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UNDERSTANDING MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN KENYA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MAINSTREAM PRESS

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Abstract

The media play a critical role in shaping society's perceptions of social problems such as intimate partner violence (IPV) through news reports. Such reports are indicators of social, economic, political and cultural norms that either normalize or challenge the occurrence of IPV. Similar to global trends, the prevention of IPV is critical to the achievement of gender equality in Kenya. However, past critiques mainly in high income countries have faulted mainstream media for normalizing IPV through stereotypical and sensational reporting. There is however little research in low and middle level income countries such as Kenya on media framing of IPV. This study therefore sought to understand the representation of intimate partner violence in Kenya by the mainstream press. 70 news articles published by The Standard and Daily Nation newspapers were identified from 2015-2019 through constructed week sampling. Findings indicated that the majority of IPV reports were framed as isolated cases with little contextualization. Such reports tended to use victim blaming language. Further, voices of experts were eclipsed by those of law enforcement and criminal justice sources. This study concluded that for the media in Kenya to contribute meaningfully in the prevention of IPV, there is need for news coverage that promotes public understanding of IPV through widely contextualized reports, emphasis on gender equality and rejection of violence as a means of solving problems in intimate relationships.

Key words: Newspaper, Representation, intimate partner violence, gender equality

Introduction

Public policies addressing IPV in Kenya are geared towards deterrence and penalties for offenders. Many international interventions are however increasingly primed on prevention measures by targeting the underlying causes, modifying risk and activating

protection (Sutherland et al., 2015). This trajectory aims at reducing incidences of IPV by targeting factors that trigger or fertilize conditions which are favourable to IPV (Quadara & Wall, 2012). Out of the complexities of underlying causes, gender inequality is recognized as one of the key ingredients that underpin IPV (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013). This study is founded on a socio-ecological model which builds on news framing and critical feminist theories. It places gender, power and patriarchy as the key explanatory factors. This approach regards power inequalities between men and women, constructions of masculinity and social norms and attitudes as risk factors that happen at the societal level but cascade to the individual with similar representation in the news. This study therefore focuses on building evidence to intervene at the society and community level where the media are a dominant force in shaping the discourse on matters of public importance through representation (Easteal, Holland & Judd, 2015).

Setting

Kenya, is a lower-middle income country in East Africa with 47 devolved units (counties). The 2019 Population and Housing Census report shows the country has a total population of 47,564,296 persons comprising 24,014,716 females and 23,548,056 males. Out of these, 32,732,596 and 14,831,700 persons lived in rural and urban areas respectively (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics [KNBS], 2019). Kenya's population can therefore be characterized as largely rural based.

The Constitution of Kenya, (2010) recognizes the principle of equality and non-discrimination as established in chapter four. Men and women have the right to equal treatment, including equal opportunities with both direct and indirect discrimination prohibited. The same constitution guarantees freedom of the media in article 34. Freedom of the media allows practitioners to scrutinize and analyse events or information that shapes the society. It is this freedom that allows journalists and editors to determine what should be consumed by the public such as IPV news. A status of the media report by the Media Council of Kenya, (2019) showed that even though there was a decline in newspaper readership, which stood at 23 percent among other media, newspapers received the highest confidence ratings by readers who regarded them the least likely to misreport on societal issues, thereby making them ideal in this analysis. Kenya has a robust newspaper landscape with the first mainstream newspaper being published in 1902 as *The East African Standard* but eventually rebranding to its current identity as *The Standard*. The newspaper industry which was initially a monopoly later became competitive with the entry of the *Daily Nation* in 1960. The former is published by the Standard Media Group while the latter is a product of Nation Media Group. The two are the leading newspapers in Kenya. A report on media consumption by Kenya Audience Research Foundation [KARF], (2019) showed that *Daily Nation* remained the market leader with an average daily reach of 48.3% followed by *The Standard* at 25.3%. Given this context, the researchers analysed how IPV was represented by the mainstream press, based on reports published by the two main newspapers from 2015-2019.

The Problem

Intimate partner violence is a social menace that is accorded regular media coverage in Kenya. The news media perform a pivotal role in shaping public opinions and policy responses to IPV (Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010). Newspapers set the parameters of public debate by framing events in a coherent narrative. These parameters offer some actors a prominent role while others may be marginalized or ignored thus firming inequality. Despite Kenya's legislative interventions in the period under review (2015-2019), IPV is still prevalent. Statistics show that 45 percent of women and 44 percent of men between the ages of 15 and 49 have experienced some form of physical violence (National Crime Research Centre [NCRC], 2014). These figures are higher than global estimates which project that 35 percent of women suffer violence at the hands of partners, and some form of sexual violence (Garcia, 2014). In 2018 for example, most victims of domestic violence were women, girls, men and boys in that order (National Police Service [NPS], 2018).

