occurrence of single incidents of GBV. News is very important; it fulfils the basic information role of the media. There are, however, other roles of the media that are begging for more attention – the educational, developmental, agenda-setting and accountability roles. We are missing robust feature and investigative stories on GBV. We are also missing follow-ups, except the cases are high-profile ones. We are missing the staying on a story that helps to reflect the multifaceted nature of the issues involved and puts stakeholders on their toes to act on GBV.

I propose the following practical RUSH steps to help journalists, media houses and those who desire to see changes in society on GBV, and indeed other issues, to follow up:

**Acknowledge the complexity of the issue:** According to the *Reporting on gender-based violence in humanitarian setting* report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF), "...covering Gender Based Violence is one of the most difficult tasks a journalist is likely to face throughout their career." I know this from experience, having planned tens of stories and directed a documentary on the subject matter. It is complicated. It is personal. It can be difficult to define. It is messy to deal with such a private matter in a public square like the media. Both culture and religion are culprits in entrenching some of the abuses. They obstruct justice in the name of saving faces, rather than fighting for the rights of





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the oppressed. There are vested interests in unexpected places. A mother who looked the other way while her husband molested her daughter. A traditional leader who wants justice out of court, to make his reign look good. A society that shames the survivor, rather than the abuser. To do successful follow-up stories on GBV, it is important for the journalist or media organisation to accept that this will be difficult and requires nuance of the highest level.

***Identify your sources as stakeholders and repositories of knowledge:*** Many times, there is excessive focus on the survivor. This can be draining for a person who is already dealing with pressure and perhaps post-traumatic disorder from an abusive incident. A good way to expand a story and present fresh angles consistently is to find other sources. While this is normal, I propose a comprehensive stakeholders mapping, which will help reporters to approach sources who can assist in expanding their knowledge of the issue. There are so many sources and stakeholders involved in stories about GBV. Women's equal rights advocates, the police,

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social workers, judges, doctors, psychologists, human rights activists, forensic experts, parents, teachers, elected officers, representatives of agencies focused on GBV and traditional leaders, are some of those who come to mind. When reporters treat sources as resource persons, rather than just a means of meeting deadlines and having voices represented in their stories, they maximise the opportunities to learn. This will help them do better follow-up stories that will enrich the knowledge of leaders and challenge the status quo.

**Let curiosity drive your research:** The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) says 30 countries, including 27 African countries, are practicing **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**, with four million girls affected before the age of 15 annually. It also estimates that 120 million girls may have been married off before they reach the age of 18 by 2030, if efforts are not intensified to change the trend. More than one in three women have experienced one form of GBV or the other. About 137 women are murdered daily. What do these numbers



really mean? What are the contributing factors to these alarming figures? How are these realities of abuse related to other issues like poverty, insecurity and development? How about boys? Are we reporting cases of GBV that happen to boys and men enough? There is need for depth in reports about GBV, as these are prevailing and pervasive human rights issues. They are more than mere incidents. GBV is a phenomenon that has been strengthened by social norms, gender stereotypes, and human rights neglect. The World Bank says GBV is a pandemic that has affected one out of three women. Curiosity driven follow-up stories can help the media unpack the situation and enable stakeholders to know where to direct more efforts.

**Follow the law:** There are many treaties and laws internationally and locally on GBV. Nigeria, in particular, has signed many of these treaties, conventions and laws. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is one of them. There is also the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (2015), which a significant number of states have adopted. Apart from these, there are many other laws within other bodies of legislation that speak to the country's regulatory position on GBV. Journalists need to unpack these laws outside the breaking news cycles. The media has the capacity to push the boundaries of demand for the implementations of GBV laws in such a way that affects the supply for social justice through follow up stories.

**Identify your biases and seek to report above them:** We often speak about media objectivity, and the need for journalists to be fair to all parties involved in a story. The main bias of a journalist should be to truth and justice. But a person's perspective is often coloured by his/her socio-cultural exposure. Journalists are products of society and have biases on the basis of their socialisation. A reporter who will achieve the objectivity required to do follow-up stories on GBV must be honest enough to acknowledge his or her

biases, so that he or she may be intentional in rising above them with exposure to knowledge on the subject, association with people who understand the nuances involved, and a keen sense of professionalism.

**Understand your limitations:** There are too many aspects of a story that a reporter or news organisation has no control over. This is especially so when it comes to GBV. The journalism of follow-up is a form of activism or advocacy, but reporters need to do more than advocate. Also, reporters are not the police, judges, parents, wives or husbands, as the case may be in their stories. Follow-ups can contribute to changing an issue, but the journalist's primary role is to report factually and consistently, to hold those who have the responsibility to make the change accountable.

**Follow the ethics of the issue, along with the ethics of the profession:** There are many resources available for reporting GBV, which detail the ethics of covering the subject. It is important that the circumspect reporter understands this in order to avoid the case of re-victimising survivors or exposing them to further dangers. The use of identifiers for a survivor is an example. The use of videos and pictures is another. When you blend the ethics of reporting the subject with the ethics of the journalism profession, you are likely to do better follow-ups that will make greater impact.

**Remain sensitive:** Reporting the fact can be brutal to survivors, even though it helps the common good. How do we navigate this? One way is to stay curious, like all the points mentioned above advocate. The other is to be empathetic. Be human. Many of the reports you will be dealing with involve very personal details about the people involved. Getting a scoop is not enough. You must be responsible about how you deliver the message. Imagine this to be one of those boxes with the big label – “Items are fragile. Handle with care.”



