



GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) IN THE NEW NORMAL: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECT NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER'S COVERAGE

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Abstract

Gender-based violence has become a social issue that calls for appropriate media coverage to highlight its threat to society. There have been more cases of rape, physical abuse, domestic violence, and sexual assault/exploitation, all of which have received little to no media attention. Hence, this paper examined Gender-based Violence in the New Normal: a Comparative Analysis of Selected Nigerian Newspaper's Coverage. The objective of this study is to ascertain the frequency of gender-based violence and comparatively analyse gender-based violence in the two selected newspapers: *The Punch* and *The Guardian* newspapers, which were purposively selected for the study. The Agenda Setting theory was adopted to understand how much importance the media places on issues to shape the public discussion. A quantitative analysis design was adopted for the study, and a coding sheet was used for data collection. To establish a comparative analysis of gender-based violence reports, Saturday newspapers from July to December 2019 (the period just before the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic) and January to June 2022 (the most recent publications) are selected for this study. The coverage of gender-based violence cases in selected Nigerian newspapers varied significantly between 2019 and 2022. As a result, more cases of sexual gender-based violence were reported in the selected newspapers in 2019, while more cases of physical gender-based violence were reported in 2022. Findings also revealed that, in terms of gender-based violence cases, the Punch newspaper outweighed the Guardian newspaper between 2019 and 2022.





Findings also revealed that, in terms of gender-based violence cases, the Punch newspaper outweighed the Guardian newspaper between 2019 and 2022. The study concluded that there is insufficient coverage of cases of gender-based violence. It is recommended that the media should educate and sensitise people of all ages and social classes about the underlying cause causes of violence and how to prevent it.

Keywords: Gender Based Violence, New Normal, Newspaper coverage, Nigeria, Content Analysis

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Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a global phenomenon that is becoming a more common and pervasive human rights violation issue. It can take the form of sexual, verbal, physical, emotional, or financial abuse (Edwards & Sharpe, 2004; Obidike & Ezeabasili, 2020; Chime, Nduagubam & Orji, 2022). Though any gender can be a victim of gender-based violence; studies (Okolo&Okolo, 2018; Gilbertson & Pandit, 2019; Ekweonu, 2020) show that women are disproportionately affected, particularly in patriarchal cultures and societies. Chime, Nduagubam, and Orji (2022) claim that GBV survivors suffer debilitating short- and long-term effects on their physical and mental health, including varying degrees of physical injury, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, limited ability to complete daily tasks, anxiety, and, in severe cases, death.

GBV is said to be endemic in Nigeria, with factors such as insurgency, economic downturn, weak legal systems, and gender inequality, among others, facilitating it (Ekweonu, 2020; Chime, Nduagubam & Orji, 2022). However, with the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 which brought about a 'new normal' in almost every sphere of life, studies (UN Nigeria, 2020; Townsend, 2020; UN Women, n.d.) show a spike in GBV cases. According to an Oxfam report (2021), the pandemic devastated efforts to prevent and respond to GBV and catalyzed an explosion in global GBV case numbers, as data retrieved from 10 countries showed calls to GBV helplines increased by 25 to 111% in the first months of the pandemic. Also, following a series of reports on



physical and sexual violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, Nigeria declared a state of emergency on GBV in June 2020, resulting in sex offender registries and harsher punishment for offenders (WHO, n.d. cited in Chime, Nduagubam & Orji, 2022).

The media, particularly newspapers, serve as the watchdog of society and a medium for public enlightenment on GBV-related issues when performing their surveillance function. They are dominant forces capable of focusing attention on GBV and framing the debate. Studies examining the frequency with which newspapers and other news outlets report on GBV and associated issues are thus necessary.

Although, studies (Obidike & Ezeabasili, 2020; Ekweonu, 2020) have been conducted to examine how the media framed and reported GBV cases during the COVID-19 pandemic, scant attention has been paid to the frequency of coverage or comparing it to coverage before the COVID-19 pandemic. Against this backdrop, this study examined newspaper coverage of GBV by select Nigerian Newspapers to see if indeed, there has been a spike in GBV related cases in the new normal.

