

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

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 actor 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 intersect with economic disparities and systemic inequalities, the impact of domestic violence is particularly pronounced. Despite increased awareness and advocacy efforts, the prevalence of domestic violence in the region remains alarmingly high, affecting individuals irrespective of gender identity.

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

1 society. Bakuuro & Diedong (2021) stressed the fact that media discourse analysis
2 allows us to tap into the minds of the author and the audience to know their levels
3 of understanding of the issues at table. Within this context, the representations of
4 social actors—victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and authorities—holds significant
5 implications for both the perpetuation and prevention of domestic violence.

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

- 16
- 17 1. How are social actors involved in domestic violence, including victims,
18 perpetrators, bystanders, and authorities, portrayed in newspaper headlines
19 in Sub-Saharan Africa?
- 20 2. To what extent do newspaper headlines represent social actors involved in
21 domestic violence against men and women differently in Sub-Saharan
22 Africa, and what are the implications for promoting more inclusive and
23 accurate media coverage of this issue?
- 24

25

26 **Literature Review**

27

28 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was developed in the late 1980s and early
29 1990s. During the 1990s, CDA evolved from Critical Linguistics (CL) into its
30 current form, with the aim of uncovering hidden ideologies and intentions within
31 texts (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 4). Unlike Discourse Analysis (DA), CDA is a
32 "constitutive problem-oriented, interdisciplinary" method that focuses not on
33 linguistic units but on social phenomena. This requires a unique approach that is
34 both multi-methodological and multi-disciplinary (Wodak & Meyer, 2008, p. 2).
35 Van Leeuwen (2006) distinguishes Critical Linguistics (CL) from Critical
36 Discourse Analysis (CDA) in several key ways. While CL and CDA share
37 common foundations, CDA seeks to establish critical social theory and explores
38 the links between "discourse and the social practices in which they are embedded"
39 (p. 167). Additionally, CDA adopts a more sophisticated interdisciplinary
40 approach, extending beyond the analysis of texts and spoken discourse to
41 investigate their meanings through methods such as historiography or Discourse
42 Analysis (DA).

43 Another important concept in CDA research is dominance. CDA aims to
44 investigate both opaque and transparent structural relationships of dominance,
45 discrimination, power, and control as they manifest in language. By critically
46 evaluating texts, CDA seeks to highlight issues of injustice, repression, and

1 marginalization, thereby revealing underlying dominance (Wodak, 2001, p. 204).
2 In a conventional setting, domination may manifest through social conflict or
3 various forms of conflicts between groups competing for material or symbolic
4 resources. The power dynamics between different groups and the accompanying
5 ideologies frequently give rise to disparities and oppression, prompting
6 marginalized groups to resist and strive for change. Moreover, the theory of
7 dominance, which posits that variations in discourse stem from the unequal power
8 distribution between men and women, offers insights into these disparities.

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

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

27 28 29 **Theory**

30
31 van Leeuwen (1996, 2008) discusses a 'socio-semantic inventory' as a tool for
32 examining the representation of participants in social practices within a text. The
33 significance of representation lies in its potential to be more salient than the actual
34 social behavior itself. A fundamental premise of van Leeuwen's theory is the
35 examination of how social actors are depicted within the English language. Rather
36 than centering on linguistic classifications (such as transitivity categories) and
37 linguistic processes (like nominalization and passive agent omission), van
38 Leeuwen directs attention to the "sociosemantic inventory of the ways in which
39 social actors can be represented and establish the sociological and critical
40 relevance" to the various categories, which are then analyzed in terms of their
41 linguistic realization (van Leeuwen, 2008, p.23).

42

1 **Table 1. 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.
Inclusion & Exclusion	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 texts proceeds.
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.

2

3

4

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

1 reporting on sexual violence shed light on the nuanced ways in which media
2 depict victims and perpetrators. This study revealed disparities in how individuals
3 involved in such incidents are characterized, uncovering subtle yet significant
4 differences in the language and terminology employed, highlighting potential
5 biases or preconceptions embedded within media representations.

