



Research Article

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Perception of Gender-Based Violence Against Males Among Newspapers' Audience in Lagos State

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ABSTRACT

The increasing cases of violence against males in Nigeria are undermined by patriarchal masculine beliefs that view males as perpetrators, and females as primary victims of GBV. Media scholars highlight that the media significantly influence gender norms, shape public perception, and can challenge harmful socio-cultural practices. This study examines how online readers of Punch and Vanguard newspapers perceive GBV against males, using perception theory and media framing theory as its framework. The study highlights the relationship between media exposure and audience perception of GBV against males. The result of the study indicates that greater exposure to GBV against male increases acknowledgment of male victimhood particularly against adult males but does not eliminate gender bias of female vulnerability as the respondents consider female victims as primary victims of GBV. The study recommends public sensitisation on male-targeted violence for better societal recognition, and a review of the framing of male victims. This will encourage discourse and facilitate the development of laws and policies aimed at protecting male victims.

INTRODUCTION

Public awareness and discourse on Gender Based-Violence (GBV) emerged in the late 1960s during the second wave of women's movement, to counter male-perpetrated violence against women (Wolf, 2013). The global recognition of the women's movement gave rise to the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the first international platform to explicitly address GBV. Although pivotal, its focus on women created the impression that GBV is solely a female issue. Nevertheless, many scholars argue that the misconception stems from the high rate of violence inflicted on female victims globally and the prevalence of gender stereotypes (Adebayo, 2014; Carlyle et al., 2014; USAID, 2020). The World Health Organisation (2013) describes GBV as vicious acts affecting males and females but of which the female is mostly impacted due to entrenched gender imbalance.

Consequently, several international bodies have implemented projects that are primarily aimed at protecting women and girls (Carlyle et al., 2014; World Bank Group, 2019) while male victims seem to have been side-lined with insufficient social, governmental, or legal support. Social and cultural expectations that males should be tough, strong, and self-reliant have hindered male sufferers from reporting abuse for fear of disbelief, stigmatization, or ridicule (Burke, 2021; Margherita et al; 2021; Moore, 2021) and empower females to oppress their male counterparts unnoticed (Adebayo, 2014; Dolan, 2014). It is almost impossible to acknowledge females as perpetrators in societies where they are perceived as inherently weak and submissive (Dolan, 2014). This is typical of patriarchal societies which thrive on socio-cultural practices and beliefs that reinforces male superiority (Adebayo, 2014; Ademulika,

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2018; Sikweyiya et al, 2020) including ideas such as men's right to discipline and control their wives; sex as a man's right; domestic violence as a private issue; divorce as a shameful occurrence; female genital mutilation as a means to mitigate promiscuity etc. (World Bank Group, 2019). A study by Manful, Appiah and Gyasi-Boadu (2016) reveals that domestic violence against women has been normalised among teenagers in Ghana. As a result, females are widely construed as major victims, while males are seen as the perpetrators (Bozkurt et al, 2015; Margherita et al, 2021; Moore, 2021). This makes male victimhood incongruous within a male egoistic society.

The misconstruction of GBV as violence against females is contested by the increasing reported cases of male victims not only in Nigeria but globally. The trend of young boys being physically, emotionally and sexually violated has become common across the nation. A prominent incident is the alleged death of 12-year-old Sylvester from multiple internal injuries, reportedly inflicted by senior students at his boarding school in Lagos (Asough, 2021). A year earlier, there was a case of the alleged physical and sexual molestation of a junior secondary school student at Deeper Life High School, Uyo (Ukpong, 2021). Additionally, in July 2021, the Bi-annual report of Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT) states that 194 men were assaulted by their partners (Premium Times, 2021). Current studies in Western societies have also indicated that men suffer various forms of violence especially from their partners (Carlyle et al., 2014; Margherita et al, 2021; Moore, 2021). This shows that males are as vulnerable as females.