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**Find the gaps in reporting and plug them:** For instance, there is need to beam the search light on other kinds of violence against women. Apart from sexual and physical violence, which are quite frequently reported, there is also emotional violence. The subject hardly makes the news because it is more difficult to prove. Journalists can discuss with experts to unpack this issue. Also, it is not only girls and women who are affected by GBV. There is also economic violence and there are harmful traditional practices waiting to be explored. Many reports, including GBV that of Emma Brown in *Washington Post* titled “**Sexual Assault Against Boys Is a Crisis**”, point to how serious GBV cases involving boys are rampant and often neglected. There is need to emphasise the prevalence of GBV through detailed reports, so that the big picture of what we are up against as a society is clearer. Identify new angles, especially those that widen the narrative beyond the initial incident you are reporting and confirm their prevalence.

### **Follow up on GBV stories can be difficult**

There are challenges to utilising the RUSH strategy for following up on GBV stories.

The nano-second nature of news sharing enabled by digital

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platforms for social interactions, like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, is one of such challenges. As one news item breaks, many others follow suit, at times instantaneously. The reporter is thus kept on the move, with little spare time to follow up on an 'old' story.

Reporting fatigue is also another issue. How long should a reporter keep following up on a particular story? As long as possible, until some form of change happens. However, the reporter would have to keep up on creativity and exploring the many ideas given, to ensure that the follow-up reports keep pushing the envelope of justice, until something happens.

The story follow up budget is yet another issue. This challenge can be better appreciated when one considers that many media houses in Nigeria do not give allowances to their reporters to cover logistics to do stories in the first place.

Yet, another constraint is the staff strength. I was once on a road show to media houses to discuss a media monitoring report on the oil and gas industry. When my team showed desk editors the gaps in the reporting of the sector, they replied by saying the sector



is reported under either the business or energy beats, which in some media houses have only three reporters all together. Where then is the manpower to do investigative and follow-up reports?

A peculiar challenge to GBV is the fact that the survivor or her family may not be interested in follow-up stories. I have heard colleagues who work on the advocacy side of the work complain about how frustrating dealing with the issue can be, especially when individuals or families insist on dropping the cases involved for personal reasons outside what the advocates regard as justice. This can be discouraging but people have a right to choose and journalists continue to have a duty to uphold justice.

These challenges are real, and we need to tackle them. I believe strongly that the benefits of follow-up journalism far outweigh the challenges. When we do the RUSH types of follow-up stories, we increase the shelf life of stories and stand a better chance of being useful to society as reporters. Journalists risk getting stuck with drama, rather than reality, if they are unable to follow-up on issues.

### **The Media Has Superpowers. So what?**

Access to the mass of the people makes the media quite powerful. Politicians know this. No wonder they keep dabbling into media ownership and spending a lot on building publicity, including plain propaganda. Policy makers know this too, because media reports are often farmlands where raw data that guide policy-making are harvested. The superpowers the media has can help push the envelope in terms of follow-up news for GBV. However, after leading more than 15 media monitoring exercises, I can confirm that the media is not using its superpowers well. It is missing

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the opportunity to lead in news framing, setting agenda and demanding accountability through follow-up stories driven by nuanced investigation. It is mostly also missing the opportunity to use the online space as an added advantage to do much more following-up and in-depth reports, rather than serving as an archiving platform. The media can harness its superpower potentials to tackle gender-based violence for the good of society, by following up to report until something happens.





# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### GBV Report Websites

In Nigeria, numerous cases of gender-based violations have gone unreported. However, some governmental institutions, non-governmental organisations, and civil societies have created civic tools that survivors, their families and the society can use to report these attacks. Some of the platforms are listed below:

**Report GBV:** In 2020, the Federal Government of Nigeria through the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and the EU-UN Spotlight Initiative launched the first-ever gender-based violence (GBV) data situation room and dashboard. The platform can be used to report violence against women and girls in Nigeria. Currently, the platform documents 4,111 reported cases, 132 fatal cases, 210 closed cases, 759 open cases and 11 convicted perpetrators. **Web address:** <https://reportgbv.ng/#/>

**SGBV-RRS:** The Sexual Violence Response and Referral System was launched in 2021 by the Lagos State Government through its Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT). DSVRT in partnership with the European Union-funded Spotlight Initiative, Women's Helping Hands Initiative and with technical support from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) launched the 24/7 helpline to rapidly respond to SGBV survivors. The virtual system helps to provide uninterrupted access to trained service providers, by providing help and support through **a toll-free helpline, 08000333333** with the social media hashtag #safetyinnumber.

**Stand to End Rape (STER):** STER is a youth-led non-profit advocating against sexual violence, providing prevention mechanisms and supporting survivors with psychosocial services. Due to a culture of victim-blaming and shaming, victims of sexual violence rarely speak up or seek help — a problem STER is trying to solve by encouraging victims to report cases to the organisation directly through an intake form. In 2019, STER received 173 reports via this medium. **Web address:** <https://standtoendrape.org/report-abuse/>

**ORANGE PAGES:** The Orange pages was launched in 2021 by Invictus Africa, a non-governmental organisation with the mandate of promoting human rights and addressing inequalities affecting vulnerable and disadvantaged people especially women and children. The Orange Pages is a directory of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Responders and Service Providers in Nigeria. It contains the names and contacts of verified and validated individuals and organisations, including the sexual assault referral centres, all of whom respond to SGBV and provide support. **Web address:** <https://www.invictus.ng/orangepages>



