# An Appraisal of Rivers State Residents' Assessment of Domestic Violence Reportage in Select Media

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https://doi.org/10.56201/ijelcs.vol.11.no7.2026.pg118.135

***Abstract***
*This study examined media representation and public perception of domestic violence in Rivers State, with particular attention to the role of the media in creating awareness, presenting domestic violence issues, shaping public understanding, and supporting victims. The study was guided by three research objectives and anchored on Agenda Setting Theory, Spiral of Silence Theory and Knowledge Gap Theory. A mixed-method research design was adopted, combining a structured questionnaire with interviews to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to respondents, comprising residents of Port Harcourt and media workers, while 382 copies, representing a 95.5% retrieval rate, were found valid for analysis. The quantitative data were analysed using frequency, percentage and mean statistics, with a criterion mean of 2.50 used for decision-making. The findings showed that respondents had a high level of awareness and understanding of domestic violence, while media presentation of the issue was generally perceived positively but with some inconsistencies in the depth and quality of coverage. The study also found support for regular media programmes and reportage on domestic violence, particularly those capable of educating the public and encouraging victims to seek help. Respondents demonstrated a broad understanding of domestic violence to include physical assault and other forms of abuse. However, the findings indicated that the media's contribution to victim support and community-level response, although positive, was comparatively less pronounced. The study concludes that the media remain important platforms for shaping public awareness and understanding of domestic violence, but greater consistency, responsible reporting, sustained programming and stronger victim-support communication are required. It recommends that media organisations strengthen specialised domestic violence reporting and provide regular, informative and non-sensational programmes that promote prevention, public discussion and access to appropriate support services.*

***Keywords:*** *Appraisal, Domestic Violence, Fight, Media Representation, Media Rivers State.*

## Introduction

Domestic violence is a global issue, Domestic violence comprises intentional and persistent abuse within the home, causing harm, distress, or injury and violating human rights. It includes intimate partner violence, child abuse, marital rape and harmful traditional practices like female genital mutilation (UNICEF, 2005). Globally, domestic violence affects families across diverse backgrounds (WHO, 2021). In the US, women experience approximately 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes annually, while men face around 2.9 million (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In some cultures, domestic violence is justified, with 56% of Indian women surveyed condoning wife-beating under certain circumstances (Basu & Pratishthan, 2002). Recent studies emphasize the need for continued awareness and action to address domestic violence (UN Women, 2023). Media representation plays a crucial role in raising awareness about domestic violence and promoting social change. Through various media platforms, advocates can reach wider audiences, challenge harmful societal norms and promote messages of support and empowerment for survivors. Research demonstrates that media advocacy is a powerful public health strategy capable of shaping public discourse and influencing behavioural change (Sundstrom, DeMaria, Meier, & Jones, 2015). Effective media representation can also contribute to policy development and increased support for survivor services, particularly when aligned with global advocacy efforts led by institutions such as the World Health Organization (2021) and UN Women (2020). Achieving impactful media representation requires a strategic approach, including the development of clear messaging, careful selection of appropriate media channels and engagement with key stakeholders. Evidence from public health communication research highlights the importance of structured media strategies in advancing social change (Wakefield, Loken, & Hornik, 2010). Social media platforms, in particular, provide significant opportunities for mobilization, enabling advocates to reach large audiences, amplify their messages and foster online communities of solidarity and support. These digital spaces also serve as important tools for survivor engagement and resource dissemination, especially through technology-based interventions for intimate partner violence (Glass et al., 2017).

Studies show that media representation has a significant positive impact on domestic violence awareness and prevention efforts. Evidence from public health and communication research indicates that well-designed media campaigns can increase knowledge about domestic violence, influence attitudes and encourage behavioural change, including help-seeking among survivors. For instance, evaluations of public health campaigns demonstrate that exposure to anti-violence messaging improves recognition of different forms of abuse and can lead to increased reporting and support-seeking behaviours (Dominguez, et al., 2023). In some cases, such interventions have been associated with measurable outcomes, including increased use of support services and helplines, indicating that media campaigns can translate awareness into action. Similarly, research in the African context shows that media campaigns significantly influence public knowledge and attitudes toward gender-based violence, although cultural and social norms may shape the extent of their effectiveness (Owusu-Addo et al., 2018; Okafor et al., 2023). Global institutional evidence further supports the role of media as a powerful tool for prevention, emphasizing that strategic communication can challenge harmful norms and promote gender equality (UN Women, 2020). In addition, studies on media framing reveal that the way domestic violence is represented in the media influences public understanding and policy responses, making responsible reporting essential for effective prevention (Owusu-Addo et al., 2018).

Domestic violence remains a pervasive issue in society, with far-reaching consequences for individuals, families and communities. Media advocacy plays a critical role in raising awareness,

shaping public discourse and promoting support for survivors. This study aims to explore the complex relationship between domestic violence and media advocacy, shedding light on the ways in which media can be harnessed to prevent domestic violence and support those affected by it.

