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Media Coverage of Domestic Violence in Kenya: A Perpetuation of Gender Stereotypes

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Abstract:

Domestic violence is a gross violation of human rights. It is rampant among married, cohabiting and even dating couples. Domestic violence is a practice that is largely influenced by cultural hues. Mass media play an important role in the transmission of attitudes, perceptions and beliefs castigated by these cultural values. Mass media over represent violent crimes hence presenting images that are at odds with reality; and specifically enhance gender stereotypes which are born out of a people's attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. These gender stereotypes arising from media reports on domestic violence are likely to lead to more similar form of violence. This paper assesses the extent to which media coverage of cases of domestic violence has perpetuated gender stereotypes among Kenyan media consumers thus fuelling more violence. Specifically, the paper looks at the depiction of domestic violence victims basing on the reporters own choice of words as well as the reports or comments of eye witnesses or views and comments by those who consumed the story. The paper also addressed the possible causes of propagation of gender stereotyping in reporting cases of domestic violence. The issues of possible personal biases, journalistic unprofessionalism and cultural interference were investigated. A qualitative approach was applied in this study; with a content analysis, providing a basis for synthesis of media reporting of domestic violence cases. Domestic violence has for a long time been viewed as aggression towards a female partner by a male partner. However, cases of men being battered by their female partners have been reported. Hence this paper looked at the depiction of both male and female genders as either victims or perpetrators of domestic violence. The concept of mass media effects on their consumers was analyzed using the principles of Cultivation theory. The paper confirms that there is gender based bias in media coverage of domestic violence. Further, coverage of domestic violence in Kenya is full of gender stereotype depiction and perpetuation which is likely to fuel domestic violence.

Keywords: Domestic violence, media reporting, domestic violence victims, gender stereotypes, media coverage, cultural values

1. Introduction and Background

Cases of domestic violence have been reported all over the world. Approximately 1.3 million women and 835,000 men are physically assaulted by an intimate partner annually in the United States (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). In 2000, 1,247 women and 440 men were killed by an intimate partner.

Another survey shows that an intimate partner killed approximately 33% of female murder victims and 4% of male murder victims (Callie Marie- Rennison, 2003). By the mid 1990's, at least fifteen hundred women each year were murder victims from domestic violence. Thirty-four percent of the women homicide victims over age 15 are killed by their husbands, ex-husbands or boyfriends (National Women Abuse Prevention Project).

According to the New York City Department of Health, women who abuse alcohol or other drugs or whose partners do are the major victims of domestic violence. Other categories include women who are poor, or those attempting to leave their abusers (FBI, Supplementary Homicide Reports, 1976-2004). According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, no matter what the rate of violence or who initiates the violence, women are 7 to 10 times more likely to be injured in acts of intimate violence than are men.

There are 4,000 refuge places for women in Britain and 20 for men. The centre, run by the Montgomery Family Crisis Centre was founded in 2006 and it is Britain's first refuge exclusively for men and their children fleeing violent partners. The British Crime Survey (2002) reported that almost 20% of reported domestic violence incidents involved male victims.

However, the report acknowledges that it is very difficult to come up with accurate figures of domestic violence for either gender because it is suspected the vice is hugely under-reported because of stigma. However, it is believed that these figures are even more uncertain when it comes to male victims of domestic abuse. Straus and Gelles, (1990) note that all types of male domestic abuse are becoming more prevalent.

In South Africa, a gender based violence indicators study conducted by Genderlinks and the Medical Research Council found that 7.8% of South African women had experienced intimate partner sexual violence in the past year while 19% of women had experienced such violence in their lifetime (Okwemba, 2011). Gender and Media progress Study carried out in 2010, found out that Gender Domestic violence cases are rarely covered by media accounting for just 4% of all stories in Southern Africa despite many studies which show it as a widespread problem.

In Kenya, a demographic and health survey carried out by the Ministry of Planning in 2003 revealed that at least half of all Kenyan women had experienced violence since the age of 15, with close family members among the perpetrators. Although these statistics do not explain what form of violence is referred to, they are shocking. 39% of the woman surveyed said they were abused by a husband or partner.