## Appendix 2

WHAT FACTOR(S) DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE THE CAUSE(S) OF GBV IN NIGERIA?			
Gender	Responses	Gender	Responses
Male	Patriarchy and African mentality of male superiority	Female	Poor institutional framework. Weak sexual policies. Poor judiciary system
Male	Power dynamics. Societal beliefs. Lack of legal framework	Female	Drug abuse. Depression. Poverty
Female	Poverty. Illiteracy	Female	Justice evasion by perpetrators. Patriarchy
Male	Frustration. Idleness and drugs	Female	Favoritism
Male	Attraction. Lack of Self Control	Male	Female stigmatisation
Male	Cultural Influence (that imposes a man as the leader of a woman in a marriage, and the quest to enforce/ establish supremacy). Inferiority complex. Lack of understanding, love, respect. Incompatible values, ideals.	Male	Frustration. Societal perception
Male	Poverty. Patriarchy. Lack of love. Insensitivity	Male	Alcoholism. Drug abuse. Lack of good home training. Lack of good moral and religious training
Male	Cultural practices. Insurgency. Unemployment. Hunger	Male	Lack of proper implementation of the law

Gender	Responses	Gender	Responses
Female	Silence	Male	Patriarchal inclination of a society. Lack of strong legislation. Lack of Orientation/Education/Illiteracy. Unbalanced equality in financial inclusiveness
Female	Parents. Bad environment and lack of awareness	Male	Cultural belief. Economic pressure
Female	Greed. Hatred. Jealousy and other forms of attacks	Male	Poverty. Lack of orientation
Female	Carelessness on the part of parents	Female	Wickedness. Lack of sympathy. Selfishness. Vulnerability. Lack of political will to prosecute and punish the offenders.
Female	Ignorance. Poverty. Illiteracy. Lack of proper punitive measures	Female	Wickedness. Lack of sympathy. Selfishness. Vulnerability. Lack of political will to prosecute and punish the offenders.
Female	Some of them is lack of awareness. some Women old age, some unaware like children are just being forced into it.	Male	Frustration. Infidelity
Female	Unequal status of men and women	Male	Abuse. Discrimination and Violence



Gender	Responses	Gender	Responses
Male	No strong law	Male	Gender-based violence is deeply rooted in discriminatory cultural beliefs and attitudes that perpetuate inequality and powerlessness, in particular of women and girls.
Female	Hunger. poverty. harmful gender norms. gender inequality in power and resources	Male	Culture. Illiteracy
Male	Harmful gender norms. hunger. war and conflict. value.	Male	Poverty
Female	Lack of justice systems as deterrent	Female	Culture. Religion
Male	Education. Sensitization. Psychology. Emotional intelligence	Male	Drug abuse. Alcoholism etc
Female	Patriarchy	Female	Male domination of most aspects of national life. Female poverty. Societal condoning of GBV
Male	Irresponsibility of an individual. Lack of patience.	Male	Poverty
Male	Poverty. Unemployment. Broken home. Drug abuse. Mental health issues.	Female	Culture. Bad upbringing. Bad genes. Poverty. Ignorance. Traditional beliefs. Religion.

Gender	Responses	Gender	Responses
Female	Mental illness	Female	Understanding
Female	Stereotypes	Female	Poverty. Ignorance. Illiteracy
Male	Culture	Male	Mode of dressing. Culture
Male	Culture	Female	Lack of awareness. Entitlement. Illiteracy. Poverty
Male	High tolerance. Failure to implement existing punishments. Societal influence.	Male	Cultural factors. Poor legislation
Male	Lack of orientation. Culture. Illiteracy. Personality disorder	Female	Psychological and cultural factors
Male	Lack of swift justice delivery system as in the case of rape victims. Insecurity crisis, where women are taken advantage of	Male	Sexual urge. Insecurity. Lack of self defence orientation. Indecency
Female	Cultural & religious beliefs. Lack of education. Poverty	Male	Sexual urge. Insecurity. Lack of self defence orientation. Indecency
Female	Poor enlightenment	Female	Ignorance
Female	Ignorance. Tradition and individual traits	Female	Insufficient laws and poor enforcement of existing laws. Political and religious affiliations of offenders
Female	The victim has no blame here. Most men feel superior. They feel they should give favour to a woman in exchange for her body.	Female	Government. Poverty. Greed



Gender	Responses	Gender	Responses
Female	Poverty. Culture and societal norms. Lack of empathy	Male	Inadequate parental care and guidance
Male	Any violation of rights that is gender based.	Female	Fear of stigmatisation. Proper understanding of the law
Male	Inadequate exposure and understanding	Male	Lack of adequate knowledge
Male	Weak justice system. Poverty	Male	Don't know
Male	Culture	Male	Insecurity. Improper dressing. Unnecessary night movements. Unnecessary visitation
Male	Gender inequality. Cultural practices or beliefs. Stereotypes	Female	Weak enforcement of laws against GBV
Male	Cultural gender stereotypes. Slow administration of justice. Indecent exposure	Male	Culture
Female	Inadequate law enforcement agencies	Male	Insecurity. Jealousy. Financial Issues
Female	The issue of women subjugation in our society, women being considered as weaker vessels and we have no strict laws against it just like they do in countries like America.	Male	Drunkenness. Infidelity. Economic hardship
Male	Power asymmetry. Patriarchy	Male	Drug abuse. Wrong upbringing

