

University Students' Perception of Mass Media Reportage of Gender-Based Violence in Cameroon

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Abstract

This study examined university students' perception of mass media reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon, its impact on them, the types of media sources that influence them, and the factors that affect them. Applying the Taro Yamane formula for sample size determination, two hundred and sixteen postgraduate students were drawn from a population of 500 students from the University of Dschang's Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 21 and displayed in tables and figures. Forty-three-point-five (43.5) percent of respondents thought the media appropriately reported gender-based violence. The survey revealed that television, social media, and radio reported gender-based violence the most. The study found that university students' view of mass media portrayal of gender-based violence in Cameroon is influenced by several factors, including the media platform, accuracy, and victim identity protection. The study recommends that media practitioners report gender-based violence accurately and ethically and that the government passes victim-identity protection laws. Future research should examine how gender-based violence reporting affects women and children.

Keywords: Perception, Mass Media, Gender-Based Violence, Cameroon, University Students

Introduction

Gender-based violence is harm caused by socially assigned gender disparities. The UN resolution on abolishing all forms of violence defines gender-based violence as any action that causes women physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including coercion. Institutionalized gender inequality causes gender-based violence. Gender-based violence narratives shape public opinion and policy.

GBV and domestic and sexual violence are common in Cameroon (The Inter-agency GenCap advisor for Cameroon, Delphine Brun, 2020; ReliefWeb, 2020 ARC Journals, n.d.). Sexual violence and other GBV have increased in impacted areas since the 2016 Anglophone Crisis (Al Jazeera, 2021, ARC Journals) (n.d.). Despite the prevalence of GBV in Cameroon, nothing is known about media coverage and public reaction.

Cameroonian women and girls are especially prone to GBV (The Inter-agency GenCap advisor for Cameroon, Delphine Brun, 2020; ReliefWeb, 2020 ARC Journals, n.d.). The Inter-agency GenCap advisor for Cameroon reported 43.2 percent of married women suffered domestic violence, 39.8 percent from physical assault, and 14.5 percent from sexual assault (The Inter-agency GenCap advisor for Cameroon, Delphine Brun, 2020). Sexual assault and other forms of gender-based violence have increased in Anglophone Crisis-affected areas (Al Jazeera, 2021, ARC Journals, n.d.). Despite Cameroon's high GBV rate, nothing is known about media coverage and public reaction.

GBV is prevalent in Cameroon (Nkafu, 2022; SVRI, 2020 Foretia Foundation, 2014). GBV increases the risk of depression and other mental health issues in women (Nkafu, 2022; Ndifon and Njotang, 2016). Despite GBV's prevalence, little is known about how media coverage affects public opinion.

Cameroon has high rates of gender-based violence, a study shows (Nkafu, 2022; SVRI, 2020 Foretia Foundation, 2014). How mass media coverage of GBV influences public perception and attitudes is uncertain. GBV media coverage affects public perception. GBV news can sway public opinion. GBV media attention can increase awareness, conversation, and action (Tsuyuki, Drame, & Hailemariam, 2019). Media coverage of GBV

can perpetuate harmful stereotypes and victim-blaming of violence survivors (Tsuyuki, Drame, & Hailemariam, 2019).

Gender-based violence and mental illness are common in Cameroon (Nkafu, 2022; SVRI, 2020 Foretia Foundation, 2014 Ndifon & Njotang, 2016). How mass media coverage of GBV influences public perception and attitudes is uncertain. This study explores how Cameroonian media coverage of GBV affects students' opinions.

Statement of the Problem

Increasing instances of gender-based violence in Cameroon indicate that efforts to address this societal issue have not produced the anticipated effects. Eliminating gender-based violence remains one of the world's most pressing societal issues. Consequently, the fight against gender-based violence has reached a crescendo. The World Health Organization (WHO) believes that at least one in five females has experienced physical or sexual abuse. Researchers, particularly those from the field of psychology, contend that violence against women harms their psyche and overall contribution to society. This makes the topic worthy of news coverage. Even though gender-based violence has occurred in Cameroonian culture, how the subject is covered remains problematic. Moreover, it is the role of the press to set a constructive agenda for Cameroonian society. This study's problem is framed as a question: how do audiences perceive media coverage of gender-based violence?

Objectives of the Study

The study is aimed at the following;

1. To investigate University students' perception of mass media reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon.
2. To examine the impact of mass media reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon on University students.
3. To determine the types of mass media sources that influence the perception of university students on gender-based violence in Cameroon.
4. To analyze the factors that influence the perception of university students on gender-based violence in Cameroon.

