

Social Actors' Representations in Newspaper Headlines on Domestic Violence against Men and Women in Sub-Saharan, Africa

*By Tolulope Akinseye**

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue in Sub-Saharan Africa, shaped by socio-cultural norms, economic disparities, and systemic inequalities. Media representations of domestic violence, particularly through newspaper headlines, play a significant role in shaping public perceptions and responses to this pressing societal issue. This study conducts a comparative analysis of social actors' representation in newspaper headlines of domestic violence against men and women in Sub-Saharan Africa. Through a discursive analysis, the paper explores the representation of the victims, perpetrators, and authorities, across various newspapers within the regions. The findings from the analysis of headlines in three African regions show a pronounced media focus on victims rather than perpetrators in the headlines. Additionally, the inclusion of OTHERS enriches the narrative, with Western Africa showing the highest. Furthermore, the analysis reveals distinct patterns in role allocation, with perpetrators often depicted as active agents and conversely, sometimes represented as passive agents, shifting the narrative to victims' experiences and suffering. The study also highlights regional differences, with Eastern Africa less frequently activating perpetrators in headlines. Finally, the use of nomination, categorization, and collectivization in headlines adds depth, emphasizes collective efforts, and highlights the prevalence of domestic violence, although sometimes at the expense of individual experiences.

Keywords: media representations, social actors, domestic violence, men and women

Introduction

Domestic violence is a pervasive and deeply entrenched issue that affects individuals and communities worldwide. Lenore (1999) characterizes domestic violence as an incredibly damaging pattern of behavior that needs thorough characterization. Similarly, Itzin et al. (2010) define domestic violence as "a pattern of abusive behaviors involving a wide range of physical, sexual, and psychological maltreatment perpetrated by one person in an intimate relationship against another to gain or maintain unfair power, control, and authority".

In Sub-Saharan Africa, where socio-cultural norms and patriarchy intersect with economic disparities and systemic inequalities, the impact of domestic violence is particularly pronounced. These factors place victims in disadvantaged positions within the family structure, significantly contributing to the high prevalence of

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intimate partner violence (IPV) in the region. Previous studies have revealed that Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest IPV rates globally, with an overall prevalence of 36%, surpassing the global average of 30% (Devries et al., 2013; García-Moreno et al., 2013). While men can also be victims of domestic violence, the prevalence is significantly higher among women (Chukwudeh, 2022). This issue is further compounded by the troubling reality that both men and women in these societies have largely come to accept domestic violence as a societal norm (Islam et al., 2017; Uthman, Moradi, and Lawoko, 2011).

Central to the discourse surrounding domestic violence is the role of the media in shaping public perceptions, attitudes, and responses. Media representations play a critical role in framing the narrative around domestic violence, influencing how it is understood, discussed, and addressed within society. Despite increased awareness and advocacy efforts, the prevalence of domestic violence in the region remains alarmingly high, affecting individuals irrespective of gender identity. Bakuuro & Diedong (2021) stressed the fact that media discourse analysis allows us to tap into the minds of the author and the audience to know their levels of understanding of the issues at table. Within this context, the representations of social actors—victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and authorities—holds significant implications for both the perpetuation and prevention of domestic violence.

This article seeks to explore the representation of social actors in media reportage of domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a specific focus on Violence Against Men (VAM) and Violence against Women (VAW). Understanding the complexities of social actor representation in media coverage is essential for advancing efforts to combat this pervasive issue. Through this exploration, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of media in shaping perceptions of domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa and inform strategies for promoting more inclusive, equitable, and effective responses to this critical public health and human rights challenge. Thus, the research questions that will guide this research are:

1. How are social actors involved in domestic violence, including victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and authorities, portrayed in newspaper headlines in Sub-Saharan Africa?
2. To what extent do newspaper headlines represent social actors involved in domestic violence against men and women differently in Sub-Saharan Africa?

Literature Review

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s. During the 1990s, CDA evolved from Critical Linguistics (CL) into its current form, with the aim of uncovering hidden ideologies and intentions within texts (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 4). Unlike Discourse Analysis (DA), CDA is a "constitutive problem-oriented, interdisciplinary" method that focuses not on linguistic units but on social phenomena. This requires a unique approach that is both multi-

methodological and multi-disciplinary (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 2). van Leeuwen (2006) distinguishes Critical Linguistics (CL) from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in several key ways. While CL and CDA share common foundations, CDA seeks to establish critical social theory and explores the links between "discourse and the social practices in which they are embedded" (p. 167). Additionally, CDA adopts a more sophisticated interdisciplinary approach, extending beyond the analysis of texts and spoken discourse to investigate their meanings through methods such as historiography or Discourse Analysis (DA).

Another important concept in CDA research is dominance. CDA aims to investigate both opaque and transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as they manifest in language. By critically evaluating texts, CDA seeks to highlight issues of injustice, repression, and marginalization, thereby revealing underlying dominance (Wodak, 2001, p. 204). In a conventional setting, domination may manifest through social conflict or various forms of conflicts between groups competing for material or symbolic resources. The power dynamics between different groups and the accompanying ideologies frequently give rise to disparities and oppression, prompting marginalized groups to resist and strive for change. Moreover, the theory of dominance, which posits that variations in discourse stem from the unequal power distribution between men and women, offers insights into these disparities.

CDA encompasses a range of methodologies, including Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional framework, van Dijk's (1998a) socio-cognitive approach, Wodak's (2001) discourse-historical approach, and Van Leeuwen's (2008) theory of social actor representation.

Fairclough (1992) presents the three-dimensional approach to critical discourse analysis, encompassing (1) the textual aspects (including vocabulary, grammar, and text structure), (2) discursive practices, and (3) sociocultural practices. Wodak's framework comprises three interconnected components: discourse immanent critique, sociodiagnostic critique, and prognostic critique. Discourse immanent critique involves scrutinizing the variability, contradictions, and challenges within the internal structure of discourse. Socio-diagnostic critique extends beyond discourse boundaries, leveraging the analyst's background and contextual understanding to contextualize the discourse within broader social, political, and situational contexts. Prognostic critique entails considering the implications of discourse analysis findings for enhancing and reforming discourse. Furthermore, van Leeuwen (2008) introduces the socio-semantic approach as the way to agglomerate the social actors and the ideological consequences in the texts (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Theory

van Leeuwen (1996, 2008) discusses a 'socio-semantic inventory' as a tool for examining the representation of participants in social practices within a text. The significance of representation lies in its potential to be more salient than the actual social behavior itself. A fundamental premise of van Leeuwen's theory is the examination of how social actors are depicted within the English language. Rather

than centering on linguistic classifications (such as transitivity categories) and linguistic processes (like nominalization and passive agent omission), van Leeuwen directs attention to the "sociosemantic inventory of the ways in which social actors can be represented and establish the sociological and critical relevance" to the various categories, which are then analyzed in terms of their linguistic realization (van Leeuwen, 2008, p.23).