Gender	Responses	Gender	Responses
Female	Lack of parental care. Peer pressure and influence	Male	Lack of education. Cultural practices
Male	Culture. Religion. Lack of policies	Female	<p>I think it's an unbalanced mental state on the side of the violator coupled with the conspiracy of silence on the side of the violated. They don't want to talk, they do not feel safe talking and sometimes, they don't know who to talk to and how to reach the appropriate authorities.</p> <p>The justice system is frail, the antecedent of GBV is the weak and frail justice system that we have in Nigeria</p>
Female	The mentality that it is a man's world	Male	Ignorance from the two sides: Male's Ignorance of the consequences. The female's ignorance of the causes.
Female	Inequality	Female	Lack of freedom. Low financial Power. Family Issues





Gender	Responses	Gender	Responses
Male	Cultural and traditional beliefs. Notion that one gender is more superior than the other. Lack of policy and implementation of gender equality rights.	Male	Drug Abuse. Most times
Female	Lack of political will to implement laws that punish violators. Abolition of customary laws defending the female. In case of rape what evidence does police want to establish the fact that a girl was raped	Female	Struggle by women for jobs, appointments or office positions. Dress code lacking etc
Male	Ignorance. Transfer of aggression. Stereotypes. Cultural biases. Migration. Integration challenges. Historical lapses in Nigeria's formation. Personal choices. Economic competition	Female	Archaic cultural beliefs

<b>MENTION SOME OF THE GBV REPORTING GUIDELINES YOU ARE FAMILIAR WITH</b>	
Protecting survivor's identity. Seek his/her consent before publishing	Maintain the anonymity of the speaker or your source
Not mention the identity of the victim	None
Identity of victims should be protected in the published article, so as to prevent stigmatisation. Home addresses and mobile contacts of victim(s) should be protected for further victimisation and stigmatisation. Alleged perpetrator should be given fair hearing also, until the allegation is fully substantiated. E.t.c	Confidentiality. Objectivity
None at the moment	Concealing the identity of the victim in the case of Rape to avoid stigma
None	Show the image of perpetrator and not the victim. Don't blame the victim. Protect the identity of under-age victim.
Protect the identity of the survivor	Hearing from both parties.
You will not show the face of the victim and will not mention his or her name by means of protecting their image.	Omission of victim's name and photographs when it is involved a minor.
None	Omission of victim's name and photographs when it is involved a minor.
Protecting the victim in reportage. Do not interfere with legal proceedings. Be professional in every way possible	Non disclosure of minors identity



Protecting the victim. Not showing their face. Giving them hope and asking them to speak up and also make sure they are not harassed.	Protection of the victim
Keep the name of the victim confidential.	None
Respect. True fact. Avoiding harm etc.	Protecting identity of victims
None	What is the purpose of reporting GBV? Who is the audience? What is the overall goal: for the victim, the society and sake of justice?
A reporter is not expected to expose identity of victim without their consent	None
Protect the identity of survivors. Not to compound their plight by blaming them. Not to stigmatise them	Confidentiality of source. privacy
To protect the identity of a minor in GBV reporting	Protecting the identity of abused minors
Concealing the identity of some victims to avoid discrimination. Protecting minors. Speaking to law enforcement agencies.	Gender sensitivity. Use of pronouns
Keep identity of underage victim undisclosed	Being factual. Protecting your source. The story should seek for justice and not make the victim depressed/ isolated
Hiding the identity of an underage	I don't know any.
Do not show the victims face.	I don't know any.
Ensuring safety of survivor. Ensuring confidentiality and respecting the survivor	Protect the victim. Get the facts from both sides

Being sensitive to victim’s feelings. Respect for victim’s privacy	The name of the raped victim be withheld
Giving protection to the identities of the victims. Protecting minors when they are the victims. Not using their pictures and seeking their consent	Protect the image of the victim. Names of minors should never be mentioned. Be objective
Victims’ identity protection. Confidentiality. Unbias reportage	Fairness
Avoid using the victims or survivors photos in the article	Withheld names of victims
Journalist should not show or state the name or show faces of survivors to avoid stigmatization in the society.	Protect the identity of a minor.
None	Empathy
Do not expose the girl child in your report	Annonimity of the victim
Censorship of affected minors. Refer to accused persons as alleged actors and not guilty parties. Protect victims from public ridicule	Not to expose victim face or name. Seeking protection for victim. Investigate its clarity before reporting and ensure case been reported to Police
Objectivity	



<b>LIST TYPES OF GBV THAT YOU KNOW e.g. RAPE</b>	
Harassment. Shading	Rape. Harassment. Sexual harassment. Emotional abuse. Biological harassment
Rape. Assault. Female mutilation. Sex trafficking	Rape. Slut-shaming and name calling. Domestic violence. Groping
FGM. GBV. HP	Rape. Domestic violence. Sexual violence. Intimate partner violence
Rape. Murder	
	FGM. Child marriage. Physical assault. Body groping. Slut-shaming. Unwanted touches. Rape
Sexual assault. Body shaming	Religion. Marriage
Rape. Physical assault. Trafficking, e.t.c	Groping
Sexual assault. Verbal assault	Rape. FGM. Marital violence
Sexual Violence. Physical Violence. Emotional and Psychological Violence. Harmful Traditional Practices	Rape. Wife battery
Domestic violence.	Sexual Assaults. Rape. Criminal Assault. Defilement
Sexual harassments by some superiors. Rape. Blackmail. Threat to life etc	Rape. Marital Sexual Assault. Battery. Economic/financial deprivation. Favourism
None	Rape. Torture
Assault. Trafficking. Rape. Defilement. Child marriage. Battery etc	Rape. Beating. Sexual harassment
Old woman. Girls. Menus and Married women.	Rape. Beating. Sexual harassment