Informed by critical feminist theory, a pivotal aspect of media influence obtains from their ability to create a dominant reality that reinforces dominant power relations (Easteal, et al., 2015). This means newspaper news stories provide a potential site for the reproduction of IPV tolerance and gender inequality (Mendes, 2012).

Given this context and past critiques in mainly high income countries, which have faulted mainstream media for normalizing violence, this study sought to understand the representation of IPV by the mainstream press in Kenya, which is a lower middle income country with regular media reporting of IPV cases.

Objective

The main objective of the study was to explore ways in which intimate partner violence is represented by the mainstream press.

Research question

The main research question was, 'how is intimate partner violence represented by the mainstream press in Kenya?'

Methodology

Critical feminist epistemological perspectives fashioned the trajectory of the research process particularly its criticism but not dismissal of positivist paradigms, which argue that reality exists externally to the researcher and must be investigated through the rigorous process of scientific inquiry based on quantitative data (Sprague, 2005). Feminist critiques have also proposed that any one method or form of data collection is necessarily subjective and can only germinate 'truths' specific to a particular perspective thus certain elements of a quantitative study may be better analysed qualitatively (Patton, 2002). The import of this position is that the use of plural methods and data typologies produce more holistic results and as such, feminist approaches do not reject positivism but appreciate its usefulness in certain contexts.

Similar methodological ideas influenced this study. The researchers balanced the enquiry between quantifications (positivism) and qualitative descriptions (Gray, 2009). This undertaking was made possible by quantifying aspects of *The Standard* and *Daily Nation* newspaper articles that were suited for such by keeping numeric values while a thematic analysis was carried out for uncountable aspects using a coding scheme drawn from the existing literature. The sampling method chosen was aligned to previous researches focusing on traditional media. As such, constructed week sampling was used for the period covering 2015-2019. Following Hester and Dougall, (2007), ten constructed weeks yielded 70 newspaper articles on IPV which were analysed.

Frame analysis was employed as a methodical tool in this study to perform quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Major frames were quantified in percentages before exploring ways in which they overlapped and diverged with frames in circulation in the literature. The researchers analysed various aspects of language, and narratives located in sites such as headlines, the lead, closing paragraphs and within the newspapers where patterns were explored.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Feminist theory was foundational in this study. It originates from a sociological perspective which focuses on the social interpretation of violence and aggression in intimate relationships (Yllo, 2005). The import of this theory is not only a proposition of equality in gender roles in relationships such as marriages but also a call to proscribe male dominance. In essence, it abhors the subordination of women in the society. This theory is linked to social justice and thus knowledge produced is frequently used to highlight and campaign for change in social relations (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). On the other hand, framing theory of the media which is associated with Goffman, (1974) brings into focus an underlying idea that directs the construction of text (Chyi & McCombs, 2004). Media frames therefore help journalists perceive a certain topic by identifying a certain subject quickly, classifying and packaging it to reflect the perceived reality. In sum therefore, a frame is an angle from which events are viewed by the media. When incorporating quotes for their articles, journalists for example shorten longer conversations, and cut irrelevant ideas to invite readers to read a news story in a particular way and as such contain the intention of the writer. Framing theory was therefore used to analyse patterns of frames used in reporting IPV by the mainstream Kenyan press.

Literature Review

Media and Intimate Partner Violence

The Media feature as a priority area in prevention of IPV because of their ability to influence public understanding (Walden & Wall, 2014). However, media may also reinforce certain stereotypes of victims of intimate partner violence. Carlyle, Slater, and Chakroff, (2008) argue that media representation plays a significant role in the varying perceptions of IPV as a social issue over time. One consequence of this media dichotomy is a growing international interest in their representation of IPV and the implications that such representation may have on communities (Sutherland, et al., 2015). In Kenya, IPV

is one of the significant issues covered by the mainstream media. As components of the media, newspapers are key actors in shaping the public discourse because they report on current events and provide a framework for their interpretation, given that who or what is selected to appear in the news and how those individuals and events are portrayed can have a profound influence on people's attitudes, beliefs, and behavior (Flood & Pease, 2009).

Previous researches highlight that media sometimes cover the complexities of intimate partner violence reporting by representing it as an isolated event and normalizing it by presenting it as routine. Blaming victims, offering excuses for perpetrators and faulting the criminal justice system are other dimensions of coverage (Lloyd & Ramon, 2016). A few studies on the African continent have reported replication of these patterns in newspaper reporting such as Owusu-Ado et al., (2018) whose findings showed that media framing of violence against women and girls was episodic in nature with depictions of the violence as individual cases without reference to the wider contexts in which they occurred. Similarly, victim blaming language was found to be prevalent thereby failing to shape society's perception of violence against women and girls as a social and public health issue.