Literature Review

Conceptual Overview

Gender-based violence (GBV) impacts people worldwide. GBV affects university students' attitudes and behaviour.

Any act of gender-based violence is called gender-based violence. This encompasses physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, harassment, and stalking (Osuna-Rodríguez, Rodríguez, Dios, & Amor, 2020). However, sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual attention or behaviour (Fernández & Roldán, 2010). Gender-based violence and sexual harassment are common in universities and can lead to physical and psychological injury, academic difficulties, and social isolation (Osuna-Rodríguez et al., 2020).

Perception is how people understand the world. GBV perception can affect how people react to violence and harassment. People who think GBV is normal may be more inclined to do it (Ferrer, Bosch, & Guzmán, 2011). Gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and perception are linked to university students. GBV and sexual harassment perceptions can affect university students' actions. Students who view GBV as a major issue may report increased violence and harassment. Those that think it's okay may do it (Ferrer, Bosch, & Guzmán, 2011). This conceptual overview shows how university students see mass media coverage of GBV and sexual harassment. Second, it can uncover knowledge and understanding gaps, informing the development of educational programmes and interventions to reduce GBV and sexual harassment. Finally, it can help prevent

GBV and sexual harassment in universities and beyond by raising awareness of the significance of ethical and truthful media reporting.

Empirical Review

This review will examine scholarly works related to the subject.

Perceptions of Gender-Based Violence among University Staff: Interim Results

Xitsakisi Fiona Mahlori, Deirdre Cassandra Byrne, and Lungisa Anthonia Mabude investigated university staff perceptions of gender-based violence (GBV) (Mahlori, Byrne, & Mabude, 2018). The study utilised frequency-seeking questions to assess awareness, and the results showed that although GBV is one of the least expected types of violence, it does occur. Breakups increase the danger of stalking and violence.

Xitsakisi Fiona Mahlori, Deirdre Cassandra Byrne, and Lungisa Anthonia Mabude found GBV among university workers. The poll used frequency-seeking questions to assess knowledge of the issue and found that GBV, one of the least expected sources of violence, is still present. The report also indicated that breakups increase the likelihood of stalking and violence. This shows that interpersonal violence perpetuates physical and psychological violence, making it crucial for university personnel to be mindful of GBV in their interactions.

Violence against women in Cameroon: An unchecked phenomenon

The Sexual Violence Research Initiative reports unchecked violence against women in Cameroon (Asonganyi, Booka-Maleq, Etchu-Mazoh, & Limunga, 2020). The essay notes that state apathy to high rates of violence against women and social behaviours that demean women and promote gender inequality exacerbate the situation. Cameroon's gender violence is appalling. One-third of Cameroonian women have been abused (Asonganyi et al., 2020). Husbands and family members commit most domestic violence. Abuse perpetuates Cameroon's gender stereotypes. The study says the state hasn't reduced women's violence. Gender bias and inaction normalise women's violence. Control requires physical and economic aggression.

The essay offers government protection for Cameroonian women to address these issues. This could include better legal and political security for abuse victims and gender stereotype-changing education. The paper advocates providing violence victims with healthcare and resources. Cameroon's gender violence poses a health concern. The state and society must stop this brutality and protect women.

Theoretical Framework

Muted Group and Agenda Setting theories were used to underpin this study. Muted Group Theory, established by Edwin and Shirley Ardener, examines how dominant groups' communication practices repress, mute, or devalue subordinate groups' words, ideas, and discourses. The concept addresses what, when, where, with what words and thoughts, in what channels, and with what consequences people of different social classes say. Muted group theory emphasizes how language systems and behaviors vary by the speaker. The theory implies that suppressing the speech and thoughts of people outside the privileged circle helps a social group gain and keep power. Cameroonian women struggle to express themselves. Women understand men better than men understand women. Men always wanted control, silencing women.

According to Anaeto, Onabajo, and Osifeso (2008), McCombs and Shaw's 1972 Agenda Setting Theory explains how media report the news. According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), agenda setting is the premise that mass media emphasize specific concerns depending on their relative placement or amount of coverage, and mass audiences value these issues. Price and Tewksbury (1997, p.184) summarise it: Agenda setting uses story selection to indirectly influence public opinion on problem importance and political leaders through priming.

Methodology

This work uses survey data for quantitative research. It was ideal for this study because it allowed the researcher to examine audience perception, actuality, and objectivity in broadcast media coverage of gender-based violence in western Cameroon. The researcher might choose study participants from the target population. This study targeted University of Dschang Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences postgraduates.