Domestic violence. Sexual violence. Physical violence	Rape. Physical assault. Words of abuse
Rape	Violence against women and girls (VAWG). Violence against LGBTI people. Intimate partner violence (IPV). Domestic violence (DV). Sexual violence
Trafficking in women. Sexual abuse. Sexual harassment. Stalking. Child marriage.	Rape. Early marriage. FGM
Psychological violence. Sexual violence such as rape, sexual harassment. Stalking and Economic violence.	Domestic violence
Rape. Verbal assault. Assault	Rape. Forced marriages
Rape. Sexual assault	Rape. Battery. Female genital mutilation
Genital mutilation. Physical and Emotional violence. Domestic violence. Societal violence. Verbal violence	Withholding of due promotions
Rape. Early child marriage. Female genital mutilation. Physical assault	Domestic violence
Rape. Battery. Verbal assault	Domestic violence. Incest. Rape. Verbal assault. Psychological and emotional abuse. Homicide
Rape. Unlawful detention and molestation of a girl-child	Domestic violence
Unlawful possession of women property. Women not being included in land sharing or Igwes cabinet etc	Emotional abuse. Physical abuse. Trauma. Psychological abuse
Rape. Assault (physical, psychological, verbal)	Rape. Domestic violence. Female Genital Mutilation
Female genital mutilation. Child Marriage	Physical punishment. Female genital mutilation. Underage marriage. Human trafficking for sex



Rape. Physical assault. Emotional abuse	Rape. Female genital mutilation. Sexual harassment
Rape. Assault. Harassment	Rape. Social violence
Rape. Stalking. Sexual harassment. FGM. Forced abortion	Rape. Social violence
Rape	Domestic violence
Rape. Beating	Emotional and physical violence. Sex slavery. Child marriage
Rape. Physical abuse. Child marriage. Female genital mutilation and women trafficking	Assault. Emotional and physical abuse
Sexual assaults from lecturers and bosses. Intimidation. Even as a female journalist, most times we get favoured more than our male counterparts but that always comes with a clause.	Rape
Domestic violence. Sexual violence	Rape. Defilement. Emotional Abuse. Domestic Violence
Battery	Rape. Abuse
Battering. Assault	Physical Violence. Physiological Violence. Verbal Violence. Sexual Violence and Domestic Violence
Domestic battery. Rape	Rape. Physical abuse
Sexual harassment	Physical assault
Rape. Battering. Work place assault	Battery. Rape. Emotional trauma
Rape. Assault	Physical Assault. Verbal assault. Psychological assault
Sexual Harassment	Rape. Molestation
Rape. Sexual harassment. Battery	Battery. Neglect
Rape. Physical assault	Rape. Touching without consent. Assault and battery. Verbal Abuse etc

Rape. Domestic violence	Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Woman beating, Women trafficking
Forceful marriage. Sexual harassment. Torture or beating	Domestic Abuse
Verbal Abuse. Physical abuse and under pay	Physical Trauma
Rape. Harassment. Verbal abuse. Threats	Sexual harassment
Battering in Homes. Rape and Assault	Sexual violence. Physical violence. Harmful cultural norm. Psychological violence
Child Labour. Deprivation of widow's right act. Discrimination in work place	

### WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES JOURNALISTS ENCOUNTER WHILE REPORTING GBV?

Victims fail to speak up	Many lack proper knowledge of the topic; inability for survivors to open up about the ordeal makes it hard to effectively tell the story
In most cases, victims do not want to tell their stories.	No idea
Unwillingness of survivor's to talk	Lack of resources
Getting accurate information from members of the community and family members	Unwillingness to open up to investigative journalist. Financial incapability
Emotional trauma	Insecurity. Threats and sabotages by family of victims most times





<p>Funding to Chad the coverage of the events. Safety challenge. Supposed Victim's compromise and willingness to vitiate evidences of the case because of willingness to settle with perpetrators.</p>	<p>Victim's fear of relating their stories. Harassment from the perpetrators. Limited resources useful for reportage</p>
<p>Reluctance of victims/survivors to share in depth information on such a perverse development.</p>	<p>Inadequate information. Lack of cooperation by victims and their families as well as security agents</p>
<p>Journalists face threats and are even killed for reporting the news</p>	<p>Lack of funds and lack of information.</p>
<p>The society feels the issue is over flogged.</p>	<p>Victims not willing to talk. Threats to their life. Discouragement.</p>
<p>Some parents don't want people to know that their wards or children has been molested or the perpetrator may be a wealthy man and has promised a huge some of money so they try to settle within the families or they have been threatened, and that's becomes challenge for the reporter because you can't do the reporter without the will of the victim family.</p>	<p>Gaining access to sources. Getting sources to speak freely. Getting the police to provide necessary document</p>
<p>Attacks. Warnings. Threats. Fact hiding by victims especially on sexual issues</p>	<p>Security concerns. Lack of will to speak by affected persons</p>
<p>Intimidation and assaults</p>	<p>Access to information. Lack of courage by victims or families to speak out intimidation from the perpetrators, and cover up by the law enforcement agency.</p>