Feminist academics have noted the importance of framing and language in shaping portrayals of women in general and, particularly, issues such as violence against women. Bullock (2010) argues that news media position violence against women as isolated incidents, rather than as a wider problem taking place within a social context. This can take the form of promoting stereotypes and myths about 'real' and 'deserving' victims and 'provoked' or 'tragic' perpetrators and failing to convey the true scale of violence against women and girls (Cerise & Dustin, 2011). Previous studies have also indicated that framing IPV using isolation-type of framing may act to emphasise the issue and misrepresent the scale of the problem and the need for solutions. In studies investigating media representation of intimate partner violence, researchers note that newspapers rarely document a history of violence by perpetrators, with an affinity for method over cause (Morgan & Politoff, 2012; Richards, Gillespie, & Smith, 2011). Such studies have questioned whether it is more important for readers to know how but not why IPV occurs.

Turning to sensationalism in the news, media reporting of the most salacious aspects of violence against women provides the public with a perspective that is provocative but not representative. Further, sensationalist language may titillate shock, fascinate, amuse and entertain. Jackson, (2013) in a case study found that media consistently used sensational language to describe crime including use of terms "out of a horror movie," "unreal," "unspeakable," "bizarre," "shocking" and "hard to comprehend". O'Hara, (2012) analysed 124 newspaper articles relating to specific cases of sexual violence and noted that some reports used animal metaphors to describe perpetrators including words like "predator," "beast", "nocturnal" and "pounce," "stalk" or "prowl" to describe behaviours.

On the one hand, some studies have noted that use of drugs and alcohol – being drunk, passed out, out of control – were frequently used by media to convey evidence of

recklessness by women (Barnett, 2012; Dwyer, Easta, & Hopkins, 2012; Richards et al., 2013). In this way media shifted blame from perpetrators to women because their behaviour placed them at risk. On the other hand, studies which explored the sources of information that provide expert opinion included Fairbairn and Dawson, (2013) who provided evidence that media relied heavily, and sometimes exclusively, on those connected to the criminal justice system as their main source of information.

Gender Equality

The Meaning of intimate partner violence tends to vary based on the context of investigation (Chung, 2013). This is due to the multi-faceted nature of the phenomenon. As a result, there is no single universally acclaimed definition of IPV. However, one of the most widely accepted definitions is postulated by the United Nations [UN], (1993), which presents it as:

...any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm to a woman, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

The UN's definition of IPV recognizes that violence follows gender patterns. Comparatively, Kenya's Protection against Domestic Violence Act (2015), defines it as abuse that includes: child marriage, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, forced wife inheritance, interference from in-laws, sexual violence within a marriage, virginity testing; and widow inheritance, damage to property, defilement, preventing someone from accessing a reasonable share of the facilities associated with the person's place of residence, economic abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, forced entry into the complainant's residence where the parties do not share a residence, harassment, incest, intimidation, physical abuse, stalking, Verbal abuse or any other conduct against a person which harms or may cause harm to the safety, health, or well-being of the person.

Gender inequality is considered as one of the key features underpinning IPV prevalence and the main aim of the UN's sustainable development goal (SDG) number five is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (UN, 2016). The report indicates that gender inequalities persist thereby stagnating social progress. As a counter measure, eliminating all forms of IPV in the public and private spheres is seen as an effort to build a sustainable future where women are empowered and social progress is encouraged. The presence of intimate partner violence is therefore regarded as a measure of inequality (UN, 2016). Evidently, the definition of IPV by the UN earlier mentioned has a "gendered" component which largely projects women as victims and men as perpetrators. It is noteworthy that in Kenya, there has been a substantial shift towards increased gender inclusivity through various legal instruments such as the Constitution of Kenya, (2010) which in Article 29 (c) provides that every person has the right to freedom and security, including the right not to be subjected to any form of violence from either public or private sources. It is meant to provide for the protection and relief of victims of intimate partner violence; such as a spouse and any children or other dependent persons from intimate partner violence.

Article 45 of the Constitution of Kenya recognizes and protects the family institution, recognizing it as the natural and fundamental unit of society and the necessary basis of social order. Other laws that have been enacted in Kenya to protect people from gender-based violence include Protection against Domestic Violence Act, (2015), which is meant to provide for the protection and relief of victims of intimate partner violence. It is while reporting on IPV that the media are seen to play a central role because of their ability to shape public discourse on such important matters (Flood & Pease, 2009). More importantly, however, the way such information is packaged can either increase public understanding of the phenomenon by challenging its prevalence in the society or be platforms that replicate power imbalances between men and women thus perpetuate IPV and gender inequality (Easteal et al., 2015).