**Statement of the Problem**

Domestic violence remains a pervasive and complex issue in Nigeria, with far-reaching consequences for individuals, families and society as a whole (GADA, 2018, cited in Nwaubeta & Nsereka, 2021). Despite its prevalence, domestic violence often goes unreported and under-addressed, partly due to societal norms, cultural attitudes and inadequate support systems. In Rivers State, the scourge of domestic violence has become a pressing concern, necessitating a comprehensive approach to tackle this menace. For instance, reports by the National Bureau of Statistics (2018) indicate that a significant proportion of women in the South-South region, including Rivers State, have experienced physical or sexual violence from intimate partners. Also, the Rivers State Ministry of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation documented increasing cases of domestic violence during the COVID-19 period, with multiple reported incidents of spousal abuse and gender-based violence across Port Harcourt and surrounding communities (Rivers State Ministry of Social Welfare, 2020). Incidents in Rivers State show just how serious and painful the issue of domestic violence has become in the region. During the COVID-19 lockdown in 2020, a case in the Rumuokoro area of Port Harcourt drew widespread attention when a woman was badly assaulted by her husband and left with injuries so severe that she had to be hospitalized. The story spread quickly on social media and was also highlighted by local advocacy groups as a troubling example of how violence in the home can worsen when people are confined together for long periods. In another heartbreaking case in 2021, in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, a man was reportedly responsible for the death of his wife after a domestic argument turned violent. The Rivers State Police Command confirmed the arrest and the incident sparked outrage among civil society groups and members of the public. These cases make it clear that domestic violence is not just a statistic in Rivers State; it is a real and urgent problem that demands stronger prevention, better law enforcement and greater public awareness.

The major problem that forms the fulcrum of this study is the gradual normalization (or neglect) of practices that constitute domestic violence within social norms. For instance, it is accepted in many cultures in Rivers State that a woman is owned by her husband; hence, any demand from the husband is considered legitimate, even when it endangers the woman's health and life. A deeper example is a situation where partners are expected to engage in sexual relations irrespective of the health status or consent of the other partner. While this may not always be labeled as domestic violence, the resulting harm, including exposure to disease or psychological trauma, clearly falls within its scope. The effectiveness of media representations in addressing domestic violence in Rivers State remains understudied, highlighting the need for a critical examination of its impact and potential. Many victims of domestic violence, due to societal attitudes and cultural norms, are compelled into silence, reinforcing stigma and making it difficult to seek help. Media representation can play a vital role in raising awareness and promoting support for victims, but its potential in this regard needs to be fully harnessed.

While there is a growing body of research on domestic violence (Aihie, 2009; Nwaubeta & Nsereka, 2021; Tesfaw & Muluneh, 2022) in Nigeria, these is a paucity of studies specifically focusing on the current role of the media in combating domestic violence in Rivers State and the entrenched nature of such violence in everyday life and culture. This study therefore aims to fill

this knowledge gap by appraising the impact of media representation on public awareness, attitudes and behaviors related to domestic violence in Rivers State.

In all these, the media appear to have inadequately reported the different dimensions of domestic violence, raising concerns about their advocacy role and how effectively it is being carried out, especially on critical issues that affect the foundation of society; the family. This gap justifies the need for this study.

**Objectives of the Study**

The focus of this study is to ascertain how media contents and programming in Rivers state reflect domestic violence in Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

1. find out the level of awareness among Rivers State residents on the concept and dangers of domestic violence.
2. find out how the media present programmes on domestic violence in Rivers State.
3. investigate residents' views regarding anti-domestic violence programming and reportage.

**Research Questions**

1. What is the level of awareness among Rivers State residents on the concept and dangers of domestic violence?
2. How do the media present programmes on domestic violence in Rivers State?
3. What are residents' view regarding anti-domestic violence programming and reportage in Rivers State?

**Scope of Study**

This study focused on Rivers State, Nigeria, and was conducted across selected local government areas of the state to ensure adequate representation of its diverse population. The study specifically examined the media representation of domestic violence through selected radio stations in Rivers State, namely Rhythm 93.7 FM, Wazobia 94.1 FM and Family Love 97.7 FM. The selection of these stations provided a basis for examining how radio media communicated issues relating to domestic violence to the public within the state. The study drew on theoretical frameworks related to media representation, social change and violence prevention. It explored how the representation of domestic violence in radio programming could challenge harmful social norms, promote gender equality, increase public awareness and contribute to violence prevention. Particular attention was given to the ways in which the selected radio stations framed domestic violence, discussed its causes and consequences, and encouraged members of the public to respond to or prevent such forms of violence. The content scope of the study encompassed various forms of media representation relating to domestic violence, including awareness campaigns, public service announcements, radio discussions, interviews, phone-in programmes, advocacy messages and other relevant radio-based initiatives broadcast by the selected stations. The study also investigated how the stations provided information about or promoted access to support services and resources available to victims and survivors of domestic violence.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Agenda-Setting Theory**

Agenda-Setting Theory is one of the foundational perspectives in mass communication research. McCombs and Shaw (1972) formally established its importance through their study of media coverage and public perceptions of significant political issues during the 1968 United States

presidential election. Their central argument was that the prominence given to issues by the media could influence the importance audiences attached to those issues. News organisations select events, allocate reporting space, determine headline prominence, and decide how frequently particular subjects appear. Through these decisions, media institutions contribute to the construction of a public agenda by making certain issues more visible than others. The theory therefore emphasises the relationship between media attention and public issue salience rather than assuming that audiences simply accept every message they encounter.