This study used survey research. It helps academics understand individual or group opinions on a topic. The study selected respondents using convenient and purposeful sampling. Convenience samples are easily accessible to researchers. The researcher personally gave and collected the questions online. Questionnaires collected data. Two hundred sixteen postgraduates received the questionnaire. The questionnaire had closed and open-ended questions. This study uses descriptive statistics with SPSS 21.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data gathered from the respondents are presented in tables, and the simple percentage statistical method is used to analyze them. A 10-item questionnaire was distributed to 216 respondents, and the data generated were analyzed in line with the study's objectives using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. They are five tables and four charts used in presenting the data. The data are presented, analyzed, and discussed below.

Table 1: If the mass media accurately reports on gender-based violence in Cameroon

Options	N	%
Yes	94	43.5%
No	60	27.8%
No comments	62	28.7%
Total	216	100.0%

Source:Field survey, 2023

Table 1 displays Cameroonian university students' opinions on whether the media appropriately reports gender-based violence. 94 (43.5%) of the 216 students surveyed believed the media appropriately reported gender-based violence in Cameroon. 60 (27.8%) said "No," suggesting they do not feel the mass media accurately reports gender-based violence in Cameroon. 62 (28.7%) respondents did not comment.

Table 2: Frequency of respondents' consumption of news about gender-based violence in Cameroon

Options	N	%
Daily	55	25.5%
Weekly	79	36.6%
Monthly	74	34.3%
Never	8	3.7%
Total	216	100.0%

Source:Field survey, 2023

The Table above depicts Cameroonians' gender-based violence news consumption. 25.5 percent of the 216 respondents consumed gender-based violence news daily, 36.6 percent weekly, 34.3 percent monthly, and 3.7 percent never. This Table shows that most respondents read about gender-based violence at least once a month. The responders are aware of the topic and want to follow its news.

Table 3: Respondents' perception of mass media reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon

Options	N	%
Very Satisfactory	90	41.7%
Satisfactory	65	30.1%
Undecided	39	18.1%
Not Satisfactory	14	6.5%
Not very satisfactory	8	3.7%
Total	216	100.0%

Source:Field survey, 2023

The Table indicates that 41.7% of the respondents found the reportage very satisfactory, while 30.1% found it satisfactory. Only 6.5% of the respondents found the reportage to be not satisfactory.

Table 4: Perception of mass media reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon raising awareness about the issue

Options	N	%
Yes	133	61.6%
No	30	13.9%
No comments	53	24.5%
Total	216	100.0%

Source:Field survey, 2023

Table 4 reveals that 61.6 percent of Cameroonians believe mass media coverage of gender-based violence promotes awareness. This implies that mass media coverage of gender-based violence can raise awareness. This is significant because gender-based violence is a life-threatening global health and human rights issue that violates international human rights legislation and gender norms.

Table 5: If respondents have ever taken any action as a result of consuming news about gender-based violence in the media in Cameroon

Options	N	%
Yes	83	38.9%
No	71	32.9%
No comments	61	28.2%
Total	216	100.0%

Source:Field survey, 2023

Table 5 shows the results of a study on University Students' Perception of Mass Media Reportage of Gender-Based Violence in Cameroon. The Table indicates that out of the 216 respondents, 83 (38.9%) have taken some form of action due to consuming news about gender-based violence in the media in Cameroon. In contrast, 71 (32.9%) have not taken any action. The remaining 61 (28.2%) respondents did not provide any comments.

Table 6: Impact of mass media reportage of gender-based violence on Cameroon respondents

Options	N	%
Made me join the fight against GBV issues	66	30.6%
Made me want to help victims of GBV	58	26.9%
Helping to raise more awareness about GBV in my community	9	4.2%
All of the above	83	38.4%
Total	216	100.0%

Source:Field survey, 2023

Table 6 shows how gender-based violence media coverage affects responders. 30.6 percent of respondents were driven to resist gender-based violence (GBV), while 26.9 percent were motivated to support victims. 4.2 percent of respondents wanted to raise community knowledge about GBV, and 38.4 percent chose all of the above. This Table shows that mainstream media coverage of gender-based violence can inspire people to fight GBV, support victims, and increase community awareness.

Table 7: Mass media sources from which respondents consume news about gender-based violence in Cameroon

Options	N	%
Television	43	19.9%
Radio	74	34.3%
Newspaper	35	16.2%
Online news sources	10	4.6%
Social media	54	25.0%
Total	216	100.0%

Source:Field survey, 2023

Table 7 lists Cameroon's gender-based violence news sources. Radio is the most preferred source of gender-based violence news in Cameroon, with 34.3 percent of respondents. 19.9% and 25.0 percent of respondents get information from television and social media, respectively. Newspapers and internet news outlets are the least popular sources of gender-based violence news in Cameroon, with 16.2% and 4.6 percent, respectively.