6 Similarly, Pekkarinen (2018) focused specifically on the portrayal of victims
7 and alleged perpetrators of sexual violence in US news articles. Through a
8 thorough analysis of news coverage, the study identified patterns in how victims
9 are depicted as passive subjects while alleged perpetrators are framed in ways that
10 either humanize or vilify them. This dichotomy in representation not only reflects
11 broader societal attitudes towards victims and perpetrators but also has
12 implications for public understanding and empathy towards survivors of sexual
13 violence.

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

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

34 35 36 **Methodology**

37
38 This study adopted a combination of qualitative and quantitative research
39 methods. The data comprised 170 newspaper reports obtained from NexisLexis,
40 an extensive news article database covering the timeframe from 2019 to 2023.
41 Keywords such as "domestic violence, gender-based violence, intimate partner
42 violence", and related terms were used to identify relevant articles within the
43 specified timeframe. Articles were selected based on their relevance to domestic
44 violence issues, with a focus on those reporting specific incidents or cases
45 involving violence against men and women. The search was focused on popular
46 news sources from Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa, representing diverse

1 geographic regions, languages, and socio-cultural contexts. Due to limited
2 resources, news sources from other regions of Africa were not included in the
3 sample.

4 Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns, trends, and
5 discrepancies in social actor representation across different newspaper headlines
6 within Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa. Additionally, the articles were
7 systematically reviewed to identify and extract information related to social actor
8 representation, including the portrayal of victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and
9 authorities.

10 The period from 2019 to 2023 was chosen to capture recent media coverage
11 of domestic violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. This timeframe allows for an
12 examination of contemporary issues and trends in media representation, providing
13 insights into current perceptions and responses to domestic violence within
14 Western, Eastern, and Southern Africa.

17 **Data Analysis**

18
19 Theo van Leeuwen's framework provides a comprehensive tool for
20 understanding how different participants in a discourse are represented. This
21 framework is particularly useful in examining media representations of complex
22 social issues like domestic violence.

24 *Exclusion of Social Actors*

25
26 In this context, exclusion refers to the omission of certain social actors from
27 the headlines reporting violence against men and women in the regions analysed.
28 This happens through suppression and backgrounding, where social actors are left
29 out from the headlines, or rather they are not giving significant roles.

31 *Exclusion of Perpetrators*

32
33 Here, actions that are de-agentilised present the victims as the goal of the
34 violence without making reference to the perpetrators. The newspaper reporters
35 shift the focus to other victims in the headlines on the violence against men(VAM)
36 and violence against women(VAW).

38 Example 1:

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

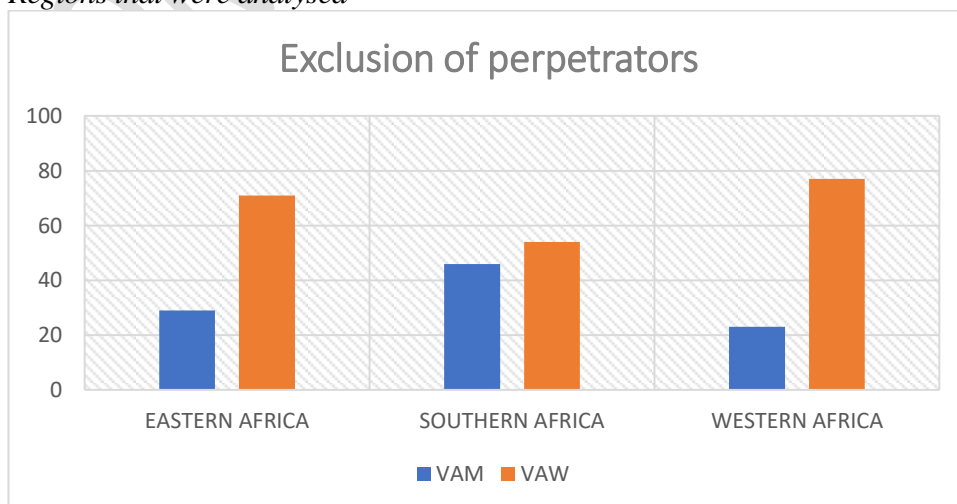
43 Example 2:

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

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

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

31
 32 **Figure 1.** *The Chart below Shows the Distribution of Exclusion across the*
 33 *Regions that were analysed*



34

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

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

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

23 *Inclusion of OTHERS*

24 The concept of 'inclusion of OTHERS' refers to acknowledging and
25 considering additional social actors who are neither victims nor perpetrators in the
26 context of newspapers headlines on domestic violence. This involves identifying
27 individuals or groups who play secondary or supporting roles in the reported
28 incidents.
29
30

31 Example 1:

- 32 i. More Women Beating Men Now - (DOVVSU)
- 33 ii. More Men Suffer Domestic Abuse Than Women, (LASU Don) Reveals
- 34 iii. Spousal Abuse Against Men Rising In Lagos – UI Criminologist
- 35 iv. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: 25% OF MEN SUFFER ABUSE IN NIGERIA
- 36 — (NGO)
- 37
- 38

39 Example 1 above has headlines on VAM. Here, the inclusion of various
40 social actors beyond the primary victims and perpetrators enhances the narrative's
41 credibility and depth. The Police Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit
42 (DOVVSU) highlights law enforcement's acknowledgment and action on
43 domestic violence against men, lending authority to the issue. The reference to a
44 Lagos State University (LASU) academic indicates that scholarly research
45 underpins these findings, adding academic validation. Similarly, a criminologist
46 from a university provides an expert perspective, emphasizing that professionals

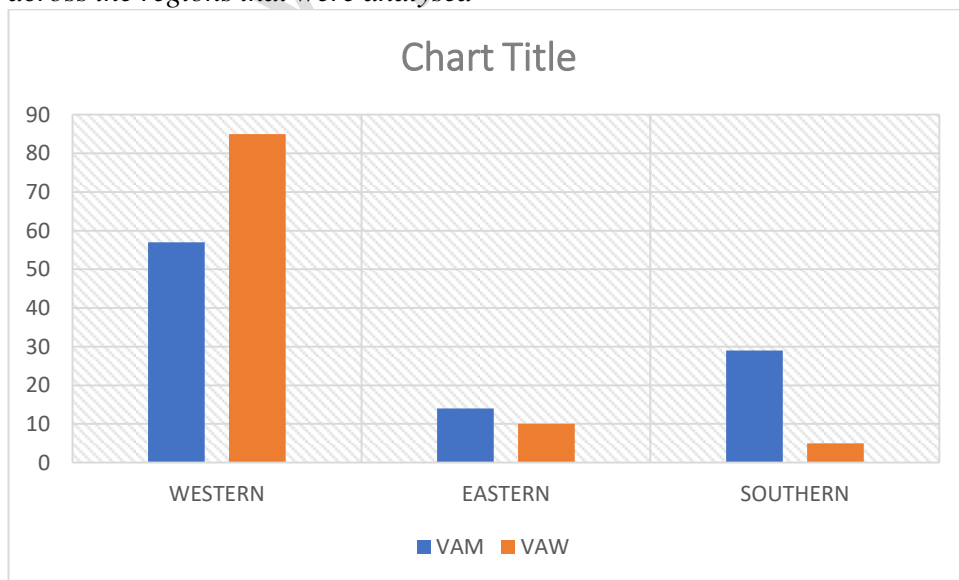
1 are noting and reporting the rise in domestic violence against men. The inclusion
 2 of an NGO, Purple Lifeline Connection, underscores civil society's advocacy and
 3 support roles, offering crucial data and perspectives. Incorporating these social
 4 actors present a multifaceted view of domestic violence against men, validating the
 5 reported trends and promoting a nuanced public discourse.