Findings

Routine IPV Reporting

Incident based articles focused on the ‘micro’ details of current and past incidents. They presented IPV as individual episodes and did not address it as a systematic social issue. In this study, the episodic frame was the most common collectively accounting for 62% (N=42) of all the articles analysed. In this study, four sub-frames characterized such reporting that comprised the policing frame, courtroom discourses, sensationalism, and IPV as common place.

The Policing Frame

This frame was closely tied to the citation of police sources of IPV information in 24 % (N=16) of all articles (see figure 1). News sources cited by the media are indicative of who is regarded as the authority on the subject covered. It is expected that contextualization of a crime is aided by who the media choose to cite in their coverage. Considering this, each item was coded to identify sources used in the form of quotations and paraphrases. Police sources dominated at 32.8% followed by neighbours at 18.6%. This finding is consistent with Sutherland et al., (2015) whose report showed that criminal justice sources accounted for the majority of news sources in IPV news. The low percentage (4.3%) representing anti-intimate partner violence advocates, experts or social workers diminished wider social contextualization, considering that such sources could offer commentaries on issues such as causes and resources based on their expertise. Table 1 in appendix 3 captures the most commonly quoted sources of IPV news reports. An example of the policing frame in the study sample was,

Police have arrested a woman in Gacharaigu village in Murang’a County for allegedly stabbing her husband to death following a domestic row. Mr. ..., 25, died at the Murang’a County Referral Hospital of stab wounds allegedly inflicted on him by his 22-year-old wife ... (Ndungu, 2018).

The lead fashions the story as an isolated incident. The narration does not broaden the context of the incident as a societal issue in as much as it provides the reader with

additional information about what transpired. This type of reporting only thrusts the limelight on the police actions and the individual elements of the crime committed. It however does little to educate the public on the issue.

This episodic format could be attributed to the choice of police sources who often report detailed facts of a crime. It has been demonstrated that positive changes can occur in some aspects of newspaper reporting if the voices of IPV advocates, service providers and victims with lived experiences are prioritised over the criminal justice sources such as the police (Fairbairn and Dawson, 2013).

Courtroom Discourses

A similar trend of episodic reporting of IPV was evident in courtroom discourses representing 14% (N=10) of all articles as shown in figure 1. The frame tended to focus on individual elements of IPV crime without wider contextualization such as,

...has been sentenced to 30 years in prison for strangling his wife... in 2012. He accused her of cheating on him... placed a hot iron box on her face, chest and thighs. It is unclear which came first-the death or the burning (Mboga, 2018).

The extract above is a case in point where the story rotated around individual elements of the crime and the legal consequences of the case in court. These were replications of courtroom proceedings without references to implications of the crime to the wider society.

Sensationalism

Sensationalism in the news is characterized by the tendency to catalyse and grab attention of the audience; a provocative angle but which may not be representative of reality (Sutherland et al., 2015). Media headlines are crucial because they act as lenses through which the tone the news report can be gauged. Consequently, headlines have an impact on the readability and memorability of a news report. In the sample collected, sensational headlines were seen in 12 % (N=8) of all articles which were classified as titillating such as, “Man kills wife by stabbing her 20 times after domestic dispute” (Hajir, 2017); “Fiery MP undergoing domestic violence” (*The Standard* Aug 19, 2018 “Man beats up wife for serving his food late” (Konyango, 2018). Although such headlines helped to situate the incidents as violent, they were problematic in randomizing the perpetrators using general terminologies such as “man”. The fact that these stories were presented as discrete incidents meant minimal contextualization of IPV as a broader social problem. This frame was grounded on the argument that journalistic premium placed on ‘timeliness’ and ‘personalization’ resulted in the representation of IPV as an individual affair without establishing the nexus between such incidents and their wider societal implications. Failure of the headlines and the leads to broaden the issues reinforced the idea that IPV incidents were isolated and unrelated to power dominance for example through patriarchy. The preference for explaining how the incidents of IPV were committed clouded the ‘why’ aspects of the incidents which even then tended to be frivolous whenever they were provided. Such included ‘quarrels over music volume’

(Mboga, (2018); ‘not performing wifely duties’ (Ngina, 2017) and ‘for wearing make-up’ (Mbuthia, 2018).