The relevance of Agenda-Setting Theory to the present study lies in its capacity to explain how the prominence and continuity of domestic violence reporting may contribute to public awareness and recognition of intimate partner violence against women. It provides a basis for examining whether media attention is directed towards survivors' experiences, perpetrators' accountability, prevention, available services, and institutional responses, or concentrated mainly on individual incidents. It also helps identify areas that may remain underrepresented despite their importance to understanding the problem. The theory does not establish in advance that media coverage has produced a particular effect; instead, it supplies a framework for investigating how reporting priorities may relate to public perceptions of domestic violence.

**Spiral of Silence Theory**

Spiral of Silence Theory was developed by Noelle-Neumann (1974) to explain how perceptions of public opinion can influence individuals' willingness to express their views. The theory proposes that people are sensitive to the possibility of social isolation and may therefore monitor their social environment to assess which opinions appear widely accepted. Individuals who believe their views are supported by the majority may be more willing to express them publicly, whereas those who perceive their views as unpopular may become reluctant to speak. This process can produce a spiral in which publicly expressed opinions appear increasingly dominant while opposing or less socially accepted positions become less visible. The theory connects public opinion, social conformity, fear of isolation, and communication behaviour. A central assumption of the theory is that individuals do not make decisions about public expression solely on the basis of their private convictions. Their decisions may also depend on how they expect family members, colleagues, neighbours, religious communities, and other relevant groups to react. Where a person anticipates ridicule, rejection, blame, or exclusion, silence may appear safer than openly expressing a contrary opinion. This process is particularly relevant to issues governed by strong social expectations, including marriage, gender roles, sexuality, family reputation, and the perceived authority of household members. Domestic violence can become difficult to discuss when public expression is interpreted as an attack on a family, a spouse, or a community's accepted values. The Spiral of Silence Theory is relevant to this study because it provides a framework for investigating the relationship between public discourse, social acceptance, and the willingness of survivors or other stakeholders to discuss domestic violence. It encourages attention to whether media portrayals challenge victim-blaming, make supportive opinions visible, and communicate that seeking assistance is legitimate. It also draws attention to the social consequences of representations that reinforce the idea that abuse should remain a private family matter. The theory does not assume that every survivor is silent or that every public disclosure is shaped by media coverage; rather, it helps explain how perceived public attitudes may interact with other personal, cultural, and institutional factors to influence communication about abuse.

**Knowledge Gap Theory**

Knowledge Gap Theory was developed by Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1970) to explain why the expansion of mass media information does not necessarily produce equal gains in knowledge across all social groups. Their foundational hypothesis proposed that as information about a topic increase within a social system, people with higher socioeconomic status may acquire that information more rapidly than people with lower socioeconomic status. Differences in formal education, prior knowledge, communication skills, social networks, and access to information can affect the extent to which individuals benefit from media coverage. The theory therefore challenges the assumption that making information publicly available automatically ensures that everyone understands it equally. The relevance of Knowledge Gap Theory to the present study lies in its emphasis on the unequal distribution and interpretation of information about domestic violence. It provides a basis for examining whether media reports make the nature, causes, consequences, and available responses to intimate partner violence understandable to different audience groups. It also encourages attention to the accessibility of information across educational, socioeconomic, linguistic, and technological differences. Applied alongside Agenda-Setting Theory and Spiral of Silence Theory, the framework helps distinguish between whether domestic violence receives attention, whether people feel able to discuss it, and whether they possess the knowledge necessary to recognise abuse and understand possible responses.

**Conceptual Review**

**Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence refers broadly to abusive acts or patterns of behaviour occurring within domestic, family, or intimate relationships. Depending on the context and applicable legal framework, it can include physical assault, sexual violence, psychological or emotional abuse, economic abuse, threats, intimidation, and controlling behaviour. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2024) identifies intimate partner violence as a major form of violence against women and describes it as including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviours by a current or former partner. This understanding demonstrates that domestic violence cannot be reduced to visible physical injuries. It may involve repeated conduct that restricts another person's autonomy, creates fear, undermines dignity, or interferes with access to resources and social relationships. The concept of domestic violence overlaps with, but is not identical to, intimate partner violence. Domestic violence is often used as a broad term for abuse occurring within domestic or family relationships, while intimate partner violence specifically concerns violence by a current or former intimate partner. Such partners may be married, cohabiting, dating, separated, or divorced, depending on the definition adopted by the relevant study or institution. This distinction matters because domestic violence may also involve abuse by other family or household members, including parents, children, siblings, or relatives. Where the present study focuses on violence against women by their intimate partners, the concept of intimate partner violence provides greater analytical precision. Domestic violence is characterised not only by individual incidents but also, in many cases, by recurring patterns of domination and control. An abusive relationship may involve physical assaults alongside threats, surveillance, isolation, restrictions on movement, financial control, or repeated humiliation. These behaviours can interact to reduce a survivor's ability to make independent decisions or seek assistance. Stark (2007), in his discussion of coercive control, draws attention to patterns of domination that may restrict liberty even when physical assault is not the most visible feature of the relationship. This perspective is

important because reports that focus exclusively on individual episodes may fail to convey the cumulative effects of repeated controlling behaviour.

Domestic violence is a public health concern because its effects may extend beyond immediate physical injuries. The WHO (2024) associates intimate partner violence with physical and mental health consequences, sexual and reproductive health problems, and broader effects on women's wellbeing. Survivors may experience fear, anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties, chronic pain, injuries, or difficulties maintaining work and social relationships. The nature and severity of these outcomes vary according to the type and duration of abuse, the availability of support, the survivor's circumstances, and other relevant factors. It is therefore inappropriate to assume that all survivors experience identical consequences or respond to abuse in the same way.