Scholars have noted that the acknowledgement of violence against males is comparatively low (Adebayo, 2014; Ademulika, 2018; Sikweyiya et al, 2020). According to the National Population Commission of Nigeria et al (2016), changing the beliefs and social norms that normalize and hide violence is vital in preventing violence from occurring. The media plays a phenomenal role in creating awareness and shaping public perception, understanding and behaviours regarding social issues including gender (Akarika et al., 2019; Njoroge, 2016). Given the limited social discourse on violence against males, the public tends to rely on the media to understand the issue. However, gender inequality is rampant in media content and repetitive use of gender stereotypes will affect public's perception of reality (Olaseinde & Ogwuche, 2022). Considering the growing media report of male victims of GBV, there is a gap in knowledge on public awareness and perception on the issue. Existing research has largely focused on female victims and audience responses to media portrayals of GBV (Akarika et al., 2019; Manful et al., 2016; Olaseinde & Ogwuche, 2022). This study therefore seeks to explore the perception of Nigerian newspapers' audience on GBV against males. It establishes the relationship between audience perception

and exposure to newspaper articles on male victims. The study will enhance integration of gender considerations in policy formation and support systems in addressing GBV worldwide.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Patriarchy And Social Construction Of Gender And Violence

Gender as a social construct dictates the roles, behaviours, and attributes assigned to males and females, often categorized as masculine and feminine (Eisend & Roßner, 2022; Mwai, 2016). Masculinity refers to roles, behaviours and traits considered appropriate for males, while femininity refers to roles, behaviours, and qualities suitable for females (UN Women, 2016). Masculine traits include physical toughness, rationality, independence, aggressiveness and bravery while feminine traits include submissiveness, emotionality, physical weakness, dependence and fearfulness (Kumar, 2012; Tennakoon, 2021). Evidently, there is a wide gap between societal expectations for males and females, which creates a dichotomy between the genders. Gender construction has also influenced power structures positioning males as superiors to females (Kumar, 2012; Ottosen & Cheng, 2012). Men dominate public and private sphere, while women are often relegated to domestic roles (Ademulika, 2018; Mwai, 2016). This is a common gender practice that cuts across the globe (Heilman & Barker, 2018; Joro, 2016).

The social-cultural system that promotes male superiority over female is described as patriarchy. The term originates from two Latin words *pater* (father) and *arch* (rule) implying "rulership of the father" (Ademulika, 2018; Asiyanbola, 2005). Patriarchy is defined as a system of social structures and practices of male dominance, oppression, and exploitation of females (Ademulika, 2018). According to Asiyanbola (2005) patriarchy confers privileges on males and severe constraints on females. Thus, any societal framework that accords men undue advantage over women is considered patriarchal. This system is prevalent in African societies (Adeleke, 2016; Aladi & Okoro, 2021; Joro, 2016) where gender inequality is embedded in their customary laws (Akarika et al., 2019; Muroyi, 2016). In Ghana, men see their superiority over females as God-given. They categorise women as feeble-minded and domesticated while also treating them as their possessions (Sikweyiya et al, 2020). In Nigeria, the payment of bride price symbolises the lawful transfer of a woman into her husband's family (Ademulika, 2018) which reinforces the notion of ownership. In the traditional Igbo society, women are excluded from inheriting properties and holding traditional leadership positions (Ezebuilo, 2020).

Patriarchy significantly influences societal beliefs of violence and how it relates to males and females. It is

believed that most masculine traits such as competitiveness, bravery, aggressiveness, assertiveness are associated with violence (Bozkurt et al., 2015; UN Women, 2016; W.H.O, 2019). Contrariwise, feminine traits such as gentleness, submissiveness, and physical weakness match that of a victim (Kumar, 2012). Some scholars note that violence is also part of the biological makeup of the male gender (Carlyle et al., 2014; Ricardo & Barker, 2018). According to Ricardo and Barker (2008), there is an inconclusive and bidirectional relationship between testosterone and violence. Testosterone may instigate pre-existing aggressive tendencies, and conversely, violent behaviour can elevate testosterone levels. However, they believe that though male physiology may influence violent behaviour, the social environment and upbringing of the male child contribute more to violent tendencies.

Violence is fundamentally a part of the socialization process for the boy child (Heilman & Barker, 2018) especially in patriarchal societies (UN Women, 2016). From an early age, boys are encouraged to indulge in activities that simulate combat such as video games and the use of toy guns (Bozkurt et al., 2015; Ricardo & Barker, 2008). The UN Women (2016) notes that violence is one of the ways men assert their gender identity. A man's ability to protect himself, coerce others and exert authority portrays his level of masculinity. Men who fail to meet these standards are labelled as "not man enough" (Heilman & Barker, 2018). In some African communities like the Yoruba culture (Akarika et al., 2019) practices such as wife-beating is normalised as a way of maintaining control (Joro, 2016; Muroyi, 2016). Therefore, feminist research reiterates that violence against females by males is a consequence of patriarchy.