Lack of cooperation from parties involved.	Access to information. Lack of courage by victims or families to speak out, intimidation from the perpetrators, and cover up by the law enforcement agency.
Some people use to hide the problem because of stigmatization, and some victim don't speak up and police officer contribute alot.	Unwillingness of those affected to speak
Discrimination. Depression (sometimes)	In most cases, the victims often proving difficult in terms of given out the needed information
Difficulties to get the real facts from the victim	Multiple challenges
Striving to get adequate and well-detailed information from the victims or perpetrators	Reluctance of survivors to speak
Fear. Harassment. Truth facts etc.	Difficulty to get sponsorships
Lack of ethics	When the matter gets to court, it drags and after some times journalists lose interest
Witness intimidation. Contradicting accounts. Limited resources	Unwillingness of victims and family to open up for fear of stigma and shame
Mostly threat	It is considered a routine report
Physical abuse, threats, and scope of the case	Difficulty to get sponsorships
Getting the survivors to talk, problem getting data, lack of cooperation from security operatives .	Victims refusal to talk to reporters in the case of minors. Refusal of parents to talk to reporters. Media's preference for paid stories. Lack of funds by media houses to cover and investigate GBV reports.



Editorial sabotage	Threat
Victims not wanting to speak out because of stigmatization.	Privacy
Ethical issues especially when the victim is a minor.	Sources to interview, evidences to back up claims etc
Victims hardly open up on what happened.	Any form of attack from the abuser. Encouraging victims to tell their stories
Security risks. Emotional trauma.	Cultural and religious barriers
Lack of interest by newsroom	Getting in contact with the victims and other sources on time.
Perpetrators on jail sentence might be freed before their time.	
Information acquisition; are the victims and the accused ready to divulge details beyond the courts? Complicated ethical considerations. Threats and lawsuits.	Lack of full information.
Violence. Threats. Sexual harassment	Lack of full information.
Unwillingness by the victims to open up	Mostly is lack of corporations from the victims or family members
Fear to open up from victims. Families trying to cover up issues and the stigma	Victims unwillingness to divulge information for fear of retribution. Unprofessional behaviour of prosecuting agencies. Long judicial process etc
Most times the victims families are not ready to give details. For their security and also victimisation.	Assault. Physical. Verbal and emotional abuse
Physical. Sexual and online abuse. Threat and intimidation	Threats of violence

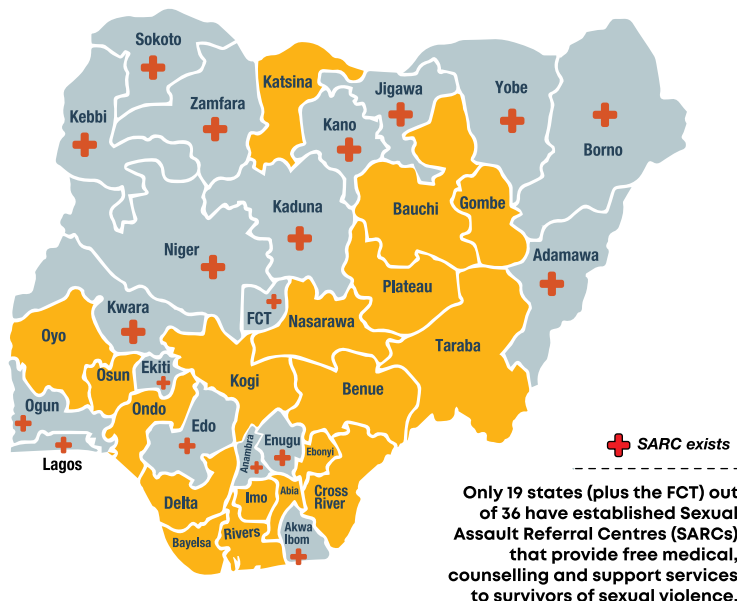
None for now	Failure of victims to speak with the Journalists. Unavailability of corresponding Reports from witnesses.
Security threats. Rejection	In trying to establish the facts, they sometimes get lost and most times cover up from family
Victims not speaking up	Sometimes bound from coverage
Not enough scope and the secretive nature of our culture to protect the perpetrators, which are mostly men	Reliable Sources. Unnecessary exposure to threats and attacks
Threats from perpetrators. Complicity by the police and reluctance by victims to come out to talk	Fund. Time. Security. Other resources like spy cameras etc.
Intimidation and harassment. Physical. Psychological and other forms of violence	Most victims are unwilling to share their experiences because of fear of being victimized.
Lack of sources. Eyewitnesses and evidence	Funding. Victimization
They might be threatened or the victim may decide not to open up completely. Lastly, it is a hard nut to crack in terms of getting Justice in Nigeria.	Most times, victims are not ready to open up to the media, they believe this will expose them to social stigmatization.
Psychological challenges. Data privacy	writing reports without the bias of emotions



Access to Information from survivors and their refusal to speak up	Social and cultural barriers. Non-disclosure by victims.
Ethical challenges. Lack of policies. Inadequate data	The conspiracy of silence on the side of the violated. Managed realities. Brown envelope. Presence of Minors in the reporting process etc
Lack of resources	Unwillingness of victims to open up.
Getting victims to speak up most especially in the northern part of Nigeria.	Lack of cooperation on the part of the victim bas they do not want to be mentioned
Victims or their families may not be willing to cooperate for fear of stigmatisation. Intimidation especially when religion or culture is involved. Perception that GBV is "not as critical" as the news deems it to be.	Physical Abuse
No cooperation from security agents. Most times parents or relatives of victims shy away from facing the fact. Government is the worst culprit. They treat it as non-issue because it doesn't directly affect them	Threat to life. Lack of financial support and protection
Evidence sourcing. Willingness of survivors and their families to volunteer information. Stifling legal frameworks. Security agencies	I am yet to find out but I feel most victims may not be free to open up