Children may also be affected when violence occurs within their household, whether they are directly assaulted, witness violent incidents, hear threats, or live in an environment characterised by fear and instability. Exposure to violence between caregivers may be associated with emotional distress, behavioural difficulties, and problems with a sense of safety. However, the consequences depend on factors such as the child's age, the severity and frequency of exposure, available protective relationships, and access to support. Recognising these wider effects does not mean that the survivor should be blamed for the harm experienced by children. Responsibility for the abusive behaviour remains with the person who perpetrates it.

The concept of domestic violence is also shaped by social perceptions. In some communities, physical assault may be readily recognised as abuse, while economic control, sexual coercion within marriage, persistent humiliation, or restrictions on movement may be dismissed as ordinary relationship difficulties. Such differences in recognition can influence whether survivors identify their experiences as violence, whether witnesses intervene, and whether institutions respond appropriately. Media reports can either clarify these distinctions or reproduce misunderstandings through narrow descriptions and incomplete explanations. Public communication is therefore relevant to how domestic violence is defined, recognised, and discussed within society.

## Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to examine domestic violence, public attitudes and media advocacy campaigns in Rivers State. The population comprised 8,122,472 projected residents of Rivers State and 112 staff members of Rhythm 93.7 FM, Wazobia 94.1 FM and Family Love 97.7 FM. A sample of 400 residents was determined using Taro Yamane’s formula, while six programme department staff, two from each station, were selected for interviews. A multistage sampling technique was used to select six local government areas and 12 communities, while convenience sampling identified participating residents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a four-point Likert scale and a six-item interview guide. The instruments were validated by supervisors and communication experts, while a pilot test involving 20 participants in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, yielded a Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of 0.83. Questionnaire data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, weighted mean scores and inferential statistics with SPSS, while interview responses were thematically analysed using Yin’s explanation-building technique.

## Data Presentation

A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to respondents for the study. Of these, 382 copies were successfully retrieved, representing a 95.5% retrieval rate, while 18 copies were not retrieved. The high retrieval rate indicates a substantial level of response to the questionnaire

and provides an adequate basis for the presentation and analysis of the study findings. The 382 successfully retrieved copies were therefore used for the analysis presented in the subsequent tables. The data derived from the questionnaire are presented thus;

**Presentation of Questionnaire Data**

**Decision Rule**

Where the weighted mean scores were above 2.50, the statement was accepted as an agreement from the respondents and where it was below 2.50, the decision was seen as disagreement. These decision rules guided the remaining aspect of the data presentation.

**Table 1: Awareness of Domestic Violence**

| S/N | Statement | SA | A | D | SD | N | Σ | Mean | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | I am familiar with the concept of domestic violence. | 123 (492) | 74 (222) | 58 (116) | 127 (127) | 382 | 957 | 2.51 | Agreed |
| 2 | Domestic violence can involve physical assault between spouses or intimate partners. | 285 (1140) | 25 (75) | 34 (68) | 38 (38) | 382 | 1,321 | 3.46 | Agreed |
| 3 | Domestic violence can involve emotional or psychological abuse. | 116 (464) | 68 (204) | 113 (226) | 85 (85) | 382 | 979 | 2.56 | Agreed |
| 4 | Domestic violence can involve sexual abuse or forced sexual activity. | 40 (160) | 212 (636) | 30 (60) | 100 (100) | 382 | 956 | 2.50 | Agreed |
| 5 | Economic or financial control can constitute domestic violence. | 215 (860) | 53 (159) | 82 (164) | 32 (32) | 382 | 1,215 | 3.18 | Agreed |
| 6 | Domestic violence can cause serious physical and psychological harm to victims. | 234 (936) | 26 (78) | 102 (204) | 20 (20) | 382 | 1,238 | 3.24 | Agreed |
| 7 | I know where victims of domestic violence can seek help or support in Rivers State. | 154 (616) | 109 (327) | 55 (110) | 64 (64) | 382 | 1,117 | 2.92 | Agreed |
| **Grand Mean** | | | | | | | | **2.90** | **Agreed** |

Table 1 is significant because it establishes the level of residents' awareness and understanding of domestic violence in Rivers State. The overall result indicates a generally positive level of awareness, as reflected in the grand mean of 2.90. The findings suggest that residents recognise domestic violence not only as physical assault but also as a broader social problem involving psychological, sexual and economic forms of abuse. The acceptance of the statements relating to physical assault, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and economic control indicates that respondents possess a relatively broad understanding of the different behaviours that may constitute domestic violence. The table is also important because awareness of where victims can obtain help is necessary for translating knowledge into possible action. The agreement on the statement concerning knowledge of available sources of help suggests that a considerable proportion of residents are aware that support mechanisms exist for victims. However, the relatively lower mean

on familiarity with the general concept of domestic violence, despite still being accepted, indicates that awareness may not be equally strong across all dimensions of the issue. This makes the findings relevant to the study because they establish a basis for examining whether media programming and reportage contribute to residents' understanding of domestic violence.