Gender-Based Violence Against Males

There is no universally accepted definition of GBV. Many scholars referenced the 1993 definition put forth by the UN General Assembly which describes Violence against Women "as any gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (UN, 1994). Although, the UN was clearly describing violence against women, which justifies the exclusion of the male gender, its remains widely cited in GBV literature. However, with the growing recognition of violence against males, VAWG is considered an aspect of GBV (Heilman & Barker, 2018; USAID, 2020). More recent definitions describe GBV as violence directed at individuals on the basis of their gender (Akarika et al., 2019; Kangas et al., 2014). FAO (2018) defines GBV as the umbrella term encompassing all forms of violence perpetrated due to socially constructed roles for men and women.

GBV can be categorised into various forms based on the nature of harm inflicted on the victim. This includes physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

Physical violence

involves using one's strength or weapons to inflict bodily harm. It includes hitting, slapping, biting, suffocating or burning (Burke, 2021; Chuka & Nwugbe, 2018).

Sexual violence

includes any non-consensual sexual act, such as forced intercourse, sexual harassment, marital rape, commercial sexual exploitation, and corrective rape (Burke, 2021; Kangas et al., 2014; FAO, 2018).

Emotional violence

entails psychological harm caused by threat or coercion e.g. verbal abuse, humiliation, isolation, violation of privacy and neglect (Burke, 2021; Chuka & Nwugbe, 2018).

Research has shown that boys and men experience of all forms of GBV. The report of the National Population Communication et al (2016) reveals that boys are more likely than girls to experience physical and emotional abuse from parents and other relatives before the age of 18. Emotional violence, such as verbal abuse, stalking and neglect is the most common form of violence men experience from their intimate partners (Malik & Nadda, 2019; Mokebo, 2018).

GBV can also be classified by its types. Some common types identified by scholars include Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), child abuse, human trafficking, and harmful traditional practices (FAO, 2018; Heilman & Barker, 2018; Mwai, 2016; Njoroge, 2016). UN (1994) enumerated three types of violence:

- Violence that occurs in family in form of marital rape, non-spousal violence, sexual abuse of children etc.
- Violence that occurs in general public community including intimidation at work, human trafficking and forced prostitution.
- Violence condone or perpetrated by the State which include illegal detaining of people, harassment by members of the force and withholding rights and privileges for refugees.

This study adopts the first two types which were also used by Obidike & Ezeabasi (2020). The third category was excluded because the researcher believes it is violence targeted at a group based on legal grounds and not necessarily due to gender.

Domestic violence is described as the abuse that occurs in a family or intimate relationship (Adebayo, 2014; Chuka & Nwugbe, 2018). Contrary to the view that domestic violence against males is perpetrated by their intimate partners (Adebayo, 2014; Njoroge, 2016), it involves other family and household members such as children, grandparents, domestic staff etc. (National Population Commission et al, 2016; Mokebo, 2018). Thus, Brenda (2019) describes domestic violence against males as abuse against men and boys in intimate relationships. GBV against males could be in public communities including schools, offices, and religious centres. This comprises of



sexual harassment, bullying in schools and prison, child sexual abuse, human trafficking of boys, etc.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Perception Theory

This study is anchored on perception theory which was propounded by Berelson and Steiner in 1964. According to them, perception is a complex process by which individuals select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful picture of the world (Ezeh et al., 2024; Ikems, 2020). Aladi and Okoro (2021) describe perception as the interpretation of messages. They noted that perception may differ from reality; and most times, decisions are made based on human interpretation (perception) rather than reality. Perception can be influenced by one's experiences, emotions, motivational state (Aladi & Okoro, 2021), societal and family values. This may vary among individuals. Therefore, perception is subjective.

Perception involves three processes

- Selective exposure - the inclination to seek information that are consistent with existing beliefs;
- Selective attention - attentiveness to certain aspects of a message that reinforces strongly held beliefs, and
- Selective retention - the tendency to recall information based on needs or values (Ikems 2020; Nyitse et al., 2021).

The theory explains how individuals' pre-existing beliefs and values influence their selection, believability and interpretation of media messages. It posits that media audience tend to expose themselves to content that align with their existing beliefs, attitudes and interests, consciously or unconsciously, and sieve those of opposite hue (Ezeh et al., 2018). As a result, people are more likely to remember and internalise media messages that suit the world view they are conversant with (Ikems, 2020) and overlook those that counter their views/beliefs (Ayo-Obiremi & Adelabu, 2020). With regards to this study, the theory suggests that media portrayal and individual idiosyncrasies will significantly shape public perception. According to Aladi and Okoro (2021), the way the media portrays GBV will likely have an impact on audience perception. This theory is relevant in examining how Nigerian newspapers' audience perceive GBV against males in a societal setting where the dominant gender norm is patriarchal.