A 2008 report by the federation of Women lawyers of Kenya (FIDA) says that about 75% of women who participated in a survey reported being abused. The FIDA director Patricia Nyaundi confirms the rate of domestic violence is higher than what is reported. Okwemba, (2011) reports that in a study, 14% of married women said their current husband or partner forced them to have sex in the past year, while another 37% had been subjected to sexual violence at some point in their relationship. Okwemba continues to report that gender based violence cases are generally underreported. Marital rape is a subject that remains silently discussed and does not see the light of day in mass media. A survey reported to have been done by Maendeleo ya wanaume, (a men's lobby group in Kenya), in 2009 indicated that over 1.5 million men suffer marital abuse by their wives. The survey was carried out in over 40 Kenyan Districts (Kiarie, 2009).

Domestic violence takes many forms. The most commonly known is physical abuse. However, emotional and psychological violence is prevalent. According to Okwemba, (2011), much of it centers on control and the problems often starts long before a relationship descends into physical harm. Sixty percent of those men reported some form of physical abuse, including being hit, beaten, or stabbed. They also reported frequent incidents of "scratching, slashing, biting and burning". The report says that the nature of abuse include being forced to perform domestic chores- traditionally reserved for women, being beaten up being forced to sleep in the living room, being locked out and most prevalently being denied conjugal rights.

When these cases are being reported in mass media they take almost the same form. They are either sexualized or generally not well researched in a way that will explore the reasons behind such acts. When a woman is killed or battered by her husband, the story is normally told as a love triangle gone sour, while others blame it on the woman neglecting her duties, drunkenness or simply "not being obedient". This presentation seems to condone domestic violence as long as there is "a reason". It justifies the action and protects the perpetrator.

When man experiences violence from his wife, the case is presented just as a puzzle: "it is not understood why she did it". This kind of presentation does not solve the problem but rather encourages other women to do the same and, "and no one will know why". Rarely do the reporters dig deeper and address it from a human rights view or from the legal point of view. Deeper repercussions are not addressed such as the possibility of children learning this vice from their abusive parents.

Hence Okwemba says media hold negative attitudes towards these stories and the mass media are therefore perpetrators of the problem. The reports are deeply entrenched in cultural positions which can argumentatively be used to explain why the violence is justified. It is an epidemic and if not reported responsibly it will not go away soon and will paralyze the family values and institution in total.

Many victims of domestic violence- whether men or women – find it hard to speak out for fear of being ridiculed or out of stigma. The few cases that are reported in the mass media are presented in a manner that gives prominence to gender stereotypes that are culturally motivated. These stereotypes either tend to condemn the victim or glorify the perpetrator thus justifying domestic violence. This presentation leads to perpetuation of the same violent tendencies among the perpetrators and prospective perpetrators.

The family unit is a very important institution in the development of a nation. It is through the productivity of each individual that a nation grows. Problems within the family especially domestic violence tremendously affect the much needed productivity. If mass media were to play the role of reporting responsibly, this problem can lessened and even eliminated. It is therefore important to understand how best media can avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes which are in themselves gender oppressive and lead to domestic violence.

A lot of research has been done globally on the coverage of domestic violence cases. However, most of this research has been based on domestic violence against women. To the best of the knowledge of this paper, no known research has been done on coverage of domestic violence against men and women in Kenya and how gender stereotyping in reporting of these cases lead perpetuate gender violence. This paper intends to fill this gap by exploring and analyzing media reports on domestic violence against men and women, identifying gender stereotypes presented in the course of reporting and synthesizing how consumers interpret such presentation. This paper will be a milestone in the efforts to reduce domestic violence in Kenya. It will provide a guide into responsible reporting of domestic violence stories. In addition, this paper adds to the body of knowledge of mass media effects because it shows how media reports affect the thinking and behavior of intimate partners.

1.1. Aim of the Research Paper

The aim of this paper is to explore how gender stereotypes are perpetuated through mass media coverage of domestic violence stories in Kenya. This paper argues that the presentation of gender stereotypes alongside unsightly depictions of domestic violence scenes make the consumers believe that domestic violence is justified as long as it can be backed by culturally constructed gender stereotypes. The paper consequently argues that this perpetuation of gender stereotypes give birth to more cases of such domestic violence.

1.2. Definition of Terms

Domestic violence – Any form of physical, emotional or psychological torture by an intimate partner such as between married, divorced, separated couples or lovers.