6
 7 Example 2:

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

13
 14 In example 2 above, the headlines on VAW illustrate the inclusion of various
 15 social actors, from international figures to local activists and governmental
 16 officials, contributing to a comprehensive narrative on combating violence against
 17 women. Camilla, The Duchess of Cornwall, brings international attention and
 18 credibility to the issue, emphasizing its global importance. The mention of African
 19 activists highlights grassroots efforts and the role of civil society in driving
 20 legislative and social reforms. The National Association of Seadogs (Pirates
 21 Confraternity) points to fraternal organizations' involvement in advocating for
 22 women's rights, showing a proactive stance in supporting victims. Lagos State
 23 Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu's commitment to empowering women underscores
 24 the local government's role in promoting gender equality. Including these diverse
 25 social actors enriches the media coverage, fostering a more informed and
 26 multidimensional public discourse on domestic violence against women.

27
 28 **Figure 2.** The Chart below shows the distribution of the inclusion of OTHERS
 29 across the regions that were analysed



30
 31

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

11 Furthermore, in Eastern Africa, the inclusion percentages are lower, with
12 14.3% for men and 10% for women. This indicates less frequent involvement of
13 other social actors in the media coverage of domestic violence against men and
14 women. However, the inclusion of high-profile figures such as Camilla, The
15 Duchess of Cornwall, and local influencers like Sungura musician Aleck Musuki,
16 still brings significant attention to the issue. The involvement of organizations like
17 the Centre for Rights, Education, and Awareness (CREAW) working with the
18 National Police Service showcases the efforts to improve systemic responses to
19 domestic violence through specialized training. Although the percentages are
20 lower, the presence of these actors highlights ongoing efforts to address domestic
21 violence and protect victims in the region, while more comprehensive and
22 localized initiatives may be necessary to enhance the impact and reach of these
23 efforts.

24 Interestingly in Southern Africa, the inclusion of others stands at 28.6% for
25 women and 5% for men. Since violence against men is less commonly reported or
26 acknowledged in many societies, media outlets seek to provide additional context
27 or validation by emphasizing the broader societal response to such incidents.
28 Furthermore, the inclusion of others in these headlines reflect a growing
29 recognition of the importance of addressing gender-based violence in all its forms,
30 including violence perpetrated against men. As societal attitudes towards
31 masculinity and vulnerability evolve, there may be increasing efforts within media
32 organizations to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes by portraying
33 men as multidimensional beings who can be victims of violence and also receive
34 support and intervention. On the other hand, headlines related to violence against
35 women may exhibit lower levels of inclusion of others due to several factors,
36 including entrenched gender biases, victim-blaming attitudes, and the
37 normalization of violence against women in some contexts. Media representations
38 of violence against women may sometimes focus primarily on the actions of
39 perpetrators or the experiences of victims, neglecting the broader social dynamics
40 and support networks that play a crucial role in addressing and preventing such
41 violence.

42

43 *Role Allocation*

44

45 This refers to the different roles the social actors play in a discourse. van
46 Leeuwen argues that the representation can reallocate or rearrange the social

1 relations between the participants. this can be realized through activation and
2 passivation. In the former, social actors are represented as active participants,
3 performing actions, while in the latter they are depicted as undergoing actions or
4 being affected by them.

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

8
9 *Perpetrators as Active Agents*

10
11 Example 1.

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

15
16 Example 2

- 17 i. Man shoot wife to death at Ashaiman
- 18 ii. Man pours hot water on wife in Ondo

19
20 In example 1 above, the headlines activate the agents 'women,' 'my wife,' and
21 'female soldier' as perpetrators of violence, highlighting an increase in instances
22 where women are actively beating men. The use of activation in these headlines
23 draws attention to a shift in societal dynamics and addresses the underreported
24 issue of female-perpetrated domestic violence. On the other hand, in example 2,
25 the noun 'man' is activated in both instances as perpetrators who actively
26 committed the violent acts of shooting his wife to death and pouring hot water on
27 his wife, respectively.