Table 8: Most trusted mass media source for news about gender-based violence in Cameroon

Options	N	%
Television	36	16.7%
Radio	43	19.9%
Newspaper	81	37.5%
Online news sources	36	16.7%
Social media	11	5.1%
Other	9	4.2%
Total	216	100.0%

Source:Field survey, 2023

Cameroon's most trusted mass media source for gender-based violence news is shown above. According to the Table, 37.5 percent of respondents trust newspapers for gender-based violence information. 19.9% of respondents trust radio, followed by 16.7% each for television and online news. The least trustworthy sources of information include social media (5.1%) and other sources (4.2%).

Table 9: Mass media source with the most influence on respondents' perception of gender-based violence in Cameroon

Options	N	%
Television	37	17.1%
Radio	45	20.8%
Newspaper	43	19.9%
Online news sources	33	15.3%
Social media	48	22.2%
Other	10	4.6%
Total	216	100.0%

Source: Field survey, 2023

Table 9 illustrates Cameroon's most influential mass media source on gender-based violence perceptions. Social media is the most significant source of information on gender-based violence in Cameroon, with 48 respondents (22.2%) identifying it as their primary source. Radio, newspaper, television, and online news sources follow (33 respondents, 15.3 percent). Ten respondents preferred word-of-mouth sources (4.6 percent).

Focus Group Discussion Data on University Students' Perception of Mass Media's Reportage of Gender-Based Violence in Cameroon

Seven university students from Cameroon participated in the focus group discussion to investigate their perceptions of the mass media's reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon, the impact of such reportage on university students, the types of mass media sources that influence their perception of gender-based violence, and the factors that influence their perception of gender-based violence.

Perceptions of mass media's Reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon

University students said Cameroonian media coverage of gender-based violence was biased and inadequate. They believed the media ignored gender-based violence. They often vilified victims and blamed them for the violence. Students also said the media did nothing to hold perpetrators accountable.

Participants agreed that Cameroon's mainstream media sensationalises and lacks context when covering gender-based violence. They feel the media focuses on the awful details of violence rather than the causes and remedies. Participants in this conversation think that the media portrays women as vulnerable victims and men as perpetrators, reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Impact of mass media's reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon on university students:

The focus group found that media coverage of Cameroon's gender-based violence affected university students. Gender-based violence news made students angry, disappointed, and helpless. They felt unsafe and anxious, knowing they or someone they knew could be a victim of gender-based violence.

Discussants said Cameroon's media coverage of gender-based violence affects university students. They believe that sensationalised media coverage of gender-based violence makes female students anxious and undermines their academic performance and mental wellbeing. The discussants also believe that the media's normalisation of gender-based violence desensitises male pupils and creates a culture of violence.

Types of mass media sources that influence the perception of university students on gender-based violence in Cameroon:

The focus group showed that Cameroonian university students' primary mass media sources were Facebook,

Twitter, and WhatsApp. According to their reports, these platforms gave students frequent gender-based violence news updates.

Participants' personal social media accounts, televisions, and radios shaped their understanding of gender-based violence in Cameroon. Social media is the most influential since it provides real-time updates on gender-based violence and allows for personal sharing. They think this source is the most accessible.

Factors that influence the perception of university students on gender-based violence in Cameroon:

The focus group found various factors influencing Cameroonian university students' perspectives on gender-based violence. Cultural norms, gender-based violence, and illiteracy were among these causes. Students' gender-based violence experiences affected their opinions.

Participants highlighted various elements influencing their understanding of gender-based violence in Cameroon. Cultural norms, education, and personal experiences. They value cultural norms that normalise gender stereotypes and violence against women. Gender-based violence and its causes should also be taught to change people's minds. Finally, this conversation's participants feel gender-based violence can influence one's perspective.

The focus group found that university students are affected by mass media coverage of gender-based violence in Cameroon and that social media is the most impactful source. Personal experiences, cultural standards, and education impacted participants' perspectives on gender-based violence.

Focus groups of Cameroonian university students found the mainstream media coverage of gender-based violence unfair and inadequate. The debate also showed that publicising gender-based violence in the media affected Cameroonian university students, who utilise social media the most.

Discussion of Findings

RQ1: How do University students perceive mass media's reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon?