Gender stereotypes- In this paper, gender stereotypes will include specific roles, characteristics and behavior attached to men or women through deeply rooted beliefs.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Gender Stereotypes in Reporting

Gender stereotypes are widely held beliefs about the characteristics and behavior of women and men. Gender stereotypes are not only descriptive, but also prescriptive beliefs about "how men and women should be and behave". According to Dividio, et al. (2010), gender stereotypes can facilitate and impede intellectual performance, perpetrate gender discrimination as well violence. Media depict domestic violence as a burden only faced by people of lower socioeconomic status or lower education. However it is important to note that higher class victims of domestic violence are not willing to bring their stories into limelight.

In covering domestic violence stories, most reports are full of "objectification, domestication and eroticization of women" (Kupe, (2003). This affects the perception and attitude of the audience towards the woman and this is further generalized to other women in society. Respect for the victims generally wanes. They are presented in the context of their husbands rather than by their names. They are also depicted as the "inferior and weaker" (Waruhiu, 2007). Kupe confirms that this kind of portrayal contributes to the worsening of social problems like violence against Women. Media often trivializes domestic violence by sexualization it leading to society's desensitization of the issue. In some cases these reports are received as and discussed as entertainment.

Another stereotype strategy in the media helps enforce the message that "they are all the same- defenseless, helpless and condemned in self pity". Such stereotypical portrayal only helps in propagating these stereotypes, causing perpetrators and prospective perpetrators to believe that the victims deserve the violence and this leads to more domestic violence.

A research by the Harare-based African Fathers Initiative concluded that, African men's roles as fathers and family's breadwinners are insisted upon by media. Men are mostly stereotypically depicted as strong, muscular and virile (Chari, T. (2009). Hence men will not easily accept to report cases of domestic violence when they fall victim. This means that these stereotypes about men also fuel feelings of inadequacy in men in certain circumstances. The report points out that if men report abuse they can be arrested themselves on suspicion of being the perpetrator (Supplementary Homicide Reports, 2004). This is because society is accustomed to domestic violence against women rather than against men.

Writing in the context of the Nigerian home video films and the portrayal of women, Okunna (1996) observes that the images of women are stereotypical in nature and are likely to negatively influence the perception of the female audiences among many viewers. Likewise, domestic abuse has been subjected to stereotypical analysis of what a victim looks like and what an abuser looks like. Okunna notes that typically, the "victim" is portrayed as female, small, timid, oppressed- and the abuser is portrayed as male, large, brutish, and aggressive. But such gender stereotypes are dangerous, and leave groups of people suffering and vulnerable.

Media reports reduce domestic violence reports into pieces of entertainment. Chipare and Morna (2003) note that gender stereotyping reduces "complex situations and people into simplistic, easily-recognized and memorable categories. This further confirms the societal expectations. They further note that any form of stereotyping is dangerous as it stimulates prejudice and inequality; justifying the position of those in authority (the perpetrator of domestic violence) as the victim is sometimes depicted as accepting their position as well as the behavior. Chipera and Morna argue that media is not the cause of domestic violence but its interactive power escalates the problem. As word is passed from one person to the other, misrepresentations occur and we build assumptions about the issue based on how we saw it in the media. Gender stereotyping in the media rather confirms the audience's attitudes towards certain issues.

A study by Signorielli, (1982) and signorielli and Kahlenberg (2001) examined the enactment of interpersonal and work roles on prime time programs airing on six broadcasting networks during 2005-2006 season addressing how the genders of writers and those working behind the scenes may be related to the gendered social roles of characters. They found out that female reporters were more likely to cover domestic violence cases against men. The danger in this is that the reporter is likely to inject her own emotion from the perspective of "If it were me".

Signorielli and Bacue (1999) in examining domestic violence stories noted the gendered portrayals of occupational and marital roles in prime time television. They noted that female characters are more likely to have identifiable marital roles, whereas male characters are more likely to have identifiable occupational roles. These stereotypical gender roles in media reporting instill the idea that one deserves a beating if he or she does not meet his obligations.

Zurawik (2005) noted that for decades, depictions of women on TV have relied more on physical beauty and her relationship to men than on intellect and competence. However, this kind of depiction is changing as the modern woman becomes more and more liberal and gender roles are slowly either being shared or are becoming reversed.

2.2. Mass Media Effects

Media, especially TV possess dramatic power. According to Severin and Tankard (1997), the media therefore have the capability to influence what the audience knows, thinks, and does. The mass media play an important role in the transmission of attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. Under certain conditions the media become important socialization agencies in determining the attitudes of young people. Specifically, TV will be influential when the same ideas, people or behaviors recur consistently from program to

program, meaning that they are presented in a stereotyped manner. Frequent viewing of violent crimes is likely to make the viewer display a pattern of beliefs and perceptions consists with media portrayals. Researchers have noted a connection between heavy viewing of violent TV programs and favorable attitudes towards the use of violence in real life (Miller, K. (2005).