Discourse Feature Description

Inclusion & Exclusion	In any social practice, there are some social actors involved in the process. When representing the practice, some of these actors may be included (explicitly mentioned), some excluded. Exclusion with no trace is suppression (deletion). Exclusion with the possibility to infer the actor's involvement is backgrounding. In the latter case, the actor is deemphasized, pushed into the background, but not completely deleted.
Role allocation	Role allocation This feature concerns the roles that social actors are given to play in the representation. They may be activated (depicted as active, dynamic forces in an activity) or passivated (pictured as receiving end of the activity).
Genericization & Specification	Social actors can be represented through generic (as classes) or specific (as identifiable individuals) reference.
Association & Dissociation	This feature refers to forming and unforming the groups of social actors in a text as the text's proceeds. In association, social actors are represented in conjunction with others, while they are represented separately in dissociation.
Indetermination & Determination	Indetermination occurs when social actors are represented as unspecified, 'anonymous' individuals or groups, determination, when their identity is, one way or another, specified.
Nomination & Categorization	Social actors can be represented either in terms of their unique identity (nomination), or in terms of identities and functions they share with others (categorization).
Functionalization & Identification	Functionalization occurs when social actors are referred to in terms of an activity, in terms of something they do, for instance an occupation or role. Identification occurs when social actors are defined, not in terms of what they do, but in terms of what they, more or less permanently, or unavoidably, are.

Personalization & Impersonalization	Social actors can be personalized (represented as human beings) or impersonalized (through concrete or abstract nouns whose meaning does not include the semantic features of human).
Overdetermination	Overdetermination occurs when social actors are represented as participating, at the same time, in more than one social practice. Here the social actor comes to symbolize different social practices which may be related to one another, be opposite, etc.

Thus, the representation of social actors plays a crucial role in shaping readers' perceptions of domestic violence against men and women in Sub-Saharan Africa. The choice of words and the frequency of their use can significantly influence how domestic violence issues are understood by the public. For instance, as Fowler (1991) and Richardson (2007) discuss, the specific terminology used to describe victims and perpetrators can convey underlying social values and priorities. If headlines frequently use terms that emphasize the victim's vulnerability or the perpetrator's criminality, this framing can affect how readers perceive the severity and nature of domestic violence.

In this context, the study employs van Leeuwen's (2008) 'sociosemantic' system to analyze how social actors are represented in headlines related to domestic violence. van Leeuwen's framework helps in understanding how linguistic choices, such as whether social actors are included or excluded, impact readers' perceptions. For example, headlines that use suppression to omit the mention of certain actors or backgrounding to minimally reference them can obscure the roles and responsibilities associated with domestic violence. This form of representation might lead to a lack of clarity about who is involved and responsible for the violence, which can influence public perception and policy responses. Additionally, as Conboy (2007) notes, newspaper headlines often use emotive language and rhetorical devices to attract readers' attention. This representation can significantly shape readers' attitudes towards domestic violence and gender roles in the region.

Numerous studies have been undertaken regarding the portrayal of social actors in the past. Risdaneva's (2018) research into the portrayal of women in news reporting on sexual violence shed light on the nuanced ways in which media depict victims and perpetrators. This study revealed disparities in how individuals involved in such incidents are characterized, uncovering subtle yet significant differences in the language and terminology employed, highlighting potential biases or preconceptions embedded within media representations.

Similarly, Pekkarinen (2016) focused specifically on the portrayal of victims and alleged perpetrators of sexual violence in US news articles. Through a thorough analysis of news coverage, the study identified patterns in how victims are depicted as passive subjects while alleged perpetrators are framed in ways that either humanize or vilify them. This dichotomy in representation not only reflects broader

societal attitudes towards victims and perpetrators but also has implications for public understanding and empathy towards survivors of sexual violence.

In a related vein, Qanitat (2015) explored the representation of social actors in the context of coverage on Islamic issues in online newspapers. By examining the strategies used by media outlets to depict various actors within the Muslim community, the study provided insights into the construction of media narratives surrounding sensitive socio-cultural topics. This research highlighted the role of media in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards specific groups or communities, underscoring the importance of critical media analysis in understanding the complexities of social actor representation.

However, while these studies collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of how media narratives are constructed and the implications of these representations for societal attitudes and behaviors, there are still some gaps that the present study aims to address. Specifically, the existing literature primarily focuses on specific contexts such as sexual violence and Islamic issues, neglecting the nuanced dynamics of representation in the context of domestic violence against both men and women. Therefore, this present study seeks to examine the representation of social actors in media coverage of domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a specific focus on violence against both men and women. By analyzing newspaper headlines, this study aims to uncover how different social actors are portrayed and framed within media narratives, shedding light on the nuances of representation in this particular context.

Methodology

This study employed a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the representation of social actors in newspaper headlines on domestic violence against men and women in Sub-Saharan Africa. A total of 170 newspaper reports were obtained from the LexisNexis database, which covers a wide array of news articles. The selected reports spanned the period from 2019 to 2023, using keywords such as 'domestic violence', 'gender-based violence', and 'intimate partner violence' to identify relevant articles. The focus was on articles reporting specific incidents or cases involving violence against both men and women.

The data collection process specifically targeted three distinct regions within Sub-Saharan Africa—Eastern Africa, Western Africa, and Southern Africa—ensuring a broad representation of media perspectives from various socio-political contexts within the region. Newspapers were carefully chosen to include both state-owned and privately-owned outlets, reflecting diverse affiliations and providing a balanced view of the media landscape in each region.

For Southern Africa, the newspapers analyzed included *Daily News*, *The Star*, *Mail and Guardian*, *Post*, and *Cape Times*. Eastern Africa's headlines were sourced from *Daily Monitor*, *Daily Nation*, and *The Herald*. Western Africa's data came from *The Punch*, *The Sun*, *Nigeria Tribune*, *Daily Independent*, *The Nation*, *PM News*, *Weekly Trust*, and *This Day*. These selections were designed to capture a wide range of reporting styles and viewpoints.

The selected timeframe of 2019 to 2023, while showing some uneven distribution of headlines across the years, provided a comprehensive overview of recent media coverage of domestic violence. Despite the unequal distribution of headlines, all headlines within this period were thoroughly analyzed to capture contemporary issues and trends in the representation of domestic violence in the media across the different regions.