## Appendix 3

# Directory of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) in Nigeria



	State	Name of SARC	Location and Address	Centre Manager Name, Email, Phone Number	SARC Hotline(s) / Handles
1	Adamawa	Hope Centre 1	ADSACA building State Specialist Hospital Jimeta, Yola	Dr Usha Saxena 08069710461 ushasaxena@gmail.com hopecenteryola@gmail.com	07068339913 hopecenteryola@gmail.com
2	Adamawa	Hope Centre 2	General Hospital, Numan	Paula G. Tumbwem 07035082504 paulagtumbwem@gmail.com	To be provided



3	Akwa-Ibom	Agape Centre	Immanuel General Hospital, Eket	Anietie Ikpe 08023009220 anie_ntem@yahoo.com agapesarc@yahoo.com	0907777433, 09090000648 09050797650, 09067773008 agapesarc@yahoo.com Twitter: @AgapeSarc
4	Anambra	Ntasi Centre	General Hospital Enugwu-Ukwu Njikoka Local Government Area, Anambra	Bernadette Uchendu 08066306402 uchebern@yahoo.com	09066916915, 09049224086
5	Borno	Nelewa Centre	Umar Shehu Ultra-modern Hospital, Maiduguri	Fati Mustapha 08161838555 mustaphafati209@gmail.com N3lewacentre@gmail.com	08028982947 N3lewacentre@gmail.com Twitter: @N3lewaCentre Facebook: @N3lewa center
6	Edo	Vivian Centre	1 Coronation Avenue, Besides Edi International Hospital, GRA Benin City	Dr. Georgina Eromosele 08052322280 ginaeroms@gmail.com	HOTLINES: 07046055026, 08054461139 Toll free line: 0800 200 2020
7	Ekiti	Ekiti SARC (Moremi Clinic)	Moremi Clinic, ART building, Ekiti State University Teaching Hospital (EKSUTH), Ado-Ekiti	Barrister Rita Ilevbare 08033581144 ritailevbare@gmail.com ekitisarc@gmail.com	07050752287 07039786904 ekitisarc@gmail.com Facebook: Ekiti SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre)

8	Enugu	Enugu State Government Tamar SARC	Family Support Programme Building, Opposite College of Education Technical, Abakaliki Road, Enugu	Evelyn Ngozi Onah 08068528819 ngozievelyn96@yahoo.com ensgtamarsarc@yahoo.com	08060084441, 07032567458 ensgtamarsarc@yahoo.com Twitter: SarcTamar Facebook: ENUGU Tamar SARC
9	Enugu	WACOL Tamar SARC Ulo Umunwanyi (The Women House)	Women Aid Collective (WACOL) Nigeria Office 9 Dr. Mathias Iloh Avenue New Haven Extension by Flyover & Behind New Haven Secondary School, Emene Express, Enugu	Egodi Blessing Igwe 08136836588 09060002128 wacolnig@gmail.com	09091333000, 09060002128 09092777000, 08155850000 (Anambra branch) wacolnig@gmail.com Live chat with counsellors @ www.wacolnigeria.org Twitter: WACOL Tamar SARC Facebook: WACOL Tamar SARC Instagram: wacol_nigeria
10	Abuja	The CeCe Yara Child Advocacy Centre	D2, Salatu Royale Estate Wuse zone 2 Abuja.	Dayo Ogunbiyi oogunbiyi@ceceyara.org 07032353516	Helplines: · Help for children and young people. Call Child helpline on 08008008001 · Help for adults concerned about a child. Call us on 07007007001 help@ceceyara.org Twitter: @cece_yara Instagram: @cece_yara Facebook: @The Cece Yara Foundation





11	FCT Abuja	Awyetu SARC	Bwari General Hospital, Abuja	Dr Oyetundun Afolabi 08035859724 WhatsApp: 07055363830 oyetundun4real@yahoo.com bghsarc@gmail.com	Hotline: 09134668737
12	Jigawa	Jigawa SARC	Dutse General Hospital 10 Kiyawa Road, Dutse, Jigawa	Dr Abbas Yau Garba 09033035588 yauichd2013@gmail.com	09033035588, 08069444225 Facebook: @Jigawa Sexual Assault Referral Center Twitter: @JigawaCenter
13	Kaduna	Salama Centre 1	Gwamna Awan General Hospital, Kakuri, Kaduna	Julianna Joseph 08033837025 julieneemalachy@gmail.com salamasarc2017@gmail.com	08092049888, 09029991140 07018160776, 09032063303 salamasarc2017@gmail.com Twitter: @SalamaSarc Facebook: @Salama Sarc
14	Kaduna	Salama Centre 2	Yusuf Dantsoho Memorial Hospital, Tundun Wada, Kaduna	Sidikat Adegboye Bello 08092899741 08092877682 cdqah2@yahoo.com Salamacenter19@gmail.com	09011578622, 08063968541 08024440733, 07030896901 Salamacenter19@gmail.com Twitter: @SalamaSarc Facebook: @Salama Sarc
15	Kaduna	Salama Centre 3	Gambo Sawaba General Hospital, Zaria, Kaduna	Amina Ladan 08065826024	0809331481, 08093314800 08093314855, 08093314844 salamacentrezaria@gmail.com Twitter: @SalamaSarc Facebook: @Salama Sarc
16	Kaduna	Salama Centre 4	Ibrahim Patrick Yakowa General Hospital, Kafanchan, Kaduna	Grace Abbin Yohanna 08035869981 08148026802 graceyabbin@gmail.com	09061503384, 09067528082 09032488802 salamasarcKaf@gmail.com Twitter: @SalamaSarc Facebook: @Salama Sarc