Framing Theory

Framing theory initially introduced by Erving Goffman and later expanded by Robert Entman, proposes that media audience sees the world based on how the media portrays it to them (Harmon, 2021; Mwai, 2016). The word "frame" depicts a window created by the media. Framing theory is also referred to as second-level agenda setting (Ajetunmobi, 2023). While agenda-setting focuses on how issues become salient, framing examines *how* the issues

are presented. Entman describes framing as the selection of certain elements of perceived reality to make them more important in a communicating text (Koga, 2014, Mwai, 2016). It involves "selection" and "emphasis" (Muroyi, 2016). As a media effect theory, it suggests that the media shapes audience interpretation and actions (Carlyle et al., 2014; Koga, 2014; Mwai, 2016) by focusing on selected issues whilst ignoring the others (Muroyi, 2016). This can be achieved through the selection of keywords, labels, stereotypes and metaphors (Ajetunmobi, 2023). However, Koga (2014) argues that though the media may distort reality, it does not mean the public will always adopt its perspective. In other words, framing effect is not absolute. With regards to this study, framing theory posits the audience perception of GBV against male will be shaped by how the newspapers portray the issue.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method and Research Instrument

This study employs survey - a quantitative research method. Survey was used to elicit responses of the newspapers' audience on their perception of GBV. The study utilised questionnaire as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire was designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data. The variables for the questionnaire were developed based on existing literature. A pilot test was conducted to confirm clarity and interpretability of the questions. The reliability of the survey was tested with Cronbach's alpha.

Study Population and sample size

The population for this study is 15,946,000 which is the 2023 population for Lagos state (Statista, 2023). A sample size of 433 was derived using Taro Yamane sample size formula with a confidence level of 95% and margin error of 5%. However, to reduce the error margin that may arise from the non-response rate, the sample size was increased to 600. The questionnaire was administered online. The criteria used for selection include readership of Vanguard and Punch newspapers online, residence in Lagos State and awareness of GBV.

Methods of Data Presentation and Analysis

The data was presented with the use of simple frequency table and analysed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive and correlation analysis was applied.

Presentation Of Findings

The results are shown in Tables 1 to 10.

Data Presentation On Correlation Results

Hypothesis 1

H₁: There is a significant relationship between the reading articles on male victims and the perception of males as victims of GBV (Table 11).

Table 1: Socio-Demographics Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	257	44.5%
Female	320	55.5%
Age		
Below 20	23	4%
20 – 40	346	60%
41 – 60	191	33.1%
Above 60	17	3%
Marital status		
Single	296	51.3%
Married	260	45.1%
Divorce/separated	21	3.6%
Educational Level		
Primary	14	2.4%
Secondary	179	31%
Tertiary	384	66.6%
Total	577	100

Table 2: Frequency of Readership

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Always	77	13.3%
Often	182	31.5%
Sometimes	212	36.7%
Rarely	106	18.4%
Total	577	100%

Table 3: Viewership of Articles on Gender-Based Violence against Males

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	453	78.5%
No	124	21.5%
Total	577	100

Table 4: Frequency of Viewership of Articles on Gender-Based Violence against Males

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Always	77	13.3%
Often	182	31.5%
Sometimes	212	36.7%
Rarely	106	18.4%
Never	124	21.5%
Total	577	100%

Table 5: Respondents' Consideration of Victims

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Female children	569	98.6%
Adult females	504	87.3%
Male children	457	79.2%
Adult males	295	51.1%

Table 6: Respondents' Consideration of the Ways Male Victims are Violated

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Wife beats husband/girlfriend beats boyfriend	326	56.5%
Men beaten, stabbed and slapped by other men	289	50.1%
Beating of children by parents, caregivers...	290	50.3%
Sexual assault of male children	501	86.8%
Men raped by women	198	34.3%
Men raped by other males	218	37.8%
Sexual harassment of men and boys	353	61.2%
Denial of sex	114	19.8%
Bullying	342	59.3%
Humiliation	339	58.8%
Verbal abuse of men	462	80.1%
Isolation	185	32.1%
Human trafficking of boys and men	261	45.2%

Table 7: Respondents' Opinion of Adult Male Victims

Options	Total		
	Yes	Not sure	No
The man must have instigated the violence	126	177	266
The perpetrators must be acting in defence because men are aggressive	123	137	317
The man must be defenceless	274	121	180
The man must be a weakling	70	101	406
The cases would not be as serious as that of a female victim	246	77	254
Men who are victims of GBV need compassion	504	46	26
Men are manipulated by their perpetrators	406	120	51
Men are reluctant to speak about their abuse	541	26	10

Hypothesis 2

H₁₂: There is a significant relationship between the frequency of reading articles on GBV against males and the belief that male victims need compassion (Table 12).