After the data was collected from LexisNexis, the headlines were manually categorized using van Leeuwen's socio-semantic framework for the representation of social actors. A meticulous process was undertaken where each headline was analyzed to identify various discursive strategies and patterns of representation. For the quantitative analysis, simple percentages were calculated to quantify the distribution of headlines across different categories. These percentages were then used to create column charts, which provided a pictorial representation of the data. This approach facilitated a clear visualization of the distribution of headlines by region and social actor, allowing for easier comparison and interpretation of how domestic violence is reported in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Data Analysis

Theo van Leeuwen's framework provides a comprehensive tool for understanding how different participants in a discourse are represented. This framework is particularly useful in examining media representations of complex social issues like domestic violence.

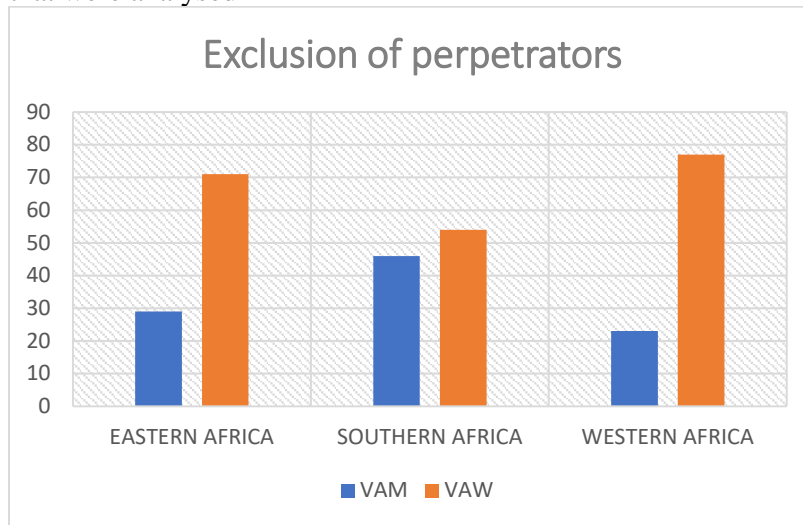
Exclusion of Social Actors

In this context, exclusion refers to the omission of certain social actors from the headlines reporting violence against men and women in the regions analysed. This happens through suppression and backgrounding, where social actors are left out from the headlines, or rather they are not giving significant roles.

Exclusion of the Perpetrators

Here, actions that are de-agentilised present the victims as the goal of the violence without making reference to the perpetrators. The newspaper reporters shift the focus to other victims in the headlines on the violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW).

Figure 1. The Chart Below shows the Distribution of Exclusion across the Regions that were analysed



The results presented in the graph above indicate the frequency of headlines in the analysed African regions. These headlines excluded the perpetrators from the headlines in cases of violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW). The findings indicate a greater frequency of headlines excluding perpetrators in cases of violence against women compared to those involving violence against men.

The exclusion of perpetrators in headlines about violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW) shows a media focus on victims. The findings from the analysis of headlines in three African regions reveal that in cases of violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW), perpetrators are more frequently excluded from the headlines, especially in VAW cases. In Eastern Africa, there are significantly more VAW headlines (71%) compared to VAM headlines (29%). Western Africa shows the smallest number of VAM headlines (23%) and the highest number of VAW headlines (77%). Southern Africa has a more balanced number of headlines, with 46% for VAM and 54% for VAW.

Also from the result, there are regional differences. For instance, in Eastern Africa, there is a significant difference between the reportage on VAM and VAW, emphasizing a stronger focus on headlines that exclude perpetrators. Similarly, in Western Africa, which has the smallest number of VAM headlines and the highest number of VAW headlines, there is an even more pronounced focus on female victims rather than the perpetrators. However, in Southern Africa, there tends to be a more balanced reportage between VAM and VAW (54).

Example 1:

- i. 1108 men reported being abused in 6 years(Western Africa)
- ii. Men still prefer silence after being raped(Eastern Africa)
- iii. You Know What, men get abused(Southern Africa)

Example 2:

- i. No! Women don't condone domestic violence (Western Africa)
- ii. Demand justice for women assaulted in 18 cities (Eastern Africa)
- iii. *Virus is one more woe for abused women*(Southern Africa)

From example 1 above, the headlines backgrounded and suppressed the perpetrators and focused on victims, thereby emphasizing the experiences and challenges faced by victims. The headlines avoid potentially stigmatizing any gender, as discourse of domestic violence is a sensitive case, thereby keeping the discussion more neutral. The media try as much as possible to maintain their integrity at the same time creating a safer environment for victims to come forward and report their experiences. However, there is a breaking of gender stereotypes in some headlines as seen in example (i) above. Before now, society often perceives men as strong and capable of protecting themselves, so when they are portrayed as victims of abuse, it challenges traditional gender roles. By emphasizing the experiences of male victims, the headlines aim to shed light on an often-overlooked issue and encourage conversations about domestic abuse against men. Apart from that, the media focuses on support for these male victims of abuse, thereby foregrounding their experiences, omitting perpetrators, and shifting focus towards acknowledging and addressing the needs of men who have experienced abuse.

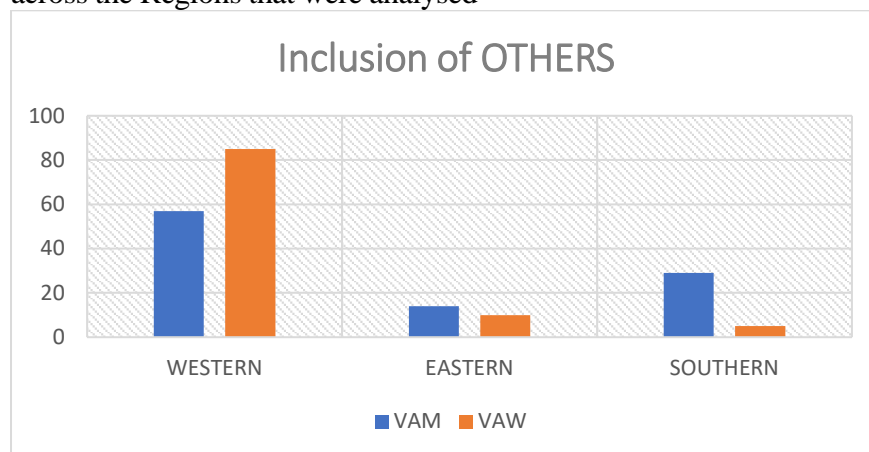
Furthermore, in example 2, backgrounding is achieved by excluding the perpetrators from the headlines. In many cultures and contexts, it is implicitly understood that men are the primary perpetrators of domestic violence. This implicit understanding often led to less frequent and explicit mention of perpetrators in headlines. It could be inferred from most of the headlines that societies often take it for granted that men are the primary perpetrators of gender-based violence and domestic abuse. This assumption is deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts, such as Africa, where patriarchal norms prevail, perpetuating the idea of male dominance and control over women. As a result, media outlets refrain from explicitly stating the gender of perpetrators in headlines, as it is implied that men are commonly associated with these crimes. While statistics often indicate that men are disproportionately represented as perpetrators of gender-based violence, it is essential to recognize that not all men engage in such behavior.

