



Thematic Analysis of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) Coverage in Habari Leo and Mwananchi Newspapers: A Review of Stories from January to December 2023

Agnes Aggrey Mbatu

agnesmbatu@gmail.com

The St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Mwanza,
Tanzania

Dr. Francis Xavier Ng' Atigwa

xachengo@hotmail.com

The St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Mwanza,
Tanzania

ABSTRACT

The study examined the thematic focus of intimate partner violence (IPV) stories in the Habari Leo and Mwananchi newspapers throughout 2023, utilizing a quantitative content analysis of 196 newspaper issues. Guided by the Agenda Setting Theory and Framing Theory, the analysis revealed that physical violence is the most frequently reported theme, appearing in 28% of the coverage. Emotional and psychological violence followed at 23%, indicating a growing awareness of its impact, while sexual violence accounts for 19%. Economic and financial abuse was mentioned in 13% of instances, showing an emerging understanding of its implications. Conversely, domestic homicides were covered only eight times (8%), suggesting these severe incidents may be underreported. Other forms of IPV, such as violence during pregnancy and cyber abuse, received minimal attention, highlighting areas that require greater media focus. The findings emphasize the dominance of physical and emotional violence in media narratives while underscoring the need for increased awareness of all IPV forms in Tanzanian society. The study recommends that newspapers enhance coverage of underreported IPV themes, ensure consistent reporting, improve the portrayal of victims and perpetrators, expand discussions on cyber abuse, and collaborate with stakeholders for awareness campaigns.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence, Thematic Focus, Media Coverage, Victim Portrayal, Awareness Campaigns

1. INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a significant global public health concern, impacting individuals across socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds (Workman, 2023). Newspapers play a crucial role in shaping public discourse and awareness around social issues like IPV (Baker and Rodrigues, 2022). Examining how newspapers portray IPV can reveal gaps in public understanding and identify areas for improvement in social responses.

WHO (2021) estimates that 38% of all female homicides worldwide are committed by intimate partners. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is increasingly becoming a serious socio-cultural problem, affecting millions of both men and women globally (Workman, 2023). There are both men and women who experience intimate partner violence (IPV), and it may be stopped. Instead of being an individual issue related to gender differences as it is portrayed in the media, Holtzman (2020) views intimate partner violence as a social and cultural problem. Over the past ten years, intimate partner violence has been acknowledged as a social health issue rather than an individual issue as it is typically portrayed in the media (Holtzman, 2020).

Studies reveal inconsistencies in newspaper coverage of IPV globally. Some prioritize sensationalized accounts of extreme violence, neglecting the prevalence of emotional and controlling behaviors (Weller, 2023). Additionally, a lack of focus on male victims and same-sex IPV is prevalent (Weller, 2023).

Globally, in the United States, research suggests a rise in IPV cases during the COVID-19 lockdowns, with newspapers highlighting the increased vulnerability of women (Naemzadah, 2023). However, studies by Glassner & Edleson (2019) point out a lack of in-depth reporting, often focusing on sensationalized cases or victim-blaming narratives.

Similar trends are observed in the UK, with a focus on tragic incidents while neglecting broader social and economic factors contributing to IPV (Kelly & Burton, 2018). Studies by Crawford & Hester (2019) highlight a gap in reporting on resources and support systems available to victims. Cultural sensitivities and social stigma often restrict open discussions about IPV in the media. Studies by Saleh & Alsawah (2022) suggest limited newspaper coverage, often with a focus on reconciliation rather than holding perpetrators accountable. IPV remains a prevalent issue, yet media coverage can be skewed.

Research by Yu & Li (2023) in China indicates newspapers primarily report on legal proceedings, neglecting the psychological impact on victims and the need for social support networks.