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

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

35
36 *Perpetrators as Passive Agents*

37
38 Here, perpetrators are represented as performers of the action (domestic
39 violence). This can be realised through grammatical constructs that shift the focus
40 away from the agent performing the action and instead emphasize the experience
41 or impact on the affected party. For a perpetrator to be passivated in discourse, the
42 representation would shift away from them as active agents committing the
43 violence and instead focus on the violence itself or its effects. Here are a few ways
44 this can be achieved:

1 *Bypass Agency*

2
3 Bypass agency refers to the omission of the perpetrator in a statement,
4 thereby foregrounding the action itself. This technique often shifts the focus from
5 who is performing the action to the action's impact or the victims.

- 6
7 i. Spousal Abuse Against Men Rising In Lagos – UI Criminologist (Western
8 Africa)
9 ii. Men also suffer domestic violence (Western Africa)
10 iii. No! Women don't condone domestic violence (Eastern Africa)
11 iv. Domestic violence: the real plight of experiences of abused women
12 (Southern Africa)

13
14 In the first headline, the focus is on the rising cases of spousal abuse against
15 men. The agency (the perpetrators of the abuse) is bypassed, and the emphasis is
16 on the trend and the victims (men). Likewise, the second example highlights those
17 men are victims of domestic violence. It does not specify who is committing the
18 violence, thus bypassing the agency and focusing on the suffering of men. Finally
19 in (iii) and (iv) above, the focus is on women's stance against domestic violence, as
20 well as the experiences and plight of abused women. The examples do not specify
21 who is committing the violence, thus bypassing the perpetrators and foregrounding
22 the opposition to the violence.

23
24 *Victims as Passive Agents*

25
26 Passive voice is used to describe actions in a way that the agent (the doer) is
27 not explicitly mentioned or the agents are placed later in the sentence, thus shifting
28 the focus to the action or the recipient of the action.

- 29
30 i. Domestic Violence: 340 Lagos Husbands Beaten By Their Wives In One
31 Year Govt Expresses Worry (Western Africa)
32 ii. Women hospitalised after attack by husbands (Eastern Africa)

33
34 The first example uses passive voice (340 Lagos husbands beaten) to
35 emphasise the husbands being beaten rather than focusing on the wives who are
36 committing the action. Also, the use of passive voice (Women hospitalised) shifts
37 the focus to the women being hospitalized, rather than directly stating that
38 husbands attacked them. The emphasis is on the state of the women post-attack.

39 Thus, employing bypass agency, nominalization, and passive voice, these
40 headlines shift the focus from the perpetrators to the victims or the actions
41 themselves. This can influence the reader's perception, emphasizing the impact
42 and the issue rather than those responsible for the actions.

43
44

1 *Victims as Active Agents*

2

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

6

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

10

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

31

32 *Victims as Passive Agents*

33

34 Newspaper reporters can sometimes depict victims of certain actions or
35 situations as passive participants rather than active ones. In this context, passive
36 agents are individuals who are primarily acted upon rather than acting themselves.
37 When victims are portrayed as passive agents, the focus is often on the harm they
38 suffer or the events happening to them, rather than their capacity to respond, resist,
39 or take action. However, this is not to mean that the media is in full support of the
40 abuse or women are to blame for their victimization (Islam & Siddique: 2023).

41

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

45

1 In samples (i) and (ii), the sentences are passive structures in which the acting
 2 persons are explicitly mentioned, but the sentences seem to focus on the
 3 grammatical subjects, which are the victims (women, 340 husbands) in the
 4 headlines. In this case, the acting persons are the perpetrators, while the victims are
 5 depicted as passive agents by focusing on their hospitalization after being attacked
 6 by their husbands, as well as the act of being beaten by their wives. In other words,
 7 in the first example, the action (being attacked) is emphasized, and the women's
 8 role in the narrative is one of being acted upon rather than taking action
 9 themselves. This type of reporting highlights the severity of the situation and the
 10 immediate impact on the victims, but it does not provide information on the
 11 women's responses or actions following the attack. In the second example, the
 12 narrative emphasizes the husbands' victimhood and the physical violence they
 13 endured. The use of the passive construction "beaten by their wives" highlights the
 14 action done to the husbands and their role as recipients of the abuse. In both
 15 examples, the victims are depicted primarily as recipients of violence or abuse.
 16 The focus is on their suffering and the actions done to them, with less emphasis on
 17 their responses, actions, or resilience.