In summary, the assumption, which reflect cultural and societal norms, as illustrated in the analysed examples, suggests that men are predominantly the perpetrators of domestic violence. On the other hand, the mention of perpetrators in VAM headlines, although fewer, indicates a growing recognition of men as victims of domestic violence. This helps to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes, acknowledging that men too can suffer from abuse. Meanwhile, the differences in regional reporting can influence local and international advocacy and policy-making efforts, targeting specific cultural and societal contexts to address domestic violence more effectively.

Inclusion of OTHERS

The concept of 'inclusion of OTHERS' refers to acknowledging and considering additional social actors who are neither victims nor perpetrators in the context of newspapers headlines on domestic violence. This involves identifying individuals or groups who play secondary or supporting roles in the reported incidents.

Figure 2. The Chart Below Shows the Distribution of the Inclusion of OTHERS across the Regions that were analysed



From the chart above, the inclusion of other social actors is significantly high in Western Africa, with 57.1% for men and 85% for women. This suggests more robust engagement and interventions of various entities and individuals in the discourse on domestic violence against women. The presence of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), and notable figures such as academics and government officials highlight the extensive efforts to address both women's and men's issues related to domestic violence. For instance, the involvement of the NHRC and CDHR emphasizes the role of authoritative bodies in advocating for women's rights, while academic experts lend credibility to reports on domestic violence.

Furthermore, in Eastern Africa, the inclusion percentages are lower, with 14.3% for men and 10% for women. This indicates less frequent involvement of other social actors in the media coverage of domestic violence against men and women. However, the inclusion of high-profile figures such as Camilla, The Duchess of Cornwall, and local influencers like Sungura musician Aleck Musuki, still brings significant attention to the issue. The involvement of organizations like the Centre for Rights, Education, and Awareness (CREAW) working with the National Police Service showcases the efforts to improve systemic responses to domestic violence through specialized training. Although the percentages are lower, the presence of these actors highlights ongoing efforts to address domestic violence and protect victims in the region, while more comprehensive and localized initiatives may be necessary to enhance the impact and reach of these efforts.

Interestingly in Southern Africa, the inclusion of others stands at 28.6% for men and 5% for women. Since violence against men is less commonly reported or

acknowledged in many societies, media outlets seek to provide additional context or validation by emphasizing the broader societal response to such incidents. Furthermore, the inclusion of others in these headlines reflect a growing recognition of the importance of addressing gender-based violence in all its forms, including violence perpetrated against men. As societal attitudes towards masculinity and vulnerability evolve, there may be increasing efforts within media organizations to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes by portraying men as multidimensional beings who can be victims of violence and also receive support and intervention. On the other hand, headlines related to violence against women may exhibit lower levels of inclusion of others due to several factors, including entrenched gender biases, victim-blaming attitudes, and the normalization of violence against women in some contexts. Media representations of violence against women may sometimes focus primarily on the actions of perpetrators or the experiences of victims, neglecting the broader social dynamics and support networks that play a crucial role in addressing and preventing such violence.

Example 1:

- i. More Women Beating Men Now - (DOVVSU)
- ii. More Men Suffer Domestic Abuse Than Women, (LASU Don) Reveals
- iii. Spousal Abuse Against Men Rising In Lagos – UI Criminologist
- iv. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: 25% OF MEN SUFFER ABUSE IN NIGERIA — (NGO)

Example 1 above has headlines on VAM. Here, the inclusion of various social actors beyond the primary victims and perpetrators enhances the narrative's credibility and depth. The Police Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) highlights law enforcement's acknowledgment and action on domestic violence against men, lending authority to the issue. The reference to a Lagos State University (LASU) academic indicates that scholarly research underpins these findings, adding academic validation. Similarly, a criminologist from a university provides an expert perspective, emphasizing that professionals are noting and reporting the rise in domestic violence against men. The inclusion of an NGO, Purple Lifeline Connection, underscores civil society's advocacy and support roles, offering crucial data and perspectives. Incorporating these social actors present a multifaceted view of domestic violence against men, validating the reported trends and promoting a nuanced public discourse.

Example 2:

- i. Camilla to Give Speech at Violence Against Women and Girls Event in Rwanda
- ii. African Activists Fight Violence Against Women One Law at a Time
- iii. Pirates Decries Alarming Violence Against Women, Minors
- iv. Sanwo-Olu Charges Women to Take Their Place in Emerging World

In example 2 above, the headlines on VAW illustrate the inclusion of various social actors, from international figures to local activists and governmental officials,

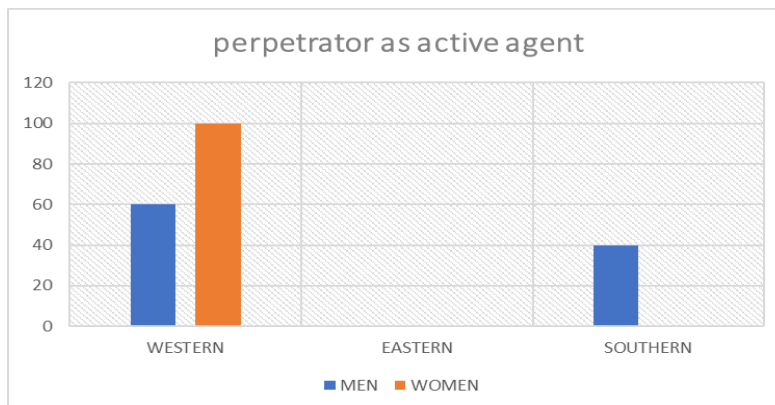
contributing to a comprehensive narrative on combating violence against women. Camilla, The Duchess of Cornwall, brings international attention and credibility to the issue, emphasizing its global importance. The mention of African activists highlights grassroots efforts and the role of civil society in driving legislative and social reforms. The National Association of Seadogs (Pyrates Confraternity) points to fraternal organizations' involvement in advocating for women's rights, showing a proactive stance in supporting victims. Lagos State Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu's commitment to empowering women underscores the local government's role in promoting gender equality. Including these diverse social actors enriches the media coverage, fostering a more informed and multidimensional public discourse on domestic violence against women.

Role Allocation

This refers to the different roles the social actors play in a discourse. van Leeuwen argues that the representation can reallocate or rearrange the social relations between the participants. this can be realized through activation and passivation. In the former, social actors are represented as active participants, performing actions, while in the latter they are depicted as undergoing actions or being affected by them.