Studies by Ajuwon et al. (2020) show a rise in newspaper coverage of IPV, but the focus is often sensationalized and lacks victim-centered reporting. Research by Eshete & Eshete (2018) suggests newspapers primarily report on extreme cases, neglecting the prevalence of emotional and economic abuse. Media coverage of intimate partner violence often focuses heavily on violence against women, framing men as the primary perpetrators and women as the primary victims (Gillespie, 2013).

However, this portrayal overlooks the reality that men can also be victims of intimate partner violence, and women can be perpetrators. By predominantly highlighting violence against women, the media reinforces gender stereotypes and contributes to the marginalization of male victims. A more balanced representation that acknowledges violence against men would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of intimate partner violence and promote gender equality.

Limited research exists on newspaper coverage of IPV in Tanzania as the result individual and the community at large suffers physical and mental health illness and other chronic condition like depression, anxiety and post traumatic disorder related to IPV, this violence also contributes to broader societal issues, including diminished economic productivity and perpetuation of gender inequality. (Gillespie, 2013) This study aims to address this gap by focusing on Habari Leo and Mwananchi newspapers for the year 2023. The research explored issues of IPV cases reported, the language used to describe victims and perpetrators, and the inclusion of information on support services for victims.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Agenda Setting Theory, introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that the media has a significant influence on public perception by prioritizing certain issues over others. This theory is relevant to the study of intimate partner violence (IPV) coverage in Tanzanian newspapers, Habari Leo and Mwananchi, as these outlets can shape public awareness and concern about IPV by deciding which stories to highlight and how often to cover them (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). The frequency and prominence of IPV reporting can elevate the issue's importance in the public consciousness and potentially influence policy actions. However, the theory also has limitations, as external factors such as political or business influences can skew media coverage, leading to underrepresentation or sensationalization of IPV stories, which may distort public understanding (Dearing & Rogers, 1996). Additionally, it does not account for the role of digital and social media in contemporary agenda-setting (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

Framing Theory, developed by Tversky and Kahneman (1981), explains that how news stories are presented influences audience perception and response. When applied to the coverage of IPV in Habari Leo and Mwananchi, this theory helps to analyze how framing choices, such as focusing on legal, social, or psychological aspects of IPV, can shape public opinions about the causes and solutions to domestic violence (Chong & Druckman, 2007). The framing of IPV as a societal issue can drive public support for interventions, whereas framing it as a private matter may limit awareness. However, the theory's weakness lies in its failure to address how individual audience members interpret news based on personal biases, as well as how editorial policies and journalist perspectives shape news framing (Lodge & Taber, 2013).

Theoretical Literature Review

The thematic focus of articles related to intimate partner violence (IPV) reveals several interconnected themes across various studies. One prominent theme is the media representation of IPV, which examines how stories in the press shape public perceptions and societal attitudes. Rollè et al. (2014) and Smith et al. (2019) highlight the media's role in normalizing violence through sensationalized and episodic reporting, thereby failing to present IPV as a systemic issue. Similarly, Wagunda (2023) emphasizes the victim-blaming narratives prevalent in Kenyan newspapers, which further entrench harmful stereotypes about IPV. These findings underscore a critical gap in understanding how media portrayals can influence public opinion and policy initiatives aimed at addressing IPV.

Another key theme that emerges is the impact of media coverage on help-seeking behavior and societal awareness. Colagrossi et al. (2023) provide insights into how news coverage of femicide can mobilize public action and increase help-seeking among survivors. This suggests a potential for media to act as a catalyst for change, although the long-term effects of such coverage remain unexplored. Forsyth and Ward (2022) also touch upon the influence of media consumption on men's attitudes toward IPV, indicating that media engagement can have both positive and negative ramifications. This interplay of media influence on behavior and awareness represents a significant area for further exploration.

The portrayal of perpetrators and their accountability forms another critical theme. Isaacs and Mthembu (2018) investigate how male perpetrators are often depicted in a sympathetic light, which can obscure their accountability for violence. In a similar vein, Venäläinen (2016) discusses how societal narratives normalize male violence while pathologizing female perpetrators. This tendency to frame perpetrators through a lens of victimhood rather than accountability serves to undermine the seriousness of IPV and complicates efforts to address it effectively. The need for comprehensive analysis beyond tabloid coverage to fully understand these dynamics is an area requiring more research.