Hypothesis 3

H₁₃: There is a significant positive relationship between the frequency of reading articles on GBV against males and the perception that male victims are aggressive (Table 13).

Table 8: Respondents' Opinion of Male Children Victims

Options	Total		
	Yes	Not sure	No
The boy must have done something to instigate the violence	102	157	318
Perpetrators must be acting in defence because boys are aggressive	96	114	367
The boy must be defenceless	355	81	141
The boy must be a weakling	70	105	402
The cases would not be as serious as that of a female victim	181	115	281
Boys who are victims of GBV need compassion	495	51	31
Men are manipulated by their perpetrators	460	77	40
Boys are reluctant to speak about their abuse	490	77	10

Table 9: Influence of Viewership on Respondents' Perception

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	154	34%
No	162	35.8%
Not sure	137	30.2%
Total	453	100%

Table 10: Response on if there are More Cases of Male Victims than what is seen in the Newspapers

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	339	74.8%
No	83	18.3%
Not Sure	31	6.8%
Total	453	100

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The audience perception of GBV against males is discussed in terms of its forms, its frequency compared to females, and the relationship between audience perception and exposure to newspapers' portrayal of male victims. The respondents seem to believe certain manifestations of violence, irrespective of the form, more than others. A significant majority acknowledges

sexual assault of male victims, particularly against male children. There is a high recognition of sexual harassment of men and boys. Other manifestations of sexual violence such as men rape by either women or other men, and denial of sex were minimally acknowledged. Therefore, this study reveals that the newspapers' audience associate sexual violence more with children than adult male victims. In terms of emotional violence, verbal abuse of men is the most recognized. Fewer respondents acknowledged bullying of boys, humiliation, and isolation. Therefore, the respondents consider more men than children as victims of emotional abuse. This aligns with studies from Kenya (Mokebo, 2018) and Indian (Malik & Nadda, 2019), which indicate that men experience more of emotional violence. The physical form of violence against males is the least recognized. The most acknowledged scenario was spousal violence - where a man is beaten by his female partner. Other instances of boys beaten by parents, teachers, or peers, and men beaten by other men were less acknowledged. Overall, while no single form of violence is overwhelmingly recognized, the participants were most familiar with sexual assault of children, verbal abuse of men, and sexual harassment of men and boys.

The audience categorisation of victims of GBV varies by age and gender. Female children are seen as the most victimised, followed by adult females, male children, and lastly adult males. Therefore, the audience believes that more females than males are victims of GBV and more

Table 11: Hypothesis 1 result

Variable Pair	Pearson Correlation (r) & Significance	Decision
Reading articles of GBV against males ↔ Perception of Adult Female victimization	r = 0.165, p = 0.000	Significant
Reading articles of GBV against males ↔ Perception of Female Children victimization	r = 0.046, p = 0.272	Not Significant
Reading articles of GBV against males ↔ Perception of Male Children victimization	r = 0.166, p = 0.000	Significant
Reading articles of GBV against males ↔ Perception of Adult Male victimization	r = 0.250, p = 0.000	Significant

Table : 12 Hypothesis 1 result

Variable Pair	Pearson Correlation (r) & Significance	Decision
Frequency of reading articles of GBV against males ↔ Perception that Adult male victims need compassion	r = 0.039, p = 0.035	Not Significant
Reading articles of GBV against males ↔ Perception that Male Children victims need compassion	r = -0.061, p = 0.140	Not Significant

children than adults of either gender are susceptible to GBV. The result of the correlation analysis confirms a significant relationship between exposure to articles on male victims and the perception of males as victims of GBV. However, the relationship is strong for adult males and weak for male children. This does not undermine the result that male children are considered more vulnerable than adult males. Rather, it suggests that increased exposure to content on GBV against males will lead to increase believability of adult male victims (who are the least acknowledged victims). This buttresses the need for increased awareness of violence against males.