In this context, the victims or the perpetrators of domestic violence might be activated as those urging action or making statements, while victims might be passivated as those experiencing violence.

Perpetrators as Active Agents



The analysis of the data reveals notable differences in how perpetrators are framed as active agents across the three regions. In the Western region, perpetrators in cases of violence against men (VAM) are depicted as active agents 60% of the time, while in cases of violence against women (VAW), this figure rises to 100%. This suggests a strong tendency in Western media to portray perpetrators, especially in cases of violence against women, as actively engaged in the acts of violence. In

contrast, the Eastern region shows no instances where perpetrators are framed as active agents, with 0% representation for both VAM and VAW. This absence indicates a potential lack of emphasis on the agency of perpetrators in media portrayals within this region. The Southern region presents a mixed picture, where 40% of perpetrators in VAM cases are depicted as active agents, while, similar to the Eastern region, there is no representation of active agents in VAW cases. This variation might reflect regional differences in media focus and the framing of social actors involved in domestic violence.

Example 1.

- i. More Women Beating Men Now- DOVVSU(Western)
- ii. How my wife beats me at will, man shares ordeal (Western)
- iii. Female soldier reported for abusing Hubby (Southern)

Example 2

- i. Man shoot wife to death at Ashaiman(Western)
- ii. Man pours hot water on wife in Ondo(Western)

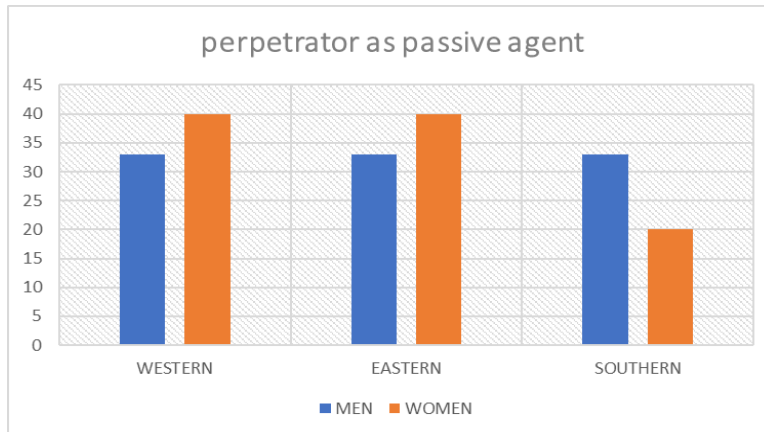
In example 1 above, the headlines activate the agents 'women,' 'my wife,' and 'female soldier' as perpetrators of violence, highlighting an increase in instances where women are actively beating men. The use of activation in these headlines draws attention to a shift in societal dynamics and addresses the underreported issue of female-perpetrated domestic violence. On the other hand, in example 2, the noun 'man' is activated in both instances as perpetrators who actively committed the violent acts of shooting his wife to death and pouring hot water on his wife, respectively.

In the provided examples, perpetrators are represented as active agents to draw attention to the seriousness and prevalence of domestic violence. The use of activation in these headlines ensures that the focus remains on the material actions of 'beating, abusing, pouring, shooting' by the perpetrators.

Notably, there are fewer occurrences of this representation across the regions, with no instances at all in Eastern Africa. This absence suggests cultural or media practices that focus more on the victims rather than the perpetrators.

Perpetrators as Passive Agents

Here, perpetrators are represented as performers of the action (domestic violence). This can be realised through grammatical constructs that shift the focus away from the agent performing the action and instead emphasize the experience or impact on the affected party. For a perpetrator to be passivated in discourse, the representation would shift away from them as active agents committing the violence and instead focus on the violence itself or its effects.



The data on perpetrators framed as passive agents across Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa reveals distinct patterns for both violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW). For VAM, there is an equal distribution of 33% across all three regions, indicating a consistent narrative where perpetrators of violence against men are uniformly depicted as passive agents. This uniformity in VAM suggests a widespread and common approach across these regions, reflecting a shared tendency in how these cases are represented in the media. In contrast, the representation of VAW perpetrators as passive agents varies across the regions. Western and Eastern Africa both have a higher percentage of 40%, indicating a stronger inclination in these regions to depict perpetrators of VAW as passive. Meanwhile, Southern Africa shows a significantly lower percentage at 20%, suggesting a different media narrative or cultural perspective that is less likely to frame VAW perpetrators as passive. This variation highlights regional differences in the portrayal of domestic violence, which may be influenced by differing cultural attitudes or media practices concerning gender and accountability.

Here are a few ways this can be achieved:

Bypass Agency

Bypass agency refers to the omission of the perpetrator in a statement, thereby foregrounding the action itself. This technique often shifts the focus from who is performing the action to the action's impact or the victims.

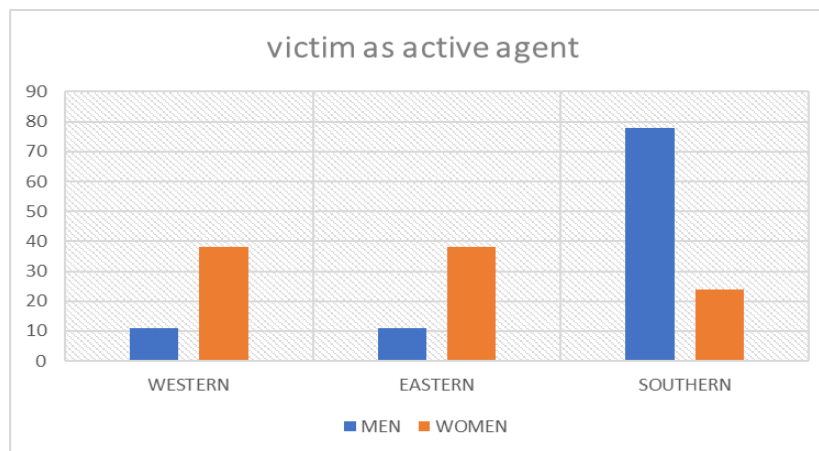
- i. Spousal Abuse Against Men Rising In Lagos – UI Criminologist (Western Africa)
- ii. Men also suffer domestic violence (Western Africa)
- iii. No! Women don't condone domestic violence (Eastern Africa)
- iv. Domestic violence: the real plight of experiences of abused women (Southern Africa)

In the first headline, the focus is on the rising cases of spousal abuse against men. The agency (the perpetrators of the abuse) is bypassed, and the emphasis is on the trend and the victims (men). Likewise, the second example highlights those men

are victims of domestic violence. It does not specify who is committing the violence, thus bypassing the agency and focusing on the suffering of men. Finally in (iii) and (iv) above, the focus is on women's stance against domestic violence, as well as the experiences and plight of abused women. The examples do not specify who is committing the violence, thus bypassing the perpetrators and foregrounding the opposition to the violence.