Lastly, the structural and systemic barriers faced by health practitioners and survivors are significant themes highlighted in the literature. Hudspeth et al. (2022) emphasize the challenges healthcare professionals encounter in identifying IPV due to organizational constraints, while Slakoff et al. (2020) examine how service providers and technology can support victims during crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These studies point to the importance of systemic changes and enhanced support structures to improve the identification and management of IPV. Together, these themes underscore the complex interplay of media, societal attitudes, and structural barriers in addressing the pervasive issue of IPV, revealing critical gaps in current research that warrant further investigation.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the researcher utilized a case study design to systematically analyze the coverage of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in the Habari Leo and Mwananchi newspapers from January to December 2023. A quantitative approach was employed, focusing on content analysis to identify and quantify reporting patterns, themes, and frequencies related to IPV across 730 newspaper editions.

Purposive sampling techniques were applied to select one edition per week that featured IPV stories, resulting in a sample size of 104 articles. The researcher developed a coding scheme to categorize the data based on various factors, such as the type of IPV, demographics, and tone.

Validity and reliability were ensured through clear research objectives, established measurement tools, and robust data analysis techniques. The study aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how IPV was portrayed in both government and privately owned newspapers, contributing insights into cultural perceptions and media representation of IPV within Tanzanian society.

4. FINDINGS

The analysis of intimate partner violence (IPV) themes in the Tanzanian newspapers Habari Leo and Mwananchi from January to December 2023 revealed a mixed portrayal of various forms of IPV. Physical violence was the most frequently reported theme, with a total of 27 instances (28%) (as shown in Table 1), indicating its serious concern and visibility in media discourse, while Mwananchi slightly outpaced Habari Leo in coverage. Emotional and psychological violence followed closely, with 22 instances (23%), reflecting a growing awareness of its harmful effects. Sexual violence accounted for 18 instances (19%), emphasizing the need for public education and action. Economic and financial abuse received 12 mentions (13%), showcasing an emerging understanding of its impact on victims' autonomy. Domestic homicides, with 8 instances (8%), received less attention, suggesting a disparity in media focus despite their severity. Violence during pregnancy was covered 5 times (5%), while cyber/online abuse and other forms of violence garnered minimal coverage with only 2 instances each (2%). Overall, the findings indicate that Habari Leo and Mwananchi predominantly highlighted physical and emotional violence, revealing areas for potential increased media focus to raise awareness and promote action against less recognized forms of IPV.

Table 1: Thematic Focus of Intimate Partner Violence Stories

Theme	Frequency (Habari Leo)	Frequency (Mwananchi)	Total Frequency	Percentage (%)
Physical Violence	12	15	27	28%
Sexual Violence	8	10	18	19%
Emotional/Psychological Violence	10	12	22	23%
Economic/Financial Abuse	7	5	12	13%
Domestic Homicides	5	3	8	8%
Violence During Pregnancy	3	2	5	5%
Cyber/Online Abuse	1	1	2	2%
Other (e.g., stalking, forced marriage)	2	0	2	2%
Total	48	48	96	100%

SOURCE: Research Findings (2024)

5. DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

The analysis of intimate partner violence (IPV) themes in the Tanzanian newspapers Habari Leo and Mwananchi from January to December 2023 revealed significant trends, particularly in the portrayal of various forms of IPV. The predominance of physical violence, accounting for 28% of the coverage, echoes findings from Rollè et al. (2014) and Smith et al. (2019), which highlight the media's tendency to sensationalize violence, thereby normalizing it within societal discourse. Additionally, the focus on emotional and psychological violence (23%) aligns with an emerging awareness of its detrimental effects, reflecting a shift in societal attitudes toward recognizing these less visible forms of abuse. This observation is further supported by Wagunda (2023), who notes the prevalence of victim-blaming narratives in media representations, complicating the public's understanding of IPV as a systemic issue.