Objectives of the study

The following objectives informed the present study;

1. To ascertain the frequency of GBV in selected Nigerian Newspapers in 2019 and 2022.
2. To comparatively analyse the coverage of GBV in the selected Nigerian Newspapers in 2019 and 2022.

Theoretical framework

The Agenda Setting Theory is the foundation of this study. It was first proposed in 1972 by Maxwell McCombs and Donald. L. Shaw (Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso, 2008). According to the theory, the media asserts influence on determining the importance placed on various issues in the public (Miller, 2002). To put it another way, if the media focuses on a problem, it is more likely to be considered a top priority by the general public (Miller, 2002). However, if the media chooses to ignore an issue, regardless of how important it is to the development of society, the issue may not be subject to public debate (McCombs, 2004).

The theory also discusses how much importance the audience places on an issue based on information in a news story and the persistence with which it is reported. According to Anaeto et al (2008), the Agenda Setting theory postulates that what people know about public issues tends to be those that the mass media presents to them,

and the importance they ascribe to issues tends to be proportional to the amount of attention given to the issue in the media. According to media experts, by giving a specific topic prominent treatment in their agenda over time, the mass media would have succeeded in convincing the audience that the issue is indeed important (Nwafor, Odoemelam & Duru, 2013). The theory is relevant to the current study because it explains the frequency of GBV cases reported in newspapers and the importance attached to it by the public.

Empirical review

During the COVID-19 lockdown, Ekweonu (2020) conducted a study on newspaper coverage of domestic violence against women. The study examined how domestic violence against women was covered in select Nigerian newspapers- The Daily Sun, Vanguard, and Guardian newspapers. The study period covered a total of 100 days which translates to 300 publications of the three newspapers under investigation. Content Analysis research was used to elicit data from the three papers. Findings showed that domestic violence against women received neither prominence nor adequate coverage during the lockdown period. It was also discovered that newspapers rarely followed up on their stories about domestic violence during the time period. The researcher concluded that the selected newspapers performed poorly in their coverage of domestic violence during the study period.

Obidike & Ezeabasili (2020) conducted a study titled 'Coverage of Gender-Based Violence in IDP Camps: A critical Analysis of select Nigerian Newspapers'. The study sought to find out where to find the kind of gender-based violence mostly reported in select Nigerian newspapers, find out whether gender-based violence against women in IDP camps were adequately covered in the media and the dominant media frame used in the coverage of gender-based violence against women in IDP camps. The study adopted content analysis research method. The study was anchored on social responsibility, agenda-setting and framing theories of mass communication. Findings from the study revealed that that the media did not give adequate report to gender-based violence against women in IDP camps. Findings also revealed that contents failed to frame the acts in such a way that can expose the implications of the crimes in order to attract public condemnation and legal consequences. It was equally observed that sexual violence is the kind of gender based violence mostly reported with defenselessness frame dominating the media frame of reports among the newspapers understudied. The researchers therefore, recommended that media outlets should frame their reports on GBV in a way that the act and encourages victims to seek justice and speak up.

Ochonogor, Nwachukwu & Itaman (2022) conducted a study on Newspaper Coverage of Violence against Women in Nigeria. Agenda setting theory and media dependency theory were the theoretical foundations for the study. Content Analysis research method was used to elicit data from four Nigerian Newspapers - The Punch, Vanguard, The Pioneer and The Post newspapers. The study period covered 13 months (January 1, 2020 and January 31, 2021). The study's goals were to determine the type and extent of reporting on violence against women in Nigerian newspapers, evaluate the prominence and depth of reporting given to this topic, and look at the formats in which this topic is covered in Nigerian newspapers. According to the findings, sexual violence-related stories were widely reported in The Punch, Vanguard, The Pioneer, and The Post newspapers. When compared to other issues covered in newspapers during the study period, violence against women received far less coverage. Issues of violence against women were given prominence in the select newspapers. As a result, the researchers concluded that the issue of violence against women was not adequately covered in the selected newspapers. It was therefore recommended that Nigerian newspapers increase their coverage of stories involving violence against women, as doing so will aid in bringing such issues to the fore and eliciting a response from the audience, thereby stemming the tide of GBV.