Several studies have linked high levels of TV viewing with attitudes favoring traditional sex roles. Saito (2007) and Shanahan and Morgan (1999) argue that media cultivates traditional gender role attitudes and contributes to the maintenance of the status quo. According to Newcomb (1978), the link between media exposure and certain attitudes demonstrates reciprocal causation. For example, watching violent TV shows might cause a viewer to hold favorable attitudes towards aggression. These favorable attitudes might then prompt him or her to watch more violent TV which in turn might encourage more aggressive attitudes. Hence the two factors can be said to be mutually causing each other. Likewise, being exposed to numerous stories on domestic violence may cause the viewer to see it as commonplace hence acceptable and eventually cause him or her to do like “everyone else”.

2.3. Theoretical Framework

This paper will base its argumentation on the cultivation theory. A full adoption of the theory will not be applied but relevant assumptions will be synthesized in relation to the paper’s core variables, specifically mass media coverage, domestic violence and gender stereotyping. Gerbner (1973) states that “naïve” viewers who interpreted homogenous messages from mass media as social norms and beliefs have been shown to affect behaviors of emergent adults. This means that people can wrongly draw inferences from simple unrelated portrayals. According to Severin and Tankard (1997), the prevalence of images and reports of violence deliver the message that we are hypersexual and violent society, thus creating televised social norms that encourage individuals to resort to sexual and violent resolutions of issues. Television viewing which is the focus of cultivation theory has been correlated with an increase in violent activity. Although this theory mainly bases its assumptions on television, more media channels continue to have a major impact on consumers. For example, the comments made via new media such as the mobile phone and social media greatly affect the opinions and perceptions of large audiences given the speed of transmission and mobility. This makes the theory of cultivation relevant to this study. Collins et al (2004) found that the prevalence of sexual content has been regularly correlated with an increase in sexual behavior and a reporting of more causal attitudes towards sex. In the same way, more media content on domestic violence can lead to perpetration of certain attitudes towards the same hence causing more cases of violence. This is mainly cultivated through stereotypical reporting of the cases.

Cultivation theory in its most basic form suggests that exposure to television over time subtly cultivates viewers perceptions of reality. The pertinent questions to be asked in this paper will revolve around two areas. This theory will help us to address the dominant patterns of images and messages, facts and values (stereotypes) expressed in media messages. It will also give direction into the relationship between attention to these messages and audiences’ conceptions of social reality. According to the theory, heavy TV watchers are more mistrusting of people than light or medium TV viewers. This suspicious view or general mistrust of the world is called the “Mean World Syndrome” (Gerbner and Gross, 1976). The relevance of the Mean World Syndrome or the cynical mindset in this study is that the more spouses are fed with cases of domestic violence, the more they equate their spouses to the characters seen in the stories. This leads them to start or continue mistrusting each other and the more likely they are to start or continue abusing each other.

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1. Media Coverage and Gender Stereotyping – Domestic Violence against Women

Aggression can therefore be seen as a learnt behavior. As people grow up and observe domestic violence being meted in their environment some pick this up and learn to respond through violence when challenged. Carolyn Njunge of the Daily Nation laments that women have been victims of domestic violence for long but have not received much attention. She claims that “their battered faces never make it to the front pages of newspapers”. As a journalist she criticizing the media industry yet she is in it. Could she be implying that she does not have the power to highlight domestic violence cases against women probably because the decision making desk of news reporting and dissemination is male dominated hence they are not sensitive to the plight of the women?

Karanja and Mololo (The Daily Nation 31 may 2011) reported the story of a young couple with 3 children and expecting their four children is given. Wife was found murdered together with two of her children and her husband later committed suicide. Asked for views by the journalist, a “marriage expert” John Gicheru blames it on the fact that the average man is yet to shed off the gender stereotyping of the last century- from the belief that beating a wife is part of being the man, to thinking that an ideal man should have more than one woman. The husband still wants to be the breadwinner and the bread divider, something that cannot work today. Through the marriage expert, a shift from the typical gender roles is blamed for the unfortunate incident. The marriage expert also retorts that the modern woman “is suffering from extreme cases of narcissism”. She goes into marriage with “a false sense of self importance”, the expert says. This is a stereotype that condemns the modern woman as conceited and unmarriageable- one who to be humbled down.