18

19 *Nominalization*

20

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

24

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

28

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

33

34 *Genericization and Specification*

35

36 These concepts help in understanding how language can either generalize or
 37 specify individuals or groups in discourse. Genericisation refers to the practice of
 38 representing social actors as a general class rather than as specific individuals. It
 39 involves using language that abstracts and generalizes social actors, making them
 40 stand for a whole category or type of people. This can often be seen in the use of
 41 plural nouns without specific identifiers or in the use of indefinite articles.
 42 Specification, on the other hand, involves representing social actors as specific
 43 individuals or as distinct groups with identifiable characteristics. This process
 44 makes the actors more concrete and individualized in the discourse. Specification
 45 can be achieved through the use of proper nouns, definite articles, or specific
 46 descriptions that differentiate the actors from the general category. For instance, in

1 media reports on social issues like domestic violence, the choice between
2 genericisation and specification can influence public perception.

3
4 *Perpetrators as a Group*

5
6 In discourse, representing perpetrators as a group involves generalizing the
7 actors involved in particular actions, often leading to stereotypes and
8 oversimplifications. This approach shifts focus from individuals to a broader
9 category, which can obscure the complexities of social realities.

10
11 Examples:

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

15
16 The first example presents the perpetrators as a generalized group (women).
17 Here, the focus is on a growing trend of women as perpetrators of violence against
18 men. The phrase "more women" implies an increase in such incidents and this
19 generalization can lead to stereotypes about women being violent and shifts
20 attention away from individual cases and the specific circumstances surrounding
21 each incident. Similarly, in (ii), the perpetrators are represented as 'wives' again
22 forming a group rather than focusing on individual actors. The headline
23 emphasizes the quantity (340 cases) and the relationship (wives assaulting
24 husbands), presenting this as a significant trend. Finally, the last headline groups
25 "men" as the target audience for a call to action, presumably regarding issues
26 related to fatherhood or men's roles in society. Although it does not explicitly
27 label men as perpetrators, the grouping can imply a collective responsibility or a
28 need for change among men.

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

33
34 *Perpetrators as Individuals*

35
36 In this case, there is a more nuanced and detailed understanding of social
37 actors, acknowledging their individuality and unique circumstances. The
38 perpetrators can also be identified as specific individual that are responsible for the
39 crime they have been accused of.

- 40
41 i. How my wife beats me at will, man shares ordeal
- 42 ii. Man pours hot water on wife in Ondo
- 43 iii. SAPS policewoman has been abusing her husband of 12 years-claim

44
45 In (i), the headline identifies the perpetrator as a specific individual, "my
46 wife," and provides context through the phrase "man shares ordeal." The use of the

1 pronoun "my" personalizes the account, highlighting the relationship between the
 2 victim and the perpetrator. The individualization above adds depth by indicating
 3 that this is a personal account, which can elicit empathy and a deeper
 4 understanding of the specific situation and prevent stereotypes about women or
 5 wives in general. Also, in (ii) the headline identifies the perpetrator as a specific
 6 individual, 'man' and provides additional detail by mentioning the location. In
 7 this context, the headline avoids generalisation about men or husbands as a group,
 8 which helps maintain a nuanced view of such incidents. Lastly in (iii) the headline
 9 specifies the perpetrator as a 'SAPS policewoman' adding an additional layer of
 10 detail by mentioning her profession and the duration of the abuse. This
 11 individualized approach helps avoid broad stereotypes about policewomen or
 12 women in general.

13

14 *Nomination and Categorization*

15

16 Nomination refers to the practice of referring to social actors by their proper
 17 names. This includes personal names and other forms of address that specifically
 18 identify individuals. Nomination focuses on the unique identity of the person and
 19 often adds a level of personalization and specificity to the discourse.
 20 Categorization, on the other hand, involves referring to social actors as members
 21 of a certain category or group. This can include social, occupational, ethnic,
 22 gender, or age groups. Categorization emphasizes the common characteristics and
 23 shared identity of the members of the group, often highlighting similarities rather
 24 than individual differences.