Methodology

To adequately gather the needed data for this study, the quantitative content analysis design is adopted. In this design, two Nigerian newspapers- *Punch* and *Guardian* (Nigerian newspapers with the highest circulation figures) are purposively selected for the study. To establish a comparative analysis of gender-based violence reports, Saturday newspapers from July to December, 2019 (the period just before the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic) and January to June, 2022 (the most recent publications) are selected for this study. Saturday is selected among the other days of the week as more human-interest stories are reported on weekends and Saturdays in particular. The newspapers for the stated months were collected by the researchers in a library newspaper archive.

A researcher manually-designed coding sheet is used to code identified gender-based violence stories in the selected months. These stories are coded based on the coding themes in the coding sheet. The coding sheet includes these themes/categories- article position, type of article, gender of the doer and the victim, the sort of gender-based violence and a category to code the response of the society/government to the offender. The researchers manually coded the newspaper articles, analysed and presented in frequency tables.

Data presentation

Frequency Distribution of GBV Cases in Nigeria

Data was gathered from the Guardian and the Punch newspapers. The table below contains the cases reported in the selected national dailies as indicated above. The study duration was July - December 2019 and January – June 2022 for both the Punch and Guardian newspapers.

TABLE 1- PUNCH NEWSPAPER
JULY – DECEMBER 2019

S/N	Type of Article	Gender	Doer	Done to	Guilty	Innocent	GBV Positioning	Published Days (GBV Cases)
JULY 2019								
1	News (3)	Male (2) Female (1)	Female (2) Male (1)	Male (2) Female (1)	2	1	Inside page Pg 29, 30, 31	6 th July 2019 13 th July 2019 (Saturdays)
AUGUST 2019								
2	Interview (1)	Female (1)	Male (1)	Female (1)	1	-	Inside page Pg 21	17 th August 2019 (Saturdays)
SEPTEMBER 2019								
3	News (4)	Female (4)	Male (4)	Female (4)	4	-	Inside page Pg 27, 32 & 33	14 th September 2019 28 th September 2019 (Saturdays)
OCTOBER 2019								
4	News (3) Feature (1)	Female (4)	Female (1) Male (3)	Male (-) Female (4)	4	-	Inside page	5, 12, 19 and 26 October 2019 (Saturdays)
NOVEMBER 2019								
5	News (4) Interview (1)	Female (5)	Male (5)	Female (5)	5	-	Inside page	2, 9, 16, 19, 23 and 30 November 2019 (Saturdays)
DECEMBER 2019								

6	News (3)	Female (2) Male (1)	Male (2) Female (1)	Female (2) Male (1)	3	-	Inside page	14, 21, 28 and 29 December 2019 (Saturdays)
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Source: Researchers' Field Survey 2022

As presented in Table 1, most of the reported gender-based violence stories were news articles, featuring more women than men- where the men were mainly the doers and the women were victims/recipients of the violence. These stories were reported on the inside pages of the Punch newspaper. In November 2019, however, there were more sexual gender-based violence reports than the other months. Gender-based violence stories were covered and reported on all Saturdays in October, November and December, unlike the first 3 months analysed. More often than not, the offenders were reported to have been punished after apprehension in the analysed reports. Only one person was reported to be innocent in the month of July.

**TABLE 2- GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER
JULY – DECEMBER 2019**

S/N	Type of Article	Gender	Doer	Done to	Guilty	Innocent	GBV Positioning	Published Days (GBV Cases)
JULY 2019								
1	News (1)	Male (1)	Male (1)	Female (1)	1	-	Inside page Pg 10	20 th July 2019 (Saturday)
AUGUST 2019								
2	News (1)	Female (1)	Male (1)	Female (1)	1	-	Inside page Pg 9	24 th August 2019 (Saturday)
SEPTEMBER 2019								
3	News (2) Cartoon (1)	Female (3)	Male (3)	Female (3)	3	-	Inside page Pg 31, 41 & 43	14 th & 28 September 2019
NOVEMBER 2019								

4	Interview (1) Opinion (1)	Male (2)	Male (2)	Female (2)	2	-	Inside page Pg 17 & 18	2 and 16 November 2019 (Saturdays)
DECEMBER 2019								
5	News (1) Opinion (1)	Female (2)	Male (2)	Female (2)	2	-	Inside page	22 and 29 December 2019 (Saturdays)

Source: Researchers' Field Survey 2022

From the data presented in Table 2, gender-based violence issues were reported on one or two Saturdays each from July to December in the Guardian newspaper. Through the months, males were the doers while the females were the victims of the violence. All of these reports were on inside pages of the newspapers gathered and there were more sexual than physical violence reports, as reflected in the table. Through the months, the doers were all guilty and there was no record of an innocent person.