IPV as Common Place

In 12% of these articles (N=8) IPV was depicted as common place using terms such as, ‘frequent’ for example, in one case, where a Mr. Luzuli is charged with battering his pregnant wife a relative is quoted, ‘‘According to Ms Masibo’s aunt, the couple has been having *frequent* arguments’ (Konyango, 2018); or in case in another article where a Mr. Njuguna is killed by his wife (Mrs. Waigwe), a nephew says, ‘They have been quarreling *from time to time* but I did not think it would reach this far’ (Gachane, (2018). Another article quotes a neighbor who says the husband would beat up the wife ‘every night’ for not performing her wifely duties (Ngina, 2017). These were considered episodic because the tone of the language used by witnesses such as ‘frequent’, ‘from time to time’ or ‘every night’ showed the crime as being common place but the report neither gave a critical analysis of the social implications of the crime nor challenge the witness narratives.

Victim blaming

This was expressed either through shared blame between victims and perpetrators (Mutuality) or exoneration of perpetrators

Mutuality

Previous research shows that the manner in which news stories are constructed may indirectly assign responsibility for IPV (Sutherland et al., 2015). In such cases, victims are depicted as partially or totally responsible for the violence that befalls them. To a large extent, such reports breed the erroneous perception that victims are to blame when violence is meted against them by the perpetrators and that therefore it is the victims, mainly women, who need to transform their own behavior for their own safety (Taylor, 2009). In this study, victim blaming as a frame occurred in 14% (N=10) of the articles (all episodic). This was noted to occur mostly indirectly through mutuality of blame. These articles quoted sources, mainly neighbours and family members who used phrases that apportioned blame to the victim. In one case, a neighbor said, ‘the wife is very shy and fears what the husband may do to her and therefore she does not speak to neighbours.’ The witness here seems to be saying that the victim is being subjected to IPV because of her shyness. other most common phrases were: ‘the couple have had long standing feuds’, ‘the couple had been having frequent disagreements’, ‘they have been quarreling from time to time’, ‘the couple has been having frequent fights’ or that the violence occurred ‘when they argued.’ In another case, the report indicated that, ‘differences between the couple had been simmering for close to six years’ thereby suggesting that the victim had stayed for too long in the marriage. In the cases mentioned, the implication would be that the victims and by extension women deserve blame in part if violence is used against them as a result of engaging in arguments with their husbands. In yet another article, neighbours attributed the IPV incident to an extra-marital affair by the woman. An eye

witness said, ‘...his girlfriend had acquired a ‘sponsor’ who was pampering her with gifts’ leading to a quarrel and the eventual murder of the woman by the husband. Another way in which blame was framed was the depiction of women who experienced violence as a result of failing to move out of abusive relationships. One article reported, “She said she had been holding on, hoping that the man would change.” The same victim was also blamed by the perpetrator who says, ‘I get provoked because she hurts me emotionally...’ meaning the victim called for the violence by ‘provoking’ the perpetrator. In these examples, women are largely blamed for the violence that befalls them.

Exoneration of Perpetrators

Victim blaming also occurred through the exoneration of perpetrators. This scenario was depicted in 10% (N=7) of the articles (all episodic) where perpetrators were framed in extenuating circumstances by depicting them to be under the influence of alcohol, drugs and other substances at the time the crime was committed. This was reflected in statements such as, ‘her husband, who was reportedly drunk, used a piece of wood to beat her’, ‘most of those interviewed blamed substance abuse for the rising cases of domestic violence in the country’ ‘...men are engaging in drugs that lead to such kind of violence.’ or “The neighbour said that the husband spends the whole day with his boys...and drink cheap liquor and chew mirra or muguka. Then when he gets home, he would argue with his wife which later results to the domestic abuse.” Whereas such aetiological narrations in relation to perpetrators of IPV may be factual accounts by witnesses, the lack of contestation by the reporter remains an issue because this is the opportunity the journalist has to procure readers’ literacy on the subject of IPV and re-direct the trajectory of excuses. In particular, the framing of perpetrators in mitigating circumstances served to indirectly excuse them from blame and thus diminish their responsibility. Exoneration of perpetrators was evident through their invisibility where anonymity played out using general terms such as “a couple”, “a single father of two”, “the man”, “a man” and “a woman.” Intriguingly, in all the cases identified, where the perpetrator’s identity was hidden, the victim’s name was highlighted. This is similar to findings by Sampert, (2010) where over half of newspaper articles provided no information on perpetrators. Such an approach to IPV reporting not only diminishes the crime committed but also exonerates the perpetrator (O’Hara, 2012). When combined with the previous frame, the findings show therefore that whereas the blame for violence seems to fall on women, men are sometimes exonerated through excuses.

