



Silent Screams? Investigating Framing of Spousal Abuse in Nigerian Online News Media

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INTRODUCTION

Spousal abuse affects 36% of married Nigerian women, a rate that substantially exceeds global averages (Nigeria DHS, 2018). However, cultural norms traditionally privatise domestic violence as family matters (Chijoke, 2017; Mshweshwe, 2020). Nigeria's media landscape has undergone dramatic transformation, with 91% of the online population now accessing news through digital platforms (Reuters Digital News Report, 2024). This shift creates new opportunities for challenging entrenched social narratives, yet existing research reveals problematic coverage patterns including episodic framing, law enforcement source dominance, and limited victim representation. This study examines how Nigerian online news frames domestic violence against wives and investigates the cultural, institutional, and journalistic factors influencing these narratives.

RESEARCH AIMS

- Analyse framing patterns in Nigerian online domestic violence coverage
- Investigate factors shaping media narratives about violence against wives
- Explore how coverage reflects, reinforces, or challenges patriarchal norms
- Examine editorial decision-making processes in sensitive social issue reporting

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Multi-Method Design

Data Collection:

- **Content Analysis:** 26 articles from Premium Times, The Punch, Vanguard (April 2022-March 2023)
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** 6 media professionals (3 reporters, 3 editors)

Analytical Approach:

- Qualitative content analysis of articles using Entman's framing theory
- Thematic analysis of interview transcripts following Braun & Clarke (2006)
- Data integration examining both coverage patterns and underlying editorial processes

Sampling: Purposive sampling following the **Osinachi Nwachukwu** case for heightened media attention context



RESULTS

- Nigerian media uses "contextually enriched episodic framing" - embedding structural analysis within individual incident reporting
- Coverage challenges cultural privatisation through expert voices and legal accountability narratives
- Journalists navigate tensions between progressive policies and cultural sensitivity through strategic negotiation
- Victim access severely limited by cultural barriers requiring family permission to speak
- Resource constraints and psychological toll prevent comprehensive coverage despite progressive editorial intentions
- Law enforcement source dominance reflects practical accessibility rather than editorial preference
- Social media influences story selection but not framing approaches

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research advances framing theory by documenting culturally specific adaptations and demonstrates media's potential as transformative agents within patriarchal contexts. Practical interventions should focus on trauma-informed journalist training, diversified sourcing networks, institutional wellness support, and regionally adapted legal education programs.

References

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