17	Kano	Waraka SARC	Murtala Muhammad Specialist Hospital, Kano	Dr Nasir Garko 08065340578 nasgak@gmail.com	09028944933, 09030424123 warakasarkano@gmail.com
18	Kebbi	Mai Talle Tara SARC	Kalgo Medica Centre. Birnin Kebbi	Safiya Isah 07063532324 safiyakamba209@gmail.com	08061434873 maitalletarasarckb@gmail.com @maitalletarasarckb
19	Kwara	Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Ilorin	Inside Juvenile Correctional Home, Oko-Erin, Ilorin.	Adesola Bolanle Ogungbemi 08034997673 ogungbemibolanle63@gmail.com	08033580150 08060697833 kwsqwomenaffairs@gmail.com
20	Lagos	Mirabel Centre	Lagos State University Teaching Hospital (LASUTH), Ikeja, Lagos	Juliet Olumuyiwa-Rufai 07013491769 julietmyjewel@yahoo.com	07013491769, 08187243468 08155770000 sarc@pjnigeria.org Twitter: @MirabelCentreNG Instagram: @mirabelcentreng Facebook: @MirabelCentre- Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Lagos
21	Lagos	Women at Risk Foundation (WARIF) Centre	6 Turton Street, Off Thorburn Avenue, Yaba, Lagos	Dr Aniekan Makanjuola 07060568196 bridget.makanjuola@warifng.org	08092100009 info@warifng.org Twitter: @WARIF_NG Instagram: @warif_ng Facebook: @WARIFNG



22	Lagos	The CeCe Yara Child Advocacy Centre	2A Akin Ogunmade Davies Close, Gbagada Phase 2, Lagos	Grace Ketefe 09085692623 gketefe@ceceyara.org  Bisi Ajayi-Kayode 09085692612 08034083896 oajayi-kayode@ceceyara.org help@ceceyara.org	<p>Helplines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Help for children and young people. Call Child helpline on 08008008001</li> <li>-Help for adults concerned about a child. Call us on 07007007001 help@ceceyara.org</li> </ul> <p>Twitter: @cece_yara Instagram: @cece_yara Facebook: @The Cece Yara Foundation</p>
23	Lagos	Idera Centre	Alimosho General Hospital Igando Lagos	Moromoke Babatunde-Martins 08035935086 WhatsApp: 08035935086 Momart112@gmail.com	08150473831 09055891612 iderasac@gmail.com iderasarc@alimoshogh.com Instagram: iderasarc
24	Niger	Rayuwa Centre	Police Clinic Stadium Road, Unguwa Daji, Minna	Dr Yinka Umeh 08188107782 yinkaumeh@yahoo.com	07030735333, 07038991160 rayuwasarc@yahoo.com Twitter: @SARCRayuwa Instagram: @sarcrayuwa Facebook: @SARC Rayuwa
25	Ogun	The Spring Centre	Babalola Ti'lase Owu close, Ikereku-Ayedun, behind Laderin Workers Estate, Oke- Mosan, Abeokuta,	Damola Lapite 08034268616 Jnmhi81@hotmail.com	08113931752 thespringcentre@yahoo.com Twitter: @centre_spring Instagram: @thespringcentre

26	Ogun	Ogun State SARC	Olabisi Onabanjo University Teaching Hospital (OOUTH), Sagamu		
27	Sokoto	Nana Khadija Centre	Sokoto Specialist Hospital, Sultan Abubakar Road, Sokoto	Adamu Florence Danladi 07061907725 08093959527 flowiedee@gmail.com	07042274748, 07042001983 09041625256 nanakhadjacentre@gmail.com Twitter: @NanaKcentre Instagram: @nanakhadjacentre Facebook: @Nana Khadija Centre
28	Yobe	Shifa Centre	Family Support Unit, Women and Children Hospital, Gashua Road, Damaturu	Dr Mahmud Maji Abdulkadir 08060438111 mahmudmaji@gmail.com	07035140037
29	Yobe	Potiskum SARC	General Hospital Potiskum, Hausawa Asibiti Road	Hauwa Idris 08067273197 Hauwaidriss2@gmail.com	08025887545



30	Yobe	Nguru SARC	Federal Medical Centre, Nguru, Nguru Town, Yobe	Dr. Badirudeen Giwa 08130048911 successfulbadirudeen@gmail.com	
31	Yobe	Gashau SARC	General Hospital, Gashua	Jawi Garba Gashua 08024371185	
32	Yobe	Geidam SARC	General Hospital, Geidam	Dr. Ahmad Ligali 07039662660 ahmedligali80@gmail.com	
33	Zamfara	Sexual Assault Referral Center, Gusau	King Fahad Women and Children Hospital, Samuru, Gusau	Muazu Anaruwa 08037355396 muazuanaruwa@yahoo.com	08035577891, 08067816263 zamfarasarc@gmail.com

This Directory of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) is adapted from **HERSTORYOURSTORY** - <https://www.herstoryourstory.ng/>

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6	Charmaine Pereira, PhD	Independent scholar-activist working on issues of sexuality and women's empowerment, feminist thought and practice, and women's relations to the state.
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