Institutional Failure Framing

This frame was thematic and described IPV in broader terms, mainly reflecting weaknesses in Judicial, political and economic structures. Of all cases, it constituted 20% (N=14) of all articles. Such articles focused on IPV as a social problem by fashioning it as a product of judicial, political or economic weaknesses (See figure 1 of appendix 1)

Judicial Systems Failure

Articles adopting this frame illuminated failure of the judicial system to stem the wave of IPV in Kenya in 7 % (N=5) of the articles. For example, one article flagged gender laws. Its headline stated, “With five new laws to protect women, why is gender violence still prevalent?” Better still, one of its paragraphs read,

If the numbers told the true story, the huge increase in the laws to protect women and children should lead to a reduction in gender-based crime. But a look at the annual crime report from the National Police Service shows an increase in cases of defilement and indecent assault. It also reveals a marginal drop in the number of rape cases in the country. (Shiundu, 2015)

This frame was critical of weak laws. It was suggested that laws alone could not stop IPV such as Kahongeh, (2018) which asked, “So, what exactly feeds the evil of domestic violence? Are the laws lax? Experts agree that domestic violence is a complex social subject whose solution does not lie in the law.”

Political failure Framing

This thematic oriented frame was reflected in 7%; (N=5) of all articles. Shiundu, (2015) for example pointed out challenges that women legislators faced in the quest to enact laws that protected women from violence. A female parliamentarian was thus quoted,

But while the laws might be good for women, the battle to make the men in Parliament understand this is Herculean. Notably, there are only 68 women in the National Assembly out of a total membership of 350, and 18 women in the Senate out of 68 senators.

“We have to fight for the political space and platform to get women's issues addressed. In a Senate where all elected senators are men, and some of them are former Cabinet ministers, it does take courage. We really fight!” said Ms Elachi, a nominated senator.

The excerpt above presented a criticism of the male dominated legislature in Kenya where the male members of parliament were collectively depicted as a stumbling block in the enactment of laws touching on IPV. It appears that men take an oppositional role while addressing issues related to IPV to protect the status quo (male dominion). This projection nevertheless highlighted the fact that state power in Kenya resided with men who dominated state institutions like parliament thereby making it difficult for women to push for legislations that deter IPV. Gender and IPV law enactment was therefore only problematized by women. The female politicians were quoted as saying that the biggest challenge was ensuring gender parity in law making thus women have the task to negotiate, lobby and do everything to make sure they find a winning formula. It was apparent that women leaders were in the forefront of fighting IPV. Many organizations to which they were affiliated are women led such as: The embrace Women Group which comprises female leaders and organizations such as Equality Now, CREAM and Black Light among others. A scholar attributed “the escalation of domestic violence to negligence by the government and lack of structures that address the scourge” (Kahongeh,

(2018) The systemic failure was echoed by Anyango, (2019) where an activist from the Center for Rights Education and Awareness (CREAW) "...faulted government institutions for failing to come out and speak about the rising incidents of women being killed." She had earlier said, "Given this trend, I do not think as a country we can go on. There are 40 cases we have heard of and these are the ones that have been reported: there could be more." The advocate decried government response saying, "If it was another disaster, for example 40 people crashed in a road accident, we could see the Transport and Interior ministries running up and down, imposing rules and such." Lack of rescue centres to offer refuge to victims (Anyango, 2019).

Discussion

This study sought to understand media representation of intimate partner violence by analyzing the mainstream press in Kenya. The results point to the presence of episodic reporting of IPV as a dominant frame followed by victim blaming language that tended to exonerate perpetrators

In this current study, it was evident that incidents of intimate partner violence were primarily framed in episodic terms. This meant that the majority of IPV incidents were reported as routine individual crimes This finding resonates with Carlyle, et al., (2008) who found many stories in their study to be episodic by orientation and concluded that such disconnected reporting may lead audiences to situate IPV issues as individualistic without projecting the responsibility the wider society bears on its prevention. It may also lead readers to distance IPV victims them from the rest of the society. The finding also confirmed studies by Jackson, (2013) and Sutherland et al., (2015) which found patterns of IPV news coverage to be tilted in favour of episodic reporting, a phenomenon seen as problematic because it leads to reproduction of IPV news that could reinforce public perceptions of intimate partner violence as a private matter with no social, economic or health implications for the wider society. This could trivialize the fight against IPV.

The fact that the police sources dominated IPV narratives gave the impression that law enforcement was the primary preventive recourse to intimate partner violence. Even when the courts discourses were replayed, they tended to focus on procedural matters and statutory provisions. The frame mostly paid attention to particularities of the crime and related penalties. Court discourses fashioned sentencing as the ultimate panacea to IPV crimes and failed to broaden the discourse in the wider context of the society.