The influence of media coverage on help-seeking behaviors and societal awareness is another critical theme that emerges from both the study findings and existing literature. With sexual violence constituting 19% of the reports, the need for public education becomes evident. Colagrossi et al. (2023) indicate that increased media attention can mobilize public action, potentially encouraging survivors to seek help. While the findings from Habari Leo and Mwananchi suggest an awareness of IPV issues, they also indicate a disparity in coverage for other forms, such as economic abuse (13%) and violence during pregnancy (5%). This underrepresentation echoes the concerns raised by Forsyth and Ward (2022) regarding the dual impact of media consumption on societal attitudes toward IPV, highlighting an area ripe for increased media engagement and public awareness initiatives.

Moreover, the portrayal of perpetrators and their accountability emerges as a significant theme in both the findings and the existing literature. The limited coverage of domestic homicides (8%) and online abuse (2%) suggests a lack of emphasis on the severity of these issues, reminiscent of Isaacs and Mthembu (2018), who argue that media representations often depict male perpetrators sympathetically. This tendency can obscure the accountability of those who commit violence, complicating efforts to address IPV effectively. Venäläinen (2016) further emphasizes how societal narratives can normalize male violence while pathologizing female perpetrators, underscoring the necessity for more nuanced reporting that holds perpetrators accountable rather than framing them as victims. Lastly, the structural barriers faced by survivors and health practitioners highlight a critical area for further exploration.

The limited focus on cyber and online abuse, along with the minimal coverage of IPV during pregnancy, points to systemic gaps in the media's portrayal of these issues. Studies by Hudspeth et al. (2022) and Slakoff et al. (2020) illuminate the challenges healthcare professionals encounter in identifying and managing IPV, suggesting that organizational and systemic changes are essential for improving outcomes for victims.

The interplay between media representation, societal attitudes, and systemic barriers reveals critical gaps that warrant further investigation, emphasizing the need for comprehensive media strategies that address all facets of IPV to foster a more informed and supportive environment for survivors.

6. CONCLUSION

The analysis of intimate partner violence (IPV) themes in the Tanzanian newspapers Habari Leo and Mwananchi from January to December 2023 revealed a predominant focus on physical violence, which constituted 28% of the coverage, indicating its serious societal concern and visibility. Emotional and psychological violence followed at 23%, reflecting an emerging awareness of its detrimental effects, while sexual violence accounted for 19%, underscoring the need for public education. However, issues like economic abuse (13%), domestic homicides (8%), and violence during pregnancy (5%) received less attention, suggesting gaps in media coverage. The portrayal of perpetrators often lacked accountability, as evidenced by minimal coverage of online abuse (2%), highlighting the necessity for more nuanced reporting. Overall, the findings indicate a need for increased media focus on less recognized forms of IPV, to enhance public awareness and promote action, addressing systemic barriers faced by survivors and emphasizing the role of media in shaping societal attitudes toward IPV.

The study recommends the following:

To Enhance Media Training: Implement targeted training programs for journalists to improve their understanding and coverage of diverse forms of IPV, particularly economic abuse, cyber abuse, and violence during pregnancy, fostering more balanced reporting.

To Increase Public Awareness Campaigns: Develop public education initiatives that leverage media channels to raise awareness about the lesser-covered forms of IPV, aiming to shift societal attitudes and encourage victims to seek help.