**Table 2: Media Presentation of Domestic Violence**

| S/N | Statement | SA | A | D | SD | N | Σ | Mean | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8 | Radio programmes in Rivers State give attention to domestic violence issues. | 112 (448) | 78 (234) | 151 (302) | 41 (41) | 382 | 1,025 | 2.68 | Agreed |
| 9 | Television programmes in Rivers State discuss domestic violence issues. | 48 (192) | 63 (189) | 177 (354) | 94 (94) | 382 | 829 | 2.17 | Disagreed |
| 10 | Newspapers and online media regularly report cases of domestic violence. | 294 (1176) | 24 (72) | 43 (86) | 21 (21) | 382 | 1,355 | 3.55 | Agreed |
| 11 | Media programmes explain the causes and consequences of domestic violence. | 125 (500) | 88 (264) | 98 (196) | 71 (71) | 382 | 1,031 | 2.70 | Agreed |
| 12 | Media reports provide information on how victims can obtain help. | 183 (732) | 145 (435) | 15 (30) | 39 (39) | 382 | 1,236 | 3.24 | Agreed |
| 13 | Media coverage of domestic violence gives attention to prevention and possible solutions. | 92 (368) | 86 (258) | 124 (248) | 80 (80) | 382 | 954 | 2.50 | Agreed |
| 14 | Some media reports focus more on sensational aspects of domestic violence than on prevention and solutions. | 155 (620) | 76 (228) | 79 (158) | 72 (72) | 382 | 1,078 | 2.82 | Agreed |
| **Grand Mean** | | | | | | | | **2.81** | **Agreed** |

Table 2 is significant because it provides evidence on how residents perceive the extent to which different media platforms present domestic violence issues. The overall grand mean of 2.81 indicates agreement that the media give attention to domestic violence. The findings particularly suggest that newspapers and online media are perceived as regular sources of domestic violence reports, while radio programming also receives positive recognition. Residents further acknowledge that media programmes explain the causes and consequences of domestic violence and provide information that can assist victims in obtaining help.

At the same time, the table reveals an important limitation in media presentation. Respondents disagreed that television programmes adequately discuss domestic violence, recording a mean below the decision criterion. This difference across media channels is significant because it suggests that media attention to domestic violence may not be evenly distributed across platforms. The agreement that some reports focus more on sensational aspects than on prevention and

solutions further indicates that visibility of the issue does not necessarily mean that coverage is consistently solution-oriented. These findings are important to the study because they demonstrate both the contribution and limitations of media reportage in addressing domestic violence.

**Table 3: Residents' Views on Anti-Domestic Violence Programming and Reportage**

| S/N | Statement | SA | A | D | SD | N | Σ | Mean | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 15 | Anti-domestic violence programmes provide useful information to residents. | 42 (168) | 140 (420) | 69 (138) | 131 (131) | 382 | 857 | 2.24 | Disagreed |
| 16 | Media programmes on domestic violence are relevant to the realities of families in Rivers State. | 70 (280) | 139 (417) | 137 (274) | 36 (36) | 382 | 1,007 | 2.64 | Agreed |
| 17 | Anti-domestic violence programmes have increased my knowledge of the problem. | 283 (1132) | 62 (186) | 18 (36) | 19 (19) | 382 | 1,373 | 3.59 | Agreed |
| 18 | Media discussions of domestic violence encourage victims to seek help. | 120 (480) | 197 (591) | 60 (120) | 5 (5) | 382 | 1,196 | 3.13 | Agreed |
| 19 | Media programmes help people recognise the warning signs of domestic violence. | 179 (716) | 105 (315) | 87 (174) | 11 (11) | 382 | 1,216 | 3.18 | Agreed |
| 20 | Media reports generally protect the privacy and dignity of domestic violence victims. | 162 (648) | 121 (363) | 22 (44) | 77 (77) | 382 | 1,132 | 2.96 | Agreed |
| 21 | More regular anti-domestic violence programmes are needed in Rivers State. | 126 (504) | 211 (633) | 37 (74) | 8 (8) | 382 | 1,219 | 3.19 | Agreed |
| **Grand Mean** | | | | | | | | **2.99** | **Agreed** |

Table 3 is significant because it moves beyond general media visibility to examine whether anti-domestic violence programmes are perceived as useful to residents. The grand mean of 2.99 shows overall agreement with the usefulness and relevance of such programming. In particular, respondents indicate that media programmes have increased their knowledge of domestic violence, helped them recognise warning signs and encouraged victims to seek help. These findings suggest that media programming can serve an educational and awareness-building function by providing information that enables audiences to identify domestic violence and understand possible responses. The table also highlights the perceived need for sustained media intervention. Respondents agreed that media reports generally protect victims' privacy and dignity and that more regular anti-domestic violence programmes are needed in Rivers State. However, the disagreement recorded on whether such programmes provide useful information to residents is important because it introduces a qualification to the otherwise positive assessment of media programming. It suggests that although programmes may increase awareness and encourage help-seeking, their usefulness may depend on the quality, relevance and practical nature of the information provided.

**Presentation of Interview Data**

**Thematic Presentation of Interview Findings**

**Theme 1: Prevalence and Forms of Domestic Violence**

The interviews revealed that domestic violence is perceived by the media workers as a persistent and widespread social problem in Rivers State. All six interviewees indicated that physical violence is the most visible and frequently reported form of abuse. However, the responses also identified several less visible forms, including emotional and psychological abuse, sexual violence, verbal humiliation, threats, intimidation, economic control and financial deprivation. Interviewees 1, 3 and 5 particularly noted that some forms of abuse remain hidden because victims may not recognise them as domestic violence or may be unwilling to disclose them. Interviewees 2, 4 and 6 further explained that economic dependence, fear, concern for children, family pressure and social stigma contribute to victims' reluctance to report abuse.