The “expert’s” argument is based purely on gender stereotypes- on gender roles and on gender supremacy battle. Such comments will obviously make couples start scrutinizing their partners to see if their partners compare with the “newspaper” character. If he interprets it to be so, then violence will erupt.

It is a common practice for mass media, especially newspapers and TV to show pictures of “happier times” when they report on domestic violence. When a prominent TV personality Wanjiru Kabiru was found murdered in her house, the media were awash with

pictures of the couple. This contrast tends to endear the audience to the perpetrator saying “if they were this happy, then there must have been something serious that that prompted him to act this way”

The late marathon champion Samuel Wanjiru hit the headline months before his death. His domestic violence saga was one of the most publicized reports on domestic violence. Media reports indicated that one of the “reasons” given for beating his wife was that she had inquired about his affairs with other women. Some of the arguments put forward by media consumers are that as long as the man is providing for his family, then a wife had no need complain. (Nyokabi Kamau 2011). Later, media publicized that Wanjiru’s wife had withdrawn a divorce suit announced in an expensive hotel as they had wine on Valentine’s Day. This presentation just depicted him as the winner, evidently because of his providing power as the society expects. On average, consumers are likely to believe that a man’s immoral behavior should never be questioned or else, violence will set in.

It is notable that many other stories on domestic violence are reported on the small edge of the paper, called “In Brief”. Only done in about five sentences, the reports do not add any value to the key functions of journalism. They contain no details but are just a mention that a wife was beaten by a husband, and then end the story with a statement such as the cause of the assault is said to be “a normal family quarrel”. One may wonder what is normal It is because it is typical of a man to “discipline” a wife when need be. Rarely do we get a follow-up of the issue in terms of serious police investigation. If the perpetrator is arrested, we do not get to hear of the sentence. This gives perpetrators of domestic violence motivation to be violent whenever it seems fit to do so.

3.2. Media Coverage and Gender Stereotyping –Domestic Violence against Men

It becomes the talk of the town only when the batterer becomes the battered. It is a case of “the man biting the dog” rather than the dog biting the man. That is news. Cases reported in the media on domestic violence against men in Kenya have raised mixed feelings among different sections of the society- anger, self pity, revenge and sympathy. These cases have been given more prominence than cases of violence on women.

In Ruiru, a man was burnt with hot water by his wife and the man claimed he “had done nothing wrong” (Nairobi star 13 February 2012). An article by Wambugu Kanyi (Nairobi Star on 21 February 2012) reported about a 40 year old man in Nyeri who was slashed with a panga several times by his wife “as he lay in bed”. In the history of Kenyan communities, there has been a belief that women from central Kenya and especially from Nyeri are violent.

The issue of generalization hence stereotyping is evident. “If one Nyeri woman does so, then all women from Nyeri are husband batterers. This stereotyping creates a lot of suspicion among married couples. A few days later, another case of domestic violence against a man was reported in the same region. Could the perpetrator’s action have been prompted by the media reports and even wanting to confirm that Nyeri women are violent?

Secondly, the statement that the man was slashed “as he lay in bed” is intended to portray his innocence and demonize the attacker. This is in contrast with a case where the woman is the victim. The tattered face of the man glared on local TV stations, print media and social media and the news spread like bush fire. Quick reactions commented that that is how women from Nyeri behave, prompting MPs Esther Murugi and Ephraim Maina to come to their defense. Although there are numerous cases of domestic violence against women in the areas that these MPs represent, never in history have such dignified persons come out to talk about domestic violence and defend the men. They would not do that because it is not unexpected. However, this case was seen as “outrageous” since the man was the victim and demanded enormous attention. They said the few cases were “isolated and media should not sensitize the matter”. The reports were termed as mere propaganda. This is tantamount to sweeping the issue under the carpet so what would prevent other women to do the same since they will not be exposed?

“Maendeleo ya Wanawake”(the main women organization in Kenya), Chairlady Rukia Subow in an unapologetic view said:” If men want to be heads of the house, let them be responsible. if you are not responsible you will get a beating. (Daily Naton, 17th 2012.). This comment was prompted by the fact that the victim was portrayed as a drunk and hence was most probably not meeting his obligations at home. This is clearly about the social roles that have been traditionally inculcated in us. Hence it was a confirmation that there are certain gender roles in society that we are obliged to meet; if we do not perform them we deserve punishment.