Victims as Active Agents

The victims of domestic violence can also be made active participants of discourse by giving the active roles. They can function as agents of material process that are used to construe the actions that they perform.



The above illustrates the regional distribution of male and female subjects across Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa. In Western and Eastern Africa, there is an identical representation of men and women, with men accounting for 11% and women for 38% in both regions. This indicates a consistent pattern in how men and women are represented across these two regions, suggesting that similar cultural or social factors may influence these percentages. The significant difference in percentages between men and women in both regions highlights a gender disparity, with women being more prominently featured or involved compared to men.

In contrast, Southern Africa shows a markedly different trend. Here, men make up 78% of the subjects, a stark contrast to the 11% in the other regions. Conversely, women account for only 24%, significantly lower than in Western and Eastern Africa. This regional variation suggests a distinct approach or focus in Southern Africa regarding gender representation. The data indicates that men are much more prominently featured or involved in Southern Africa than women, differing significantly from the patterns observed in Western and Eastern Africa. This disparity reflects varying regional dynamics, societal structures, or issues specific to Southern Africa that warrant further exploration.

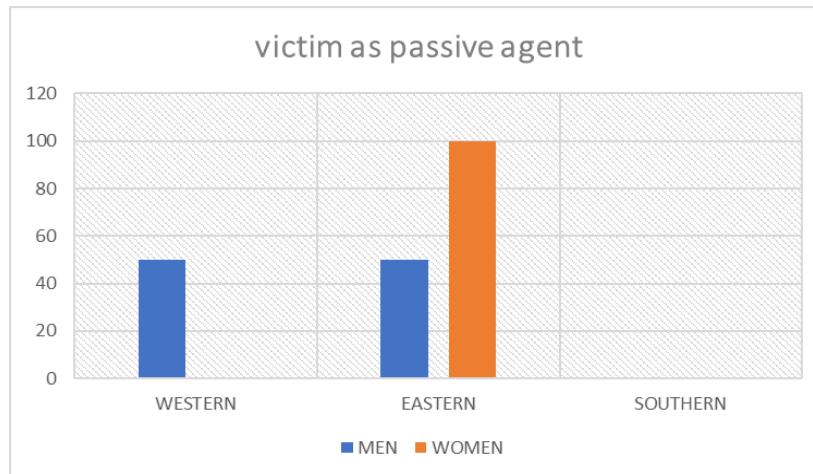
Examples:

- i. Men break silence on GBV in Rukwa
- ii. Women group move to stop adolescent prostitution in Delta
- iii. Every woman should fight for Gender inclusion

The first example portrays men as active agents in addressing gender-based violence (GBV). The phrase 'break silence' indicates that men are taking an active role in speaking out about their experiences and challenges related to GBV. Instead of being passive victims, these men are shown as proactive participants in the discourse, which can help in raising awareness and seeking solutions. In the second example, a women's group is depicted as taking concrete material action in addressing the issue of adolescent prostitution in Delta. The phrase 'move to stop' highlights their proactive stance and efforts to initiate change. This construction presents the women not just as affected parties but as active agents working to solve a societal problem. The final example encourages individual women to take an active role in the pursuit of gender inclusion. The use of "should fight" implies that every woman has a responsibility and the capability to advocate for equal rights and opportunities. It presents women as empowered individuals who can influence and drive societal changes. By suggesting that each woman can and should engage in this fight, the narrative shifts from seeing women as merely needing protection or advocacy from others to recognizing them as capable agents of change in the struggle for gender equality. In these examples, the victims or potential victims of social issues are not depicted as passive sufferers but instead, they are given active roles, transforming them into agents who perform actions and contribute to the discourse on their terms.

Victims as Passive Agents

Newspaper reporters can sometimes depict victims of certain actions or situations as passive participants rather than active ones. Passive voice is used to describe actions in a way that the agent (the doer) is not explicitly mentioned or the agents are placed later in the sentence, thus shifting the focus to the action or the recipient of the action. In this context, passive agents are individuals who are primarily acted upon rather than acting themselves. When victims are portrayed as passive agents, the focus is often on the harm they suffer or the events happening to them, rather than their capacity to respond, resist, or take action. However, this is not to mean that the media is in full support of the abuse or women are to blame for their victimization (Islam & Siddique: 2023).



The data on victims framed as passive agents across Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa shows distinct regional variations in the portrayal of both violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW). For VAM, both Western and Eastern Africa present a consistent picture, with 50% of male victims being depicted as passive agents. Interestingly, Southern Africa reports 0% in this category, indicating a complete absence of portrayals that frame male victims as passive agents. This suggests that, unlike in Western and Eastern Africa, there is either a different narrative approach or a possible underrepresentation of passive male victims in Southern Africa.

In the case of VAW, the data reveals an extreme contrast. Eastern Africa stands out with 100% of female victims being portrayed as passive agents, whereas Western and Southern Africa both report 0% in this category. This stark difference indicates that Eastern Africa predominantly depicts female victims as lacking agency, potentially reinforcing traditional gender stereotypes where women are seen as passive in situations of violence. The absence of such portrayals in Western and Southern Africa could reflect a different approach to gender representation in these regions, possibly highlighting a focus on more active roles for female victims or simply a lack of representation of passive female victims in the media.

Examples:

- i. Women hospitalised after attack by husbands (Eastern)
- ii. Domestic Violence - 340 Husbands Beaten By Their Wives in One Year - Lagos Govt (Western)

In samples (i) and (ii), the sentences are passive structures in which the acting persons are explicitly mentioned, but the sentences seem to focus on the grammatical subjects, which are the victims (women, 340 husbands) in the headlines. In this case, the acting persons are the perpetrators, while the victims are depicted as passive agents by focusing on their hospitalization after being attacked by their husbands, as well as the act of being beaten by their wives. In other words, in the first example, the action (being attacked) is emphasized, and the women's role in the narrative is one of being acted upon rather than taking action themselves. This type of reporting

highlights the severity of the situation and the immediate impact on the victims, but it does not provide information on the women's responses or actions following the attack. In the second example, the narrative emphasizes the husbands' victimhood and the physical violence they endured. The use of the passive construction "beaten by their wives" highlights the action done to the husbands and their role as recipients of the abuse. In both examples, the victims are depicted primarily as recipients of violence or abuse. The focus is on their suffering and the actions done to them, with less emphasis on their responses, actions, or resilience.

Nominalization

Nominalization involves turning actions or verbs into nouns, which often removes the agent from the statement. This technique abstracts the action and focuses on the concept rather than specific actions or individuals.