Conversely, there is minimal relationship between exposure to articles on male victims and perceptions of female victimization. That is, reading articles about GBV against males does not alter views on violence against females. This suggests that media exposure to male-focused GBV increases awareness of male victimhood, rather than shifting attitudes across demographics. It reinforces the proposition of the perception theory which stipulates that media audience internalise media messages that suit the world view they are conversant with (Ikems, 2020). Therefore, exposure to media content on male violence does not eliminate gender bias of female vulnerability. Though the respondents acknowledge violence against males, they perceive it as less severe than violence against females.

Outside the female-versus-male context, the respondents' concerns for male victims were mostly directed at male children. This is evident in their perception of men and boys. The respondents largely agreed that both men and boys deserve compassion, are manipulated, and hesitant to speak about their abuse. They

also rejected stereotypes of male victims as weaklings, instigate their abuse, exaggerate their experiences, or not as serious as female victims. However, male children were perceived as more defenceless than adult males which suggests greater empathy toward younger victims. This is irrespective of exposure to media stories on violence against males as there is no significant relationship between reading articles on violence against males and empathy towards male victims (both men and boys). This implies that respondents' compassion for male children may stem from cultural or personal convictions rather than media exposure. Again, it reinforces the proposition that existing values and beliefs are not easily eroded by the media as individuals can overlook messages that counter their beliefs (Ayo-Obiremi & Adelabu, 2020).

However, there is a strong relationship between exposure to articles of GBV against males and perception that men are aggressive and instigate violence. The association of these variables is moderate for boys. So, more exposure to newspapers' content on male victimisation increases the belief that adult male victims are aggressors and instigators of violence than it would for boys. This reinforces the result that increased exposure to content of male victimhood does not lead to increased empathy towards male victims. In fact, it may reinforce harmful stereotypes rather than challenge them. Since there is a strong relationship between exposure to articles on male victims and the perception of adult males as victims of GBV, it is only logical that higher exposure to media articles will also result in the perception of male victims based on the dominant frames in the newspapers. This underscores the need for a critical review of media framing of male victims.

Furthermore, though most respondents have seen stories of male violence, the frequency of exposure is low. A significant percentage has seldom seen stories of GBV against males. Hence, their inability to attribute causation of their perception to the media. The respondents are therefore critical of the media's inadequate representation of male victims. They stated that there are more cases of male victims than what is seen in the media. This opinion is corroborated with the fact that they are regular readers but have rarely seen articles on male violence. Consequently, media effect is subject to audience exposure to media content as well as pre-existing beliefs. This aligns with the assertion that audiences may not always see

Table : 13 Hypothesis 3 result

Variable Pair	Pearson Correlation (r) & Significance	Decision
Reading articles of GBV against males ↔ Perception that boys instigate violence	r = 0.147, p = 0.000	Significant
Reading articles of GBV against males ↔ Perception that boys are aggressive	r = 0.220, p = 0.000	Significant
Reading articles of GBV against males ↔ Perception that men instigate violence	r = 0.239, p = 0.000	Significant
Reading articles of GBV against males ↔ Perception that men are aggressive	r = 0.268, p = 0.000	Significant

through the media's lens (Koga, 2014). The society and other social institutions also play vital roles in shaping public perception. This result is contrary to that of Akarika, Ikon and Kierian (2019), whose study demonstrated a strong media impact on audience perception of violence against females. This disparity may stem from higher media coverage of female victims. In this study, the low level of exposure infers low level of media coverage of violence against males which in itself, perpetuates the perception that females are the primary sufferers of GBV.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that though greater exposure to articles on GBV against males increases acknowledgment of male victims, it does not alter gender bias of female vulnerability nor does it lead to empathy towards male victims. Empathy is demonstrated towards male children while adult male vulnerability is largely overlooked as they are mostly considered aggressors/instigators of violence. The categorisation of victims of GBV by the newspapers' audience is girls, women, boys and men in a descending order. This reinforces pre-existing patriarchal narrative around GBV. Nevertheless, the audience's call for increased media attention on male victimisation suggests a growing awareness and highly noticeable media bias which may hinder advocacy and policy development for male victims.

RECOMMENDATION

This study underscores the need for public sensitisation on the severity of GBV against male victims and a critical review of media framing of male victims. Media outlets should promote balanced reporting and comprehensive protection mechanisms for all victims of GBV, regardless of gender. A more informed society will enhance the believability of male victims' experiences, eliminate gender stereotypes, and support the development of laws and policies tailored towards male survivors. Importantly, children, regardless of gender, are among the most vulnerable group in the society and should be acknowledged as such. Prioritising adult females over male children is a skewed understanding of vulnerability driven by entrenched gender expectations.

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