25

26 Example 1:

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

31

32 Example 2:

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

35

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

44 In example 2, the headline in (iv) categorizes the social actors as
 45 "communities." It emphasizes the collective role and shared responsibility of
 46 various communities in combating violence. This broad category focuses on the

1 collaborative effort rather than the actions of specific individuals within those
2 communities. Finally, the last headline categorizes the social actors as ‘abusive
3 men’. It generalizes the issue by highlighting a category of people—men who are
4 abusive—without naming any individuals.

5
6 *Assimilation*

7
8 Here, the social actors can be quantified as a group of participants
9 (aggregation), or they are seen as general opinion(collectivization). In aggregation,
10 social actors are represented as part of a quantifiable group or category. This often
11 entails depersonalizing individuals and treating them as statistical entities.
12 Collectivization, on the other hand, involves representing social actors as part of a
13 generalized opinion or consensus within a group or society.

14
15 Example 1:

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

21
22 Example 2:

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

25
26 In Example 1, the social actors are quantified and represented as part of a
27 quantifiable group or category, which is characteristic of aggregation. These
28 examples depersonalize individuals and treat them as statistical entities, focusing
29 on the collective experience rather than individual circumstances.

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

39
40
41 **The Findings**

42
43 The exclusion of perpetrators in headlines about violence against men (VAM)
44 and violence against women (VAW) shows a media focus on victims. The
45 findings from the analysis of headlines in three African regions reveal that in cases
46 of violence against men (VAM) and violence against women (VAW), perpetrators

1 are more frequently excluded from the headlines, especially in VAW cases. In
2 Eastern Africa, there are significantly more VAW headlines (71) compared to
3 VAM headlines (29). Western Africa shows the smallest number of VAM
4 headlines (23) and the highest number of VAW headlines (77). Southern Africa
5 has a more balanced number of headlines, with 46 for VAM and 54 for VAW.
6 Overall, the results indicate a stronger focus on excluding perpetrators from
7 headlines in cases of violence against women across all regions.

8 Similarly, the inclusion of other social actors in media coverage on domestic
9 violence across different regions of Africa significantly enriches the narrative.
10 While Western Africa shows the highest inclusion rates, indicating extensive
11 collaborative efforts, Eastern and Southern Africa also highlight important
12 contributions from various actors. This inclusion enhances the credibility of
13 reports and fosters a more informed, balanced, and supportive societal response to
14 domestic violence. The involvement of reputable organizations and influential
15 figures ensures that domestic violence is recognized as a serious issue validated by
16 authoritative sources. Also, including various social actors helps raise awareness
17 and visibility of domestic violence issues. This broader representation ensures that
18 different aspects of the problem are addressed, from legal reforms to cultural
19 stigmas, reaching diverse audiences. Finally, the inclusion of other actors
20 advocating for both men and women ensures balanced representation. Their
21 involvement can lead to stronger advocacy, more robust legal frameworks, and a
22 greater societal commitment to preventing domestic violence. Also, it challenges
23 gender stereotypes and promotes an inclusive understanding of domestic violence,
24 recognizing that it affects individuals regardless of gender,

25 Furthermore, the role allocation reveals distinct patterns in how perpetrators
26 and victims are portrayed. In many instances, perpetrators are activated, meaning
27 they are depicted as active agents performing violent actions. For example,
28 headlines highlight instances where women are perpetrators of violence against
29 men, drawing attention to the issue of female-perpetrated domestic violence.
30 Similarly, men are portrayed as active agents committing violent acts against
31 women. This use of activation underscores the seriousness and prevalence of
32 domestic violence by focusing on the actions of the perpetrators. Conversely,
33 perpetrators are sometimes represented as passive agents, where the focus shifts
34 away from the individuals committing the violence to the actions' effects on the
35 victims. This can be achieved through grammatical constructs that background the
36 perpetrator and foreground the experience of the victims. This approach shifts the
37 narrative to the suffering of the victims, highlighting the severity of domestic
38 violence without explicitly naming the perpetrators. Notably, the representation of
39 perpetrators as active agents is less common in Eastern Africa, suggesting regional
40 differences in media practices. This absence reflects cultural or media tendencies
41 to focus more on victims rather than on those committing the violence. The
42 findings indicate that media representations in sub-Saharan Africa vary
43 significantly, with some regions prioritizing the activation of perpetrators to
44 highlight their actions, while others emphasize the victims' experiences, often
45 bypassing the agency of the perpetrators. Additionally, victims are sometimes
46 portrayed as active agents, taking on proactive roles in addressing domestic