- i. Domestic abuse of men needs to be recognised (Southern Africa)
- ii. Spousal Abuse Against Men Rising In Lagos – UI Criminologist (Western Africa)

From the above, the verb "to abuse" is turned into the noun "abuse." In the former, the example focuses on the need for recognition of the issue rather than who is committing the abuse, while the latter focuses on the rising trend of abuse rather than the specific actions or perpetrators.

Genericization and Specification

These concepts help in understanding how language can either generalize or specify individuals or groups in discourse. Genericisation refers to the practice of representing social actors as a general class rather than as specific individuals. It involves using language that abstracts and generalizes social actors, making them stand for a whole category or type of people. This can often be seen in the use of plural nouns without specific identifiers or in the use of indefinite articles. Specification, on the other hand, involves representing social actors as specific individuals or as distinct groups with identifiable characteristics. This process makes the actors more concrete and individualized in the discourse. Specification can be achieved through the use of proper nouns, definite articles, or specific descriptions that differentiate the actors from the general category. For instance, in media reports on social issues like domestic violence, the choice between genericisation and specification can influence public perception.

Perpetrators as a Group

In discourse, representing perpetrators as a group involves generalizing the actors involved in particular actions, often leading to stereotypes and oversimplifications. This approach shifts focus from individuals to a broader category, which can obscure the complexities of social realities.

Examples:

- i. More women beating men now
- ii. Lagos govt records 340 cases of wives assaulting their husbands in one year
- iii. Father's Day: A call to action for men

The first example presents the perpetrators as a generalized group (women). Here, the focus is on a growing trend of women as perpetrators of violence against men. The phrase "more women" implies an increase in such incidents and this generalization can lead to stereotypes about women being violent and shifts attention away from individual cases and the specific circumstances surrounding each incident. Similarly, in (ii), the perpetrators are represented as 'wives' again forming a group rather than focusing on individual actors. The headline emphasizes the quantity (340 cases) and the relationship (wives assaulting husbands), presenting this as a significant trend. Finally, the last headline groups "men" as the target audience for a call to action, presumably regarding issues related to fatherhood or men's roles in society. Although it does not explicitly label men as perpetrators, the grouping can imply a collective responsibility or a need for change among men.

Representing perpetrators as a group, as seen in these examples, can simplify complex social realities and contribute to stereotypes. This form of representation obscures individual contexts, creates stereotypes and simplifies complex societal issues such as domestic violence.

Perpetrators as Individuals

In this case, there is a more nuanced and detailed understanding of social actors, acknowledging their individuality and unique circumstances. The perpetrators can also be identified as specific individual that are responsible for the crime they have been accused of.

- i. How my wife beats me at will, man shares ordeal
- ii. Man pours hot water on wife in Ondo
- iii. SAPS policewoman has been abusing her husband of 12 years-claim

In (i), the headline identifies the perpetrator as a specific individual, "my wife," and provides context through the phrase "man shares ordeal." The use of the pronoun "my" personalizes the account, highlighting the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. The individualization above adds depth by indicating that this is a personal account, which can elicit empathy and a deeper understanding of the specific situation and prevent stereotypes about women or wives in general. Also, in (ii) the headline identifies the perpetrator as a specific individual, 'man' and provides additional detail by mentioning the location. In this context, the headline avoids generalisation about men or husbands as a group, which helps maintain a nuanced view of such incidents. Lastly in (iii) the headline specifies the perpetrator as a 'SAPS policewoman' adding an additional layer of detail by mentioning her

profession and the duration of the abuse. This individualized approach helps avoid broad stereotypes about policewomen or women in general.

Assimilation

Here, the social actors can be quantified as a group of participants (aggregation), or they are seen as general opinion (collectivization). In aggregation, social actors are represented as part of a quantifiable group or category. This often entails depersonalizing individuals and treating them as statistical entities. Collectivization, on the other hand, involves representing social actors as part of a generalized opinion or consensus within a group or society.

Example 1:

- i. Domestic violence: 25% of men suffer abuse in Nigeria-NGO
- ii. Domestic violence- 340 Husbands beaten by their wives in one year- Lagos Govt
- iii. 46 (men) killed in Gender-based Violence disputes: Men coming forth to report cases

Example 2:

- iv. More men victims of spousal abuse
- v. Married men suffer sexual abuse in silence

In example 1, the social actors are quantified and represented as part of a quantifiable group or category, which is characteristic of aggregation. These examples depersonalize individuals and treat them as statistical entities, focusing on the collective experience rather than individual circumstances.

In example 2, the phrases 'more men victims of spousal abuse' and 'married men suffer sexual abuse in silence' exhibit collectivization. Rather than focusing on individual experiences or cases, these statements generalize the experiences of men as part of a broader social trend or consensus within a group or society. The use of "more men" and "married men" suggests a collective experience shared by a significant portion of the male population, implying that these experiences are representative of a larger societal issue rather than isolated incidents. This approach overlooks the diversity of individual experiences and circumstances, instead emphasizing the prevalence of these issues among men as a group.

Nomination and Categorization

Nomination refers to the practice of referring to social actors by their proper names. This includes personal names and other forms of address that specifically identify individuals. Nomination focuses on the unique identity of the person and often adds a level of personalization and specificity to the discourse. Categorization, on the other hand, involves referring to social actors as members of a certain

category or group. This can include social, occupational, ethnic, gender, or age groups. Categorization emphasizes the common characteristics and shared identity of the members of the group, often highlighting similarities rather than individual differences.

Example 1:

- i. African activists fight violence against women one law at a time
- ii. Camilla to give speech at Violence Against Women and Girls event in Rwanda
- iii. Speaker says violence against women, girls forbidden in Nasarawa State

Example 2:

- iv. Communities key in fighting violence
- v. Abusive men exist in your daily life

In example 1, the headlines categorise the social actors as ‘African activists, Camilla, speakers’. In (i), the headline highlights a specific group based on their geographical and activist identity, emphasizing their collective efforts and shared mission to combat violence against women. In (ii) the headline personalizes the event and adds a level of specificity and prominence. It also highlights her involvement in addressing violence against women and girls, which can draw attention due to her public stature. Also, the term ‘Speaker’ in (iii) refers to a specific person, from the House in Nasarawa State, who holds a specific office.

In example 2, the headline in (iv) categorizes the social actors as ‘communities’. It emphasizes the collective role and shared responsibility of various communities in combating violence. This broad category focuses on the collaborative effort rather than the actions of specific individuals within those communities. Finally, the last headline categorizes the social actors as ‘abusive men’. It generalizes the issue by highlighting a category of people—men who are abusive—without naming any individuals.