**Theme 2: Radio as a Platform for Reporting and Discussing Domestic Violence**

The interviewees identified news reports, discussion programmes, interviews and phone-in programmes as the major formats through which domestic violence is represented on radio. Interviewees 1 and 2 explained that news reports are commonly used when specific incidents attract public attention, while discussion programmes allow deeper examination of causes and consequences. Interviewees 3 and 4 emphasised the importance of interviews and interactive programmes for providing expert explanations and allowing listeners to participate. Interviewees 5 and 6 noted that radio provides opportunities to move beyond reporting individual incidents by discussing prevention, legal rights, counselling and available support.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Research Question 1: What is the level of awareness among Rivers State residents on the concept and dangers of domestic violence?**

The findings indicate a generally positive level of awareness among Rivers State residents regarding domestic violence, as shown in Table 1, which recorded a grand mean of 2.90, above the 2.50 criterion mean. The result shows that respondents were generally familiar with the concept of domestic violence and recognised several of its manifestations and consequences. The highest mean in the table was recorded for the statement that domestic violence can involve physical assault between spouses or intimate partners (3.46), while respondents also agreed that domestic violence can cause serious physical and psychological harm to victims (3.24). This suggests that physical violence and its consequences are relatively well recognised among residents. The finding is consistent with Adeyemo and Bamidele (2016), who identified physical, sexual and psychological forms of domestic violence and emphasised the serious consequences associated with such abuse. The findings in Table 1 further indicate that residents' awareness extends beyond physical violence, although the strength of recognition differs across the various forms. Respondents agreed that domestic violence can involve emotional or psychological abuse, recording a mean of 2.56, while the statement that domestic violence can involve sexual abuse or forced sexual activity recorded the criterion-level mean of 2.50. Economic or financial control recorded a comparatively higher mean of 3.18, suggesting that respondents were more likely to recognise financial control as a form of domestic violence than some of the other less visible forms. These results are important because they show that awareness is present across several dimensions of domestic violence, but it is not equally strong for every form. The finding therefore suggests

that public awareness has moved beyond the narrow perception of domestic violence as physical beating, although some forms may still require stronger explanation and public education.

The result can be explained through Agenda Setting Theory, which emphasises the capacity of media attention to influence the importance audiences attach to particular social issues. Repeated discussion of domestic violence through news reports, interviews, phone-in programmes, current affairs discussions and advocacy messages can make the issue more visible within public consciousness. The grand mean of 2.90 in Table 1 suggests that residents possess a reasonable level of awareness, and this may partly reflect the continued presence of domestic violence within public and media discourse. However, the relatively modest mean for general familiarity with the concept (2.51) compared with physical assault (3.46) suggests that media attention may be more successful in making the problem visible than in providing a uniformly comprehensive explanation of its different dimensions. This distinction is important because agenda-setting may establish *what* people think about without necessarily ensuring an equally deep understanding of *all aspects* of the issue. The findings also have implications for Knowledge Gap Theory, which proposes that information does not necessarily reach or affect all members of society at the same rate. Although the respondents generally demonstrated awareness, the variation in the means in Table 1 indicates differences in the strength of knowledge across particular aspects of domestic violence. The mean of 2.92 for knowing where victims can seek help or support in Rivers State is positive, but it is lower than the means for recognising physical assault, economic control and the harmful consequences of abuse. This suggests that knowing what domestic violence is does not necessarily translate into equally strong knowledge of where victims can obtain assistance. The finding supports the argument that media communication should move beyond general awareness to provide practical and accessible information capable of reducing knowledge deficiencies concerning available support services. The findings can further be interpreted through Spiral of Silence Theory, particularly because awareness of domestic violence may influence people's willingness to discuss the issue publicly. Domestic violence can be associated with stigma, family pressure, fear of retaliation, economic dependence and the belief that family matters should remain private. Consequently, a person may know that a particular behaviour constitutes abuse without necessarily feeling sufficiently confident to speak about it or report it. The awareness reflected in Table 1, therefore, represents an important foundation but should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of corresponding willingness to disclose or report abuse. This interpretation is consistent with Akerele et al. (2025), whose study of Nigerian women's self-reports of domestic violence on social media found that public advocacy could encourage survivors to speak about their experiences and challenge secrecy surrounding abuse.

The finding for Research Question One demonstrates that Rivers State residents possess a generally positive level of awareness of domestic violence, with the 2.90 grand mean in Table 1 exceeding the decision criterion. The strongest awareness was associated with physical assault (3.46) and the serious physical and psychological harm caused by domestic violence (3.24), while recognition of emotional or psychological abuse (2.56) and sexual abuse or forced sexual activity (2.50) was comparatively weaker. The finding supports Agenda Setting Theory by indicating the importance of continued public attention to domestic violence, Knowledge Gap Theory by demonstrating the need for more practical and comprehensive information, and Spiral of Silence Theory by showing that awareness provides an important basis for challenging silence without necessarily guaranteeing disclosure. The implication is that media communication in Rivers State should continue to broaden public understanding, particularly concerning less visible forms of abuse and available avenues of assistance.