1 violence. These constructions present the victims not merely as passive sufferers
2 but as empowered individuals and groups taking action to address and combat
3 domestic violence. This portrayal shifts the narrative from seeing victims solely as
4 needing protection to recognizing them as capable agents of change, contributing
5 actively to the discourse on their terms. These differences in role allocation can
6 influence public perception and societal attitudes towards domestic violence,
7 shaping advocacy and policy-making efforts accordingly.

8 The nominalization in headlines effectively removes the agent from the
9 statement and shifts the focus to broader issues rather than specific actions or
10 individuals. Here, the media highlights the increasing trend of abuse, concentrating
11 on the prevalence of the issue rather than the specific actions or identities of those
12 involved. While the distinct patterns in the use of genericization present
13 perpetrators as a generalized group, specification presents them as different
14 individuals. Meanwhile, the findings imply that genericization can lead to
15 stereotypes and oversimplified perceptions; that is, the headlines are abstracting
16 individual cases into broader trends. This approach can obscure the unique
17 circumstances of each incident and contribute to generalized stereotypes about
18 women as perpetrators. In contrast, specification in the analyzed data offers a more
19 nuanced portrayal by highlighting individuals with specific details, which adds
20 depth and context to the stories. This individualized approach not only
21 personalizes the incidents but also avoids broad generalizations about groups,
22 fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in each case. In
23 other words, the differentiation between genericization and specification in media
24 reporting on domestic violence significantly influences public perception. Generic
25 headlines can inadvertently perpetuate stereotypes and obscure the personal nature
26 of each case, while specific headlines provide clarity and context, highlighting the
27 unique dynamics at play. This distinction underscores the importance of mindful
28 language use in media to ensure a balanced and accurate representation of
29 domestic violence incidents, whether involving men or women as victims or
30 perpetrators.

31 Nomination, as observed in the selected headlines, refers to specific
32 individuals by name, adding a personal and specific element to the discourse. For
33 instance, headlines mentioning "Camilla" or "Speaker" in a specific state add
34 prominence and a personal touch to the discussion of violence against women. In
35 contrast, categorization groups social actors into broad categories such as "African
36 activists," "communities," or "abusive men." This approach highlights common
37 characteristics and shared identities, emphasizing collective efforts or issues rather
38 than focusing on individual differences. On the other hand, collectivization
39 represents social actors as part of a broader social trend or consensus. Headlines
40 such as "More men victims of spousal abuse" or "Married men suffer sexual abuse
41 in silence" generalize the experiences of men, suggesting a widespread societal
42 issue. This approach emphasizes the collective nature of the problem, implying
43 that these experiences are common and significant within the group. However, it
44 can also obscure the individual experiences and circumstances, focusing instead on
45 the broader trend.

1 Finally, the analysis also indicates that assimilation plays a significant role in
2 these headlines, either through aggregation or collectivization. Aggregation
3 quantifies social actors as part of a statistical group, depersonalizing individual
4 experiences. Headlines like "25% of men suffer abuse in Nigeria" or "340
5 husbands beaten by their wives" treat individuals as part of a larger statistical
6 trend, focusing on the collective experience rather than specific incidents. This
7 method emphasizes the prevalence and scope of the issue but may overlook the
8 nuances of individual cases. Notably, there are more instances of aggregation than
9 collectivization, with aggregation being the dominant method of representing
10 social actors in these headlines.

11

12

13 **Conclusion**

14

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

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

36

37

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