The inadequacy of the criminal justice system was reflected in counter frame stories that depicted institutional failure. These theme based articles, were in the minority but offered discussion of the problematic nature of certain judicial outcomes as well as the inadequacy of reliance only on domestic violence laws to prevent IPV. Similar criticism that was levelled against male political actors. For example, some female parliamentarians criticized their male counterparts for their lukewarm support for anti-

IPV legislation. This criticism was reflective of cultural resistance to the IPV prevention that is linked to patriarchy. In Kenya, the parliamentary arm of government is indeed male dominated but recent legislation has moved towards establishing a two-thirds gender rule for equitable representation (The Constitution of Kenya, 2010).

Thematic discourses were only present in the minority of articles. Thematic reporting has been advocated as a better way of reporting IPV as it contextualizes the problem. The few cases that themed or contextualized IPV satisfied the criteria recommended by another study Gillespie et al., (2013) which pointed out that the pervasive nature of IPV needed to be demonstrated broadly. Despite such thematic reporting featuring in the minority of articles in this study, journalists used it to inform readers about signs of abusive partners and to give a variety of voices a platform to be heard such as the clergy, and women leaders.

Whereas some thematic articles were modelled along the lines recommended by feminist discourse models that situated IPV as a social problem but in this study mainly by highlighting institutional failures. Such articles were in the minority, accounting for only 14 % of the sample but cited statistical data as well as placing calls to readers for collective action by mainly depicting authoritative women leaders in the forefront of the fight against IPV. This frame continued fashioning IPV campaigns and public rhetoric as female-led thus majorly seeking to address the plight of female victims. Nevertheless, the finding that some articles situated IPV as a social problem resonated with Gillespie, et al., (2013) who noted the significance of this type of framing for it focused on a collectivist approach to IPV discourses). That said, the fact that this frame was outnumbered by individualized cases of IPV reporting was a pointer of the room that existed for newspaper messaging that focused more on collective consciousness of communities or society while reporting IPV.

Similar to previous research such as Morgan and Politoff, (2012) and Skilbrei, (2013) this study found sensationalism to be incorporated in newspaper coverage of intimate partner violence. Instances of 'salacious' coverage through the use of sensationalistic language mostly appeared, in the headlines of the some articles which incorporated elements of humour and frivolity. Halim and Meyers, (2010) have in fact argued that such trivialisation is deeply problematic because it limits the degree of genuine concern that can be socially afforded to the problem. Furthermore, sensationalism was evident where some uncommon types of violence garnered more attention in newspaper reports, giving the impression that they were more newsworthy. A comparative look at look at the latest gender based violence report in Kenya by the NCRC, (2014) showed that Killings and murder of gender based violence victims accounted for up to 7.2 per cent of IPV crimes. In newspaper reports of IPV however, such cases disproportionately accounted for the second highest type of violence reported at 35.2 percent. This finding reflected similar results by Sims, (2008) who suggested that media had a 'murder-centric' focus whereby reports of femicide or murder involving intimate partners overshadowed reporting of

other forms of IPV. The “murder-centric” focus of IPV news stories is questionable because it could lead readers to perceive IPV as mainly death oriented which was a misrepresentation contrasting national crime reports.

The headline, being the most important element of the news story, defines the information readers memorise best from a news report (van Dijk (2001). The headline not only frames the entire story but also affects its overall tone. As seen from the examples, sensationalism incorporated elements of humour, or ridiculousness. This representation could only work against the idea that gendered violence is a serious social issue. Coverage that uses entertainment, humour or titillation ultimately trivialises this important human rights issue. Halim and Meyers, (2010) argues that such trivialisation is deeply problematic because it limits the degree of genuine concern that can be socially afforded to the problem. Lastly, sensationalistic reporting also raises the question of ethics (Kothari 2008). At what point does such coverage move from necessary information to the exploitation of the victim’s experience? Here there is an obvious conflict between the perceived appeal of sensationalistic reporting and the ethical duty to show respect to victims.

Victim blaming was found to exist as a theme in this study and was reflective of Lloyd and Ramon, (2016) who found that women were often held responsible for the violence that befell them. In this study, Kenyan newspaper reports conferred a mutuality of responsibility for intimate partner violence through words, similar to Easteal et al., (2015) who also noted that a sense of mutuality situated family violence in the context of a mutual relationship problem and not as a crime. The findings also echoed Morgan and Politoff, (2012) who found that media do not necessarily engage in direct “victim blaming” but include subtle details that suggest to the reader that women may have played some shared role in the violence perpetrated against them by men.