**TABLE 3- PUNCH NEWSPAPER
JANUARY – JUNE 2022**

S / N	Type of Article	Gender	Doer	Done to	Guilty	Innocent	GBV Positioning	Published Days (GBV Cases)
JANUARY 2022								
1	News (3)	Female (3)	Male (3)	Female (3)	3	-	Inside page	January 1, 8, 15, 22 & 29, 2022 (Saturday)
FEBRUARY 2022								
2	News (1) Feature (1)	Female (2)	Male (2)	Female (2)	2	-	Inside page	February 5, 6, 12 & 22 (Saturday & Sunday)
MARCH 2022								

3	News (3) Opinion (1)	Male (1) Female (3)	Male (3) Female (1)	Female (3) Male (1)	4	-	Inside page	March 5, 12, 19 & 26, 2022 (Saturday)
APRIL 2022								
4	News (5) Cartoon (3)	Male (2) Female (6)	Male (6) Female (2)	Female (6) Male (2)	8	-	Inside page Pg 6, 9, 11, 22 & 18	April 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30, 2022 (Saturdays)
MAY 2022								
5	News (4) Feature (1) Opinion (1)	Female (3) Male (3)	Male (6)	Female (3) Male (3)	6	-	Inside page Pg 14, 15, 18, 20 & 24	7, 14, 21 and 28 May 2022 (Saturdays)
JUNE 2022								
6	News (1)	Female (1)	Male (1)	Female (1)	6	-	Inside page Pg 7	7 June 2022 (Saturdays)

Source: Researchers' Field Survey 2022

In Table 3, there are more reports of gender-based violence issues in the Punch newspaper from January to June, 2022; than in 2019. There is a wider coverage as more inside pages covered the issues. Offenders are punished more than not and the doers were reported as guilty. There is no report of an innocent case and the doers were males, except in March and April where there were records of a few females being the doers. The victims were predominantly female, while a few males were reported.

**TABLE 4- GUARDIAN NEWSPAPER
JANUARY – JUNE 2022**

S/ N	Type of Articl e	Gend er	Doer	Done to	Guilty	Innocent	GBV Positioni ng	Published Days (GBV Cases)
JANUARY 2022								
1	News (2)	Fema le (2)	Male (2)	Female (2)	2	-	Inside page	January 1, 8, 15 & 22, 2022 (Saturday)
FEBRUARY 2022								
2	News (2)	Fema le (2)	Male (2)	Female (2)	2	-	Inside page	February 27 (Saturday)
MARCH 2022								
3	Cele brity Intervi ew (1)	Fema le (1)	Male (1)	Female (1)	1	-	Inside page	March 5, 2022 (Saturday)
APRIL 2022								
4	News (2) Carto on (1)	Fema le (3)	Male (3)	Female (3)	3	-	Inside page Pg 5 & 29	April 2, 16, 23 & 30, 2022 (Saturdays)
MAY 2022								
5	Carto on (1) Opini on (1)	Fema le (2)	Male (2)	Female (2)	2	-	Inside page Pg 14 & 20	May & 14 2022 (Saturdays)
JUNE 2022								

6	News (2) Cartoon (2)	Female (2) Male (2)	Male (4)	Female (2) Male (2)	4	-	Inside page Pg 5 & 30	June 4 & 25 2022 (Saturdays)
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Source: Researchers' Field Survey 2022

From January to June, the Guardian newspaper's report of gender-based violence issues were a combination of news stories, celebrity interview, cartoon and opinion articles. The doers/offenders in January to March were reported to be on-going cases and some while were not indicated, except one case where the offender was to be punished. All the reports were on the inside pages of the gathered newspapers and included a variety of sexual, physical and emotional forms of violence.