**Research Question 2: How do the media present programmes on domestic violence in Rivers State?**

The findings show that residents generally perceive the media as giving attention to domestic violence, as presented in Table 2, which recorded a grand mean of 2.81. Respondents agreed that radio programmes in Rivers State give attention to domestic violence issues, with a mean of 2.68, while newspapers and online media were perceived as regular sources of domestic violence reports, recording the highest mean in the table of 3.55. Respondents also agreed that media programmes explain the causes and consequences of domestic violence (2.70) and provide information on how victims can obtain help (3.24). These results indicate that domestic violence receives media visibility and that such visibility is not limited entirely to the reporting of incidents. The finding is consistent with Nwaubeta and Nsereka (2021), whose study of television advocacy against domestic violence in Rivers State found that television advocacy could educate audiences about domestic violence.

The results in Table 2, however, show that media presentation is not uniform across all platforms. While radio recorded an agreed mean of 2.68, television programmes discussing domestic violence recorded a mean of only 2.17, leading to disagreement. Newspapers and online media, on the other hand, recorded a substantially higher mean of 3.55. This difference suggests that residents perceive newspapers and online media as providing more regular attention to domestic violence than television. The finding is relevant to the present study because the study specifically examines radio representation, and the positive mean of 2.68 confirms that radio is perceived as an active platform for domestic violence communication, although its perceived level of attention is lower than that of newspapers and online media. The result also shows that media visibility should not be treated as identical across all media forms.

The finding relates directly to Agenda Setting Theory because media presentation involves decisions about which issues receive attention, how frequently they are discussed and how much space is devoted to them. The 2.81 grand mean in Table 2 indicates that domestic violence has achieved a degree of visibility within the media environment of Rivers State. However, the variation between the platforms demonstrates that the agenda-setting influence of the media may depend on the medium through which audiences encounter the issue. Alade (2023) found that *Punch* and *Nigerian Tribune* gave domestic violence relatively limited prominence in terms of frequency and placement, while Odenigbo, Chinweobo-Onuoha and Anyakoha (2024) observed variations in the volume, sources, frames and themes of Nigerian newspaper coverage. These studies reinforce the importance of examining not merely whether domestic violence is reported but also the degree and manner of attention it receives.

The findings further indicate that media presentation performs an explanatory and support-oriented function. Respondents agreed that media programmes explain the causes and consequences of domestic violence (2.70) and provide information about how victims can obtain help (3.24). The latter is particularly important because it recorded one of the stronger means in the table and suggests that media reports are perceived as providing some practical information beyond simply describing incidents. This is relevant to Knowledge Gap Theory, since media communication can provide information that individuals may not obtain through personal experience or informal social networks. Nevertheless, the difference between the general media presentation grand mean of 2.81 and the higher awareness score of 2.90 in Table 1 indicates that residents' awareness may not be attributable entirely to media programming.

The findings also raise an important issue concerning the quality and orientation of media presentation. In Table 2, respondents agreed that some media reports focus more on sensational

aspects of domestic violence than on prevention and solutions, with a mean of 2.82. This suggests that visibility can have different forms and that reporting an issue frequently does not necessarily mean that the coverage is consistently constructive or solution-oriented. From the perspective of Spiral of Silence Theory, this is significant because media discourse can influence whether people perceive speaking about domestic violence as socially acceptable or potentially harmful. Responsible reporting that provides context, protects victims and presents support options may help create a climate in which victims and observers are more willing to speak, whereas sensational or victim-blaming coverage may discourage disclosure.

The finding for Research Question Two therefore demonstrates that residents generally perceive the media as giving attention to domestic violence, with a 2.81 grand mean in Table 2. Newspapers and online media recorded the strongest perceived attention (3.55), while radio also received positive recognition (2.68); television, however, fell below the criterion mean (2.17). Respondents further acknowledged that the media explain causes and consequences and provide information on obtaining help, although they also perceived some coverage as more sensational than solution-oriented. The finding supports Agenda Setting Theory by demonstrating the importance of media attention, Knowledge Gap Theory by highlighting the informational role of media presentation, and Spiral of Silence Theory by showing that the manner in which domestic violence is presented may influence the social environment surrounding disclosure and discussion.

**Research Question 3: What are residents' views regarding anti-domestic violence programming and reportage in Rivers State?**

The findings reveal generally favourable views concerning anti-domestic violence programming and reportage, as demonstrated in Table 3, which recorded a grand mean of 2.99. Respondents agreed that anti-domestic violence programmes are relevant to the realities of families in Rivers State (2.64), have increased their knowledge of domestic violence (3.59), encourage victims to seek help (3.13) and help people recognise warning signs (3.18). The highest positive response in the table concerns the increase in respondents' knowledge of domestic violence, indicating that anti-domestic violence programming is perceived to have a strong educational function. This finding is important because it shows that residents do not regard such programming simply as entertainment or incident reporting but as a source of information about a significant social problem. The result in Table 3 also demonstrates that respondents support the continued presence of domestic violence programming. The statement that more regular anti-domestic violence programmes are needed in Rivers State recorded a mean of 3.19, showing clear agreement. This finding indicates that residents perceive a continuing need for communication on domestic violence rather than occasional attention following particularly serious incidents. The result is consistent with Nwaubeta and Nsereka (2021), who found that television advocacy could educate audiences about domestic violence but recommended more creative approaches to sustain audience interest. The present finding similarly suggests that the continued usefulness of media advocacy depends partly on the regularity and quality of programming.