Conclusions

This study found that coverage of IPV by Kenyan newspapers in a manner that elevates the understanding of the problem by the society is uncommon. This critique has been highlighted in previous studies and as such, it can be argued that media representation of IPV in high-income countries is replicated in Kenya which is a lower middle- level income country. It means that media frames routinely fail to represent IPV as a social issue. A representation as a social problem may lead to enhanced public policy initiatives by commissioning help resources to victims. The media can use their power to shape public opinion and their role in preventing IPV through theme based framing that recognizes IPV as a shared social problem.

Given that media reports are reflective of community perceptions of IPV, the analysis of newspapers as platforms where potential reinforcement of IPV tolerance occurs was an important effort in gauging coverage in a liberal media environment such as Kenya’s.

The researchers' findings provide vital evidence which will hopefully inform policy on current IPV prevention efforts through the media. With evidence confirming existing critiques of IPV representation, there is need for enhanced collaborative initiatives between media actors and other players such as experts and anti- IPV advocates who would be critical as sources in the contextualization of IPV reports. This will infuse gender equity narratives and incorporate messaging with clear information pointing out that IPV is a societal problem that requires collective effort and that violence is not sustainable in solving problems in intimate relationships.

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Appendix 1

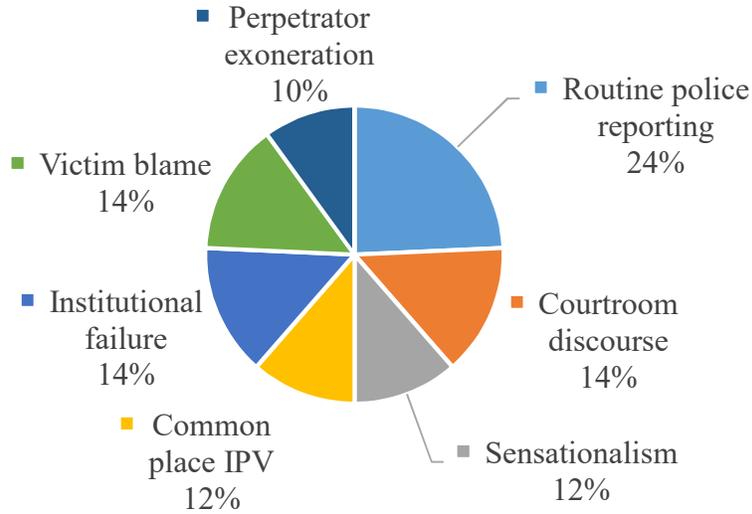


Figure1: IPV Frames

Appendix 2

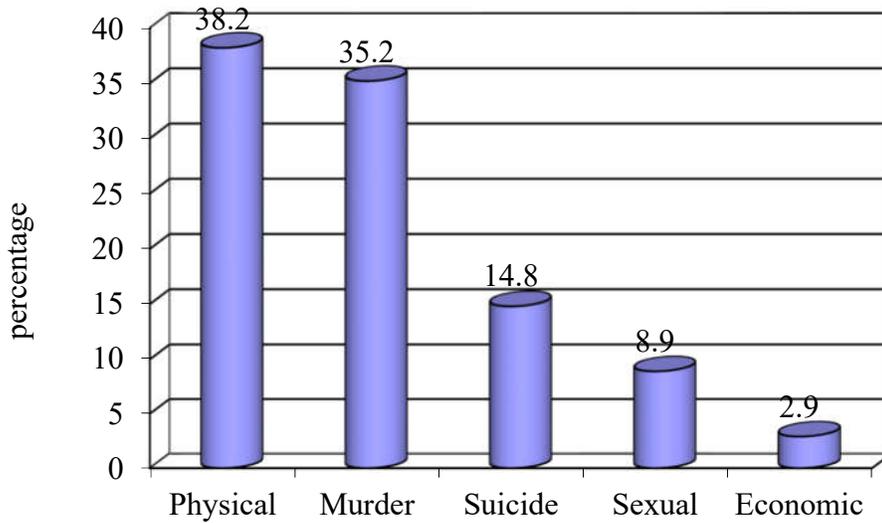


Figure 2: Type of intimate partner violence

Appendix 3

Table 1: Sources of IPV information

SOURCE	n	N	PERCENTAGE
Police	23	70	32.8%
Neighbours of victims or perpetrators	13	70	18.6%
Family of victim or perpetrator	11	70	15.7%
Political actors	6	70	8.6%
Legal professionals	4	70	5.7%
victims	4	70	5.7%
Perpetrator	3	70	4.3%
Anti-IPV advocate/Expert	3	70	4.3%
Psychiatrist/ psychologist	3	70	4.3%