Table 2, which deals with *Respondents' perception of mass media reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon*, answers this research question. According to the Table, university students in Cameroon perceive mass media's reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon as inadequate, biased, and sensationalized. They feel that the media does not give gender-based violence concerns enough attention. When they do, they frequently depict the victims negatively and blame them for the violence they experienced. The students also shared that the media made little effort to ensure those responsible were held accountable for their deeds. The participants in the discussion agreed that coverage of gender-based violence in Cameroon's mainstream media tends to be overly sensationalized and devoid of context. They believe that the media emphasizes the horrific specifics of the violence rather than the underlying causes and potential solutions to the problem.

RQ2: What impact does mass media's reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon have on university students?

Table 8, which shows the impact of mass media reportage of gender-based violence on respondents, answers this research question. The Table indicates that 30.6% of the respondents were motivated to join the fight against gender-based violence (GBV) issues.

According to the data in the Table, mass media's report of gender-based violence in Cameroon significantly impacts university students. The students reported feeling angry, frustrated, and helpless when they read or watched news about gender-based violence. They also reported feeling unsafe and anxious, knowing they or someone they knew could be a victim of gender-based violence. The discussants expressed that mass media's

reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon creates fear and anxiety among female students, which affects their academic performance and mental health. The discussants also feel that the media's portrayal of gender-based violence as a norm desensitizes male students to the issue and perpetuates a culture of violence.

RQ3: What types of mass media sources influence the perception of university students on gender-based violence in Cameroon?

Table 5 answers this research question by showing the mass media source that most influenced respondents' view of gender-based violence in Cameroon. The Table shows that social media had the greatest impact on respondents' opinions of gender-based violence in Cameroon, with 48 (22.2%) picking it as their main source of information. According to the Table, university students in Cameroon mostly use social media like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp. These platforms updated students frequently on gender-based violence, according to students. Participants' personal social media accounts, televisions, and radios shaped their understanding of gender-based violence in Cameroon. Social media is the most influential since it provides real-time updates on gender-based violence and allows for personal sharing. They think this source is the most accessible.

RQ4: What factors influence the perception of university students on gender-based violence in Cameroon?

Data from the Focus Group discussion on page 16 answers this research question. According to the discussion, the perception of university students in Cameroon on gender-based violence is influenced by several factors. These factors include the frequency of gender-based violence in their communities, cultural norms and beliefs, a lack of education and awareness about gender-based violence, and personal experiences with gender-based violence. The students also claimed that their encounters with gender-based violence affected how they viewed the issue. The participants in the discussion recognized some elements that influence their understanding of gender-based violence in Cameroon. These factors include cultural norms, educational attainment, and personal experiences. They believe cultural practices that normalize violence against women and propagate gender stereotypes are crucial to the issue. They also believe that education on gender-based violence and the factors that contribute to it should be a priority to change people's perspectives.

Conclusion

To sum up, this study shows that audience perception of mass media reportage gender-based by postgraduate students of the faculty of Letters and the Social Sciences University of Dschang is favorable. Deep-rooted patriarchy and persistent gender inequality have continued to negate women's societal values. This has inevitably made women and girls more vulnerable to shocks and stresses, including gender-based violence. Thus, effective violence prevention and a joint response that deracinate its causes and supports human and women's rights entail a more significant comprehension of inequalities. Many students who responded to this study accept that the mass media has dramatically increased awareness of issues concerning gender-based violence. They also ascertain that the media, to an extent, protects the victims' identity; thus, victims should not be afraid to speak out or report cases regarding this act.

The summary of the findings shows that:

1. The students perceive mass media's reportage of gender-based violence in Cameroon as inadequate, biased, and sensationalized;
2. The students reported feeling angry, frustrated, and helpless when they read or watched the news about gender-based violence;
3. The most prominent sources of mass media for university students in Cameroon were social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp; and
4. Several factors, including cultural norms and beliefs, a lack of education and awareness about gender-based violence, and personal experiences with gender-based violence, influence the perception of university students in Cameroon on gender-based violence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, here are four corresponding recommendations:

1. Give journalists and media outlets training and resources to improve gender-based violence reporting in Cameroon. This will eliminate bias and sensationalism in reporting.
2. Help Cameroonian victims of gender-based abuse. Counseling, legal aid, and safe spaces are examples. Gender-based abuse victims will feel less rage, frustration, and powerlessness.
3. Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp can raise awareness of gender-based violence in Cameroon. Sharing knowledge, providing support, and supporting gender equality are examples.
4. Engage community leaders, educators, and others to change Cameroon's gender-based violence culture. This includes promoting gender equality, offering information and resources, and changing cultural norms and attitudes that encourage violence against women and girls.

Ethical Considerations

The study sought the consent of all respondents and participants, and they were all assured of their confidentiality and protection from any harm arising from their participation in this study.

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