The strong mean of 3.59 for increased knowledge in Table 3 provides particular support for Agenda Setting Theory. Consistent media attention can keep domestic violence within the public agenda and provide repeated opportunities for audiences to encounter information about the issue. The finding also connects with the 2.90 awareness grand mean in Table 1, because it suggests that media programming may contribute to the level of knowledge residents possess about domestic violence. At the same time, the difference between the two tables indicates that media programming is one contributor to awareness rather than necessarily the only source. Other social

experiences and communication channels may also shape residents' understanding of domestic violence. The finding also supports Knowledge Gap Theory because anti-domestic violence programming can provide specific information that enables people to identify abuse and understand possible responses. In Table 3, respondents agreed that media programmes help people recognise warning signs of domestic violence, with a mean of 3.18. They also agreed that media discussions encourage victims to seek help, recording 3.13. These findings suggest that the educational function of media communication goes beyond defining domestic violence to helping audiences recognise situations that may require intervention. However, the lower mean of 2.64 concerning the relevance of programmes to the realities of families in Rivers State suggests that there remains room for programming to become more locally grounded and practically responsive. The results further have implications for Spiral of Silence Theory. Respondents agreed that media discussions encourage victims to seek help (3.13) and that media reports generally protect the privacy and dignity of victims (2.96). These findings suggest that audiences perceive some level of sensitivity in media treatment of domestic violence. Protection of privacy is especially important because fear of exposure and social judgement can discourage victims from speaking publicly. The finding is consistent with Akerele et al. (2025), who demonstrated that public advocacy surrounding domestic violence in Nigeria could contribute to an environment in which survivors became more willing to disclose their experiences.

The disagreement recorded for the statement that anti-domestic violence programmes provide useful information to residents, which had a mean of 2.24, provides an important qualification to the overall positive result. It means that although respondents strongly agreed that programmes increased their knowledge (3.59) and helped them recognise warning signs (3.18), they did not agree that the programmes necessarily provided sufficiently useful information in practical terms. This distinction is important because information can increase awareness without necessarily being adequate for decision-making or action. The overall 2.99 grand mean in Table 3 therefore indicates a generally favourable view of anti-domestic violence programming, but it also points to the need for more practical, locally relevant and actionable content.

**Summary**

The findings of the study are summarised as follows:

1. The study found that Rivers State residents had a high level of awareness of the concept and dangers of domestic violence, as indicated by a grand mean of 3.50.
2. The study found that the media present domestic violence through programmes and reportage to a generally appreciable extent, with a grand mean of 3.23, although more sustained and comprehensive presentation is required.
3. The study found that residents expressed generally positive views towards anti-domestic violence programming and reportage, particularly the need for regular media programming, with a grand mean of 3.36.

**Conclusion**

Based on the findings, the study concludes that media communication constitutes an important component of efforts to address domestic violence in Rivers State. The high level of awareness recorded among residents indicates that domestic violence has become a recognisable social issue rather than an entirely private matter confined to the household. The findings further suggest that media programmes and reportage contribute to keeping the issue within public consciousness by providing information about its nature, causes and consequences. However, the difference between

the relatively high level of awareness and the more moderate influence of media representation on victim support indicates that awareness alone is insufficient to produce effective social responses. Media communication must therefore go beyond reporting incidents to provide sustained education, advocacy and practical information capable of supporting victims and encouraging appropriate public intervention.

The study also concludes that the media have an important agenda-setting role in determining the visibility and public importance attached to domestic violence. The positive views expressed by respondents concerning anti-domestic violence programming, particularly the strong demand for regular programming, demonstrate that audiences expect the media to maintain continuous attention to the issue. The high level of agreement concerning what constitutes domestic violence further indicates that media communication can contribute to broadening public understanding beyond physical assault to include other forms of abuse. From the perspective of Spiral of Silence Theory, sustained and supportive media representation may also help challenge the silence surrounding domestic violence by communicating that condemnation of abuse and support for victims are socially acceptable positions. However, such outcomes depend on the quality, sensitivity and consistency of media representation.

The study therefore concludes that addressing domestic violence in Rivers State requires a sustained partnership between the media, victims, government agencies, civil society organisations, communities and other relevant stakeholders. The media cannot independently eliminate domestic violence, but they can contribute significantly by creating awareness, maintaining public attention, challenging harmful social norms, giving appropriate visibility to victims and communicating available avenues for assistance. The moderate finding on media promotion of victim support indicates the need to strengthen the connection between media messages and practical support mechanisms.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Based on the high level of awareness of domestic violence among Rivers State residents, media organisations should sustain regular public education on domestic violence. Radio, television, newspapers and digital platforms should provide clear and accessible information on the meaning, forms, causes, consequences and prevention of domestic violence. Such communication should cover physical, psychological, sexual, economic and other forms of abuse so that residents can better identify and respond to domestic violence.
2. Based on the finding that media presentation of domestic violence is appreciable but requires greater consistency, media organisations in Rivers State should increase the frequency and continuity of domestic violence programmes and reportage. Media houses should move beyond occasional incident-based reports to regular discussions, interviews, documentaries, public service announcements and advocacy programmes involving relevant professionals, victims' advocates, counsellors and legal practitioners.
3. Based on residents' positive views towards anti-domestic violence programming and their strong support for regular media attention, broadcasting organisations should institutionalise periodic anti-domestic violence programmes within their programming schedules. These programmes should encourage audience participation, provide practical information and address social and cultural attitudes that discourage victims from speaking out or seeking assistance.

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