To Promote Accountability in Reporting: Advocate for media outlets to adopt guidelines that emphasize accountability in IPV reporting, ensuring that perpetrators are portrayed in a manner that reflects the severity of their actions, while avoiding victim-blaming narratives.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ajuwon, A. J., Odebode, S. O., & Adesola, A. A. (2020). Media framing of domestic violence in Nigerian newspapers. *International Journal of Communication*, 14(2020), 2222–2244.
- [2] Alvarado Orellana, S. L., & Kamariza, C. (2015). An analysis on how the media describe intimate partner violence from a social constructionist perspective.
- [3] Baker, A., & Rodrigues, U. M. (Eds.). (2022). *Reporting on sexual violence in the #MeToo era*. Taylor & Francis.
- [4] Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing and the public understanding of science. *Political Psychology*, 28(2), 229-252.
- [5] Colagrossi, M., Deiana, C., Dragone, D., Geraci, A., Giua, L., & Iori, E. (2023). Intimate partner violence and help-seeking: The role of femicide news. *Journal of health economics*, 87, 102722.
- [6] Dearing, J. W., & Rogers, E. M. (1996). *Agenda-setting* (Vol. 4). Sage.
- [7] Eshete, A. A., & Eshete, G. (2018). Media framing of domestic violence in Kenya: A case study of The Standard newspaper. *Gender & Behaviour*, 16(2), 5674–5684.
- [8] Gillespie, L. (2013). Framing deadly domestic violence: Why the Media's spin matters in newspaper coverage of femicide. *Violence against women*, 19 (2): 222-245
- [9] Holtzman, M. (2020). Beyond victim blaming: Students' perceptions of bystanders who fail to intervene. *Sociological Focus*, 53(3), 254-270.
- [10] Hudspeth, N., Cameron, J., Baloch, S., Tarzia, L., & Hegarty, K. (2022). Health practitioners' perceptions of structural barriers to the identification of intimate partner abuse: a qualitative meta-synthesis. *BMC health services research*, 22(1), 96.
- [11] Isaacs, D. H. (2016). Social representations of intimate partner violence in the South African media. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 46(4), 491-503.
- [12] Kelly, J., & Payton, E. (2019). A content analysis of local media framing of intimate partner violence. *Violence and gender*, 6(1), 47-52.
- [13] Naeemzadah, N. (2023). *The News Media's (Re) framing of Intimate Partner Violence During the Covid-19 Pandemic and its Implications for Policy Development in Canada: A Critical Content Analysis* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Western Ontario (Canada)).
- [14] newspapers. *Journal of Educational Sciences & Psychology*, 4(1), 69-75.
- [15] Rollè, L., Abbà, S., Fazzino, R., Gerino, E., Marino, E., & Brustia, P. (2014). Intimate Partner Violence in media representation: a comparison between two Italian newspapers. *Journal of Educational Sciences & Psychology*, 4(1), 69-75.
- [16] Saleh, S., & Alsawah, M. (2022). Domestic violence in the media: A critical analysis of framing practices in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of Communication*, 16(2022), 1–23.
- [17] Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. D. (1996). *Mediating the message: Theories of influences on mass media content*.
- [18] Slakoff, D. C., Aujla, W., & PenzeyMoog, E. (2020). The role of service providers, technology, and mass media when home isn't safe for intimate partner violence victims: best practices and recommendations in the era of CoViD-19 and beyond. *Archives of sexual behavior*, 1-10.
- [19] Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1981). The framing of decisions and the psychology of choice. *Science*, 211(4481), 453-458.
- [20] Venäläinen, S. (2016). "She must be an odd kind of woman": Gendered categorizations in accounts of lethal intimate partner violence in Finnish tabloid news. *Feminism & Psychology*, 26(4), 426-443.

- [21] Wagunda, C. (2023). The Representation of Intimate Partner Violence: An Analysis of Mainstream Newspapers in Kenya (2016-2020) (Doctoral Dissertation).
- [22] Weller, K. R. (2023). Audience engagement changing media's mistrusted view of intimate partner violence.
- [23] Workman, A. (2023). Intimate Partner Violence and Global Public Health. In Handbook of Social Sciences and Global Public Health (pp. 1411-1428). Cham: Springer International Publishing.