Discussion of Findings

The exclusion of perpetrators in headlines about violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW) shows a media focus on victims. This aligns with Fairclough's observation that ‘exclusion may be politically or socially significant’ (Fairclough, 2003, p. 149). The findings from the analysis of headlines in three African regions reveal that in cases of violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW), perpetrators are more frequently excluded from the headlines, especially in VAW cases. In Eastern Africa, there are significantly more VAW headlines (71%) compared to VAM headlines (29%). Western Africa shows the smallest number of VAM headlines (23%) and the highest number of VAW headlines (77%). Southern Africa has a more balanced number of headlines, with 46% for VAM and 54% for VAW.

Similarly, the inclusion of other social actors in media coverage on domestic violence across different regions of Africa significantly enriches the narrative. This inclusion enhances the credibility of reports and fosters a more informed, balanced, and supportive societal response to domestic violence. This concept mirrors White's (2002a) idea of extra-vocalisation, where external voices are integrated into the text, often through attribution. This is notably seen in the media's practice of referencing reputable organizations and influential figures to underscore the gravity of domestic violence. While Western Africa shows the highest inclusion rates, indicating extensive collaborative efforts, Eastern and Southern Africa also highlight important contributions from various actors. The involvement of reputable organizations and influential figures ensures that domestic violence is recognized as a serious issue validated by authoritative sources. Also, including various social actors helps raise awareness and visibility of domestic violence issues. This broader representation ensures that different aspects of the problem are addressed, from legal reforms to cultural stigmas, reaching diverse audiences. Finally, the inclusion of other actors advocating for both men and women ensures balanced representation. Their involvement can lead to stronger advocacy, more robust legal frameworks, and a greater societal commitment to preventing domestic violence. Also, it challenges gender stereotypes and promotes an inclusive understanding of domestic violence, recognizing that it affects individuals regardless of gender.

Furthermore, the role allocation reveals distinct patterns in how perpetrators and victims are portrayed. In many instances, perpetrators (men or women) are activated, meaning they are depicted as active agents performing violent actions. This aligns with previous studies indicating that men and women have an equal risk of being both abusers and victims (Colorado-Yohar et al., 2016; Fawson, 2015; Hamberger & Larsen, 2015). The analysed headlines highlight instances where women are perpetrators of violence against men, drawing attention to the issue of female-perpetrated domestic violence. Thobejane (2012), who also noted that violence committed by women against their male partners has been largely ignored due to stereotypes portraying men as inherently strong, emphasizes that this growing recognition challenges these deeply ingrained perceptions. On the other hand, the headlines portrayed men as active agents committing violent acts against women. This use of activation underscores the seriousness and prevalence of domestic violence by focusing on the actions of the perpetrators. Conversely, perpetrators either men or women are sometimes represented as passive agents, where the focus shifts away from the individuals committing the violence to the actions' effects on the victims. This can be achieved through grammatical constructs that background the perpetrator and foreground the experience of the victims. This approach shifts the narrative to the suffering of the victims, highlighting the severity of domestic violence without explicitly naming the perpetrators. Notably, the representation of perpetrators as active agents is less common in Eastern Africa, suggesting regional differences in media practices. This absence reflects cultural or media tendencies to focus more on victims rather than on those committing the violence. The findings indicate that media representations in sub-Saharan Africa vary significantly, with some regions prioritizing the activation of perpetrators to highlight their actions, while others emphasize the victims' experiences, often bypassing the agency of the

perpetrators. Additionally, victims are sometimes portrayed as active agents, taking on proactive roles in addressing domestic violence. These constructions present the victims not merely as passive sufferers but as empowered individuals and groups taking action to address and combat domestic violence. This portrayal shifts the narrative from seeing victims solely as needing protection to recognizing them as capable agents of change, contributing actively to the discourse on their terms. These differences in role allocation can influence public perception and societal attitudes towards domestic violence, shaping advocacy and policy-making efforts accordingly.

The nominalization in headlines effectively removes the agent from the statement and shifts the focus to broader issues rather than specific actions or individuals. Here, the media highlights the increasing trend of abuse, concentrating on the prevalence of the issue rather than the specific actions or identities of those involved. While the distinct patterns in the use of genericization present perpetrators as a generalized group, specification presents them as different individuals. The findings suggest that genericization can contribute to stereotypes and oversimplified perceptions by abstracting individual cases into broader trends. As Van Leeuwen (2008) explains, this process allows social actors to be represented as members of a generalized class. In contrast, specification in the analyzed data offers a more nuanced portrayal by highlighting individuals with specific details, which adds depth and context to the stories. This individualized approach not only personalizes the incidents but also avoids broad generalizations about groups, fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in each case. In other words, the differentiation between genericization and specification in media reporting on domestic violence significantly influences public perception. Generic headlines can inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes and obscure the personal nature of each case, while specific headlines provide clarity and context, highlighting the unique dynamics at play. This distinction underscores the importance of mindful language use in media to ensure a balanced and accurate representation of domestic violence incidents, whether involving men or women as victims or perpetrators.

Nomination, as observed in the selected headlines, refers to specific individuals by name, adding a personal and specific element to the discourse. For instance, headlines mentioning prominent individuals adds prominence and a personal touch to the discussion of violence against women. In contrast, categorization groups social actors into broad categories. This approach highlights common characteristics and shared identities, emphasising collective efforts or issues rather than focusing on individual differences.

Finally, the analysis also indicates that assimilation plays a significant role in these headlines, either through aggregation or collectivization. Headlines like "25% of men suffer abuse in Nigeria" or "340 husbands beaten by their wives" illustrate how aggregation treats individuals as part of a larger statistical trend, focusing on the collective experience rather than specific incidents. van Leeuwen (2008) explains that this process involves quantifying social actors as part of a statistical group, which can depersonalize their individual experiences. This method emphasizes the prevalence and scope of the issue but may overlook the nuances of individual cases.

Notably, there are more instances of aggregation than collectivization, with aggregation being the dominant method of representing social actors in these headlines.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of media representation in shaping public perceptions of domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. The analysis of newspaper headlines reveals regional differences in the representation of social actors involved in domestic violence, highlighting the media's focus on victims rather than perpetrators. Additionally, the inclusion of diverse social actors enriches the narrative and enhances the credibility of reports, fostering a more informed and balanced societal response to domestic violence. Furthermore, the patterns of role allocation in media coverage play a significant role in public understanding of domestic violence. The representations of perpetrators as active or passive agents and the use of linguistic techniques such as nominalization, genericization, and specification significantly influence how domestic violence is perceived and addressed. These findings emphasize the need for mindful and accurate media reporting to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced portrayal of domestic violence.

Ultimately, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of media representations of domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. By identifying underlying biases and disparities, the research informs efforts to challenge stereotypes, and advocate for more responsive media coverage of domestic violence. The insights gained from this analysis can drive policy changes and resource allocation to support victims more effectively and encourage comprehensive approaches to combating domestic violence across genders.

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