Table 5- Frequency of GBV Cases reported by Punch & Guardian Newspaper

2019				
GBV Cases	Frequency		%	
	Punch	Guardian		
News	17	5	85	55.6
Opinion	-	2	-	22.2
Cartoon	-	1	-	11.1
Feature	1	-	5	-
Interview	2	1	10	11.1
	20	9	100	

Source: Researchers' Field Survey 2022

In 2019, there were a total of 29 gender-based violence stories covered by the Punch and Guardian newspapers from July to

December. Punch newspaper had more covered stories than the Guardian. Of all these stories, news stories were the most reported. Punch covered just one feature article and Guardian had opinion and cartoon coverages.

Table 6- Frequency of GBV Cases reported by Punch & Guardian Newspaper

2022				
GBV Cases	Frequency		%	
	Punch	Guardian	(100)	
News	17	8	70.8	57.1
Opinion	2	1	8.3	7.1
Cartoon	3	4	12.5	28.6
Feature	2	-	8.3	-
Interview	-	1	-	7.1
	24	14	100	

Source: Researchers' Field Survey 2022

In 2022, there were more gender-based violence stories covered in both newspapers than in 2019. There were more news stories than the other genres. The Guardian reported one interview on gender-based violence and Punch reported 2 feature stories.

Discussion of findings

According to the research done for the study, GBV cases reported in Nigerian newspapers originated as news stories. In 2019, sexual GBV cases were the most common, while physical GBV cases were the most common in 2022. There were not many GBV instances that were both physical and damaging as well as sexual. The study's results indicate that there is limited coverage of GBV cases. The proposal of Bazza, (2010), which discovered that sexual harassment is the most prevalent form of gender-based violence against women, supports this conclusion. Uwaoma, Umenze, Ifeoma, and Nwamadu (2020) also pointed out that GBV cases have not received enough attention in media coverage. Findings from the study also revealed that some

cases of GBV cases were domestic violence cases, some of which the guilty party meting out the abuse was the female gender. Reporting on incidents of GBV in Nigerian media has drawn attention to rape, domestic violence, and other issues. Okoli and Arinze (2018) conducted research to look into the role of the media in domestic violence. The study reaffirmed that the media is acknowledged on a global scale as a socialization agent that shapes the values, attitudes, and opinions of society. Therefore, they must intervene and start the education process to stop violence and abuse in our culture. A media education campaign should educate people of all ages and social classes on the core causes of violence in their neighborhoods. The coverage of GBV cases in the selected Nigerian Newspapers in 2019 and 2022 were at a huge variant. Findings emanating from the field survey revealed that the Punch newspaper in the year 2019 and 2022 outweighed the reportorial prowess of the Guardian newspaper where GBV cases were concerned. This was evident in coding categories used in the course of this study.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, GBV is a common social problem which according to UNDP Nigeria, is not reported most of the time which has made it difficult to identify the gaps in GBV reporting. According to literature, restrictions and implications from the COVID-19 pandemic is sad to have contributed to the rise in gender-based violence in the country. This brought us to the subject matter; GBV in the new normal. We sought to ascertain whether there was an increase in GBV-related cases during the COVID pandemic, the study examined a sample of the coverage of the topic in Nigerian newspapers, comparing the frequencies of GBV-related cases before and after the pandemic.

Findings indicated that there was a spike in Gender Based Violence post COVID-19 pandemic, with both the Punch and Guardian newspapers reporting higher cases in 2022. The study found that sexual and physical acts of violence were the most frequent, with emotional acts of violence trailing behind. However, study also revealed that the Guardian newspaper compared to the Punch, performed poorly in its coverage of domestic violence during the study periods.

Recommendations

In response to finding ways to curb Gender-Based violence, it is recommended that:

1. There be more education regarding sexual and gender-based violence as well as more campaigning in favour of legislative changes to deter GBV.



2. To further inform the public and raise awareness of the issue, media outlets should treat their coverage of GBV with greater seriousness.
3. Gender Based Violence Command Centers should be established around the nation to handle all GBV related emergencies.
4. The contributing factors which lead to GBV should be publicly addressed frequently in order to alter society's prevalent gendered attitude and beliefs.



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