The Daily nation of 18th February 2012 had a sub-head that clearly depicted gender roles and social expectations and stereotypes: “Women knock over the old order”. This refers to the reversed roles that are now taking shape on society where roles that were traditionally male are being taken by women and vice-versa. It was also in reference to the fact that for a long time men have been the perpetrators of domestic violence, but now “women can also discipline their men”. This sub-head is clearly strongly worded and sounds like a coup has just occurred. It therefore, potentially inciting to men to come up and defend their position and this is likely to lead to more domestic violence.

The Nation 18th Feb 2012 sub- head: Absent men are to blame for war at home, says expert. The heading confirms that the modern man is abandoning his roles in the family and causing frustration among women. The expert, specializing in African traditional religion and practices says that men must rediscover their roles. He further says that the current situation has nothing to do with the campaign for the rights of women. He also brings in another stereotype: Women have no problem obeying reasonable and wise leadership. This depicts women as naturally submissive to men. He talks about gender roles as he notes that men no longer work hard and provide for their families and offer the expected security. He asserts that most men refuse to go home early and this is contrary to the role of the man in securing his family and property. These statements can be interpreted to be passing the message that men of today deserve a beating from their wives because they are not offering security; neither are they providing for their families.

The Daily Nation 18 Feb 2012 report on Maendeleo ya wanaume, an organization that deals with men’s protection said the rise in the cases was due to female superiority complex. The chairman laments that the emphasis on women empowerment had made women believe that they can control men as the “feminine gender is trying to take up the position reserved for men”. This amounts to

demonizing women. However, Nyiva Mwendwa of the historic 1995 UN conference on women in Beijing said the fight for equality should not be confused with violence. She explains that Women have endured years of abuse from men thanks to their economic dependence on men. She says that this traditional woman is fast dying out. The woman is now competing in the marketplace. She asserts that “men are now feeling inferior, leading to escapism through alcohol, extra-marital affairs and drugs”. This statement may suggest that men are naturally supposed to be superior to women, hence it frustrates them if the reverse is perceived to happen.

Nairobi Star (2012) Headline was equally punctuated with stereotypical undertones: Non-performing hubbies blamed in Nyeri battering. The report blamed the violence on “too much alcohol” which led to low libido making the wives bitter and frustrated. This headline also confirms that non performance of obligations set within a family by the society is punishable. Hence the battering is not treated as a crime but as a well executed and deserved punishment. This rather trivializes the matter in that it sexualizes by giving it pleasurable undertones. It also trivializes the wives’ bitterness as merely brought about by lack of bodily pleasure in times of great economic hardships. The headline presents a topic too sensitive to discuss in public and this is likely to cause more anxiety among the male and even affect “their performance” more and can lead to more violence.

More cases of domestic violence against men in Kenya have been reported – in different parts of the country. In Kiambu, a man who had just arrived home from years of study abroad was thoroughly beaten by his wife and children for allegedly “being broke”. This means that the man was beaten for failing to provide for his family as expected. Is it a form of an epidemic spread by the media?

Could this be as a result of many reports that had appeared in the media confirming that it is possible and right to beat a husband who does not provide for his family?

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Journalists must rethink about the tenets of their profession by assessing the consequences of any story they cover. The choice of words, the undertones and connotations must be considered before sending that story to the media. Some of the stories on domestic violence covered have had great impact on the audience and on the family unit.

Gender discrimination must not be allowed to interfere with reporting of any kind of story let alone on domestic violence. It is unethical to turn a story depicting deep physical and psychological wounds into a source of entertainment. The media should not give room for the ridiculing of domestic violence victims as this will only discourage others to come out and be rescued from torture.

Journalists must be ready to do enough research on cases of domestic violence before releasing them to the media.

A case of domestic violence if first reported in the mass media should be reported to completion. Journalists work should not just end at reporting from the homes, but should pursue the issues up to the corridors of justice (if ever the cases reach there). Exposition of how justice is dispensed on the cases should be given preference so that victims who wish to seek judicial redress may know how to go about it. It will be beneficial to see if the judicial system is also affected by gender stereotypes in their decisions.

When journalists seek comment from experts on sensitive matters, they should not take everything they say as truth or fact. The journalist must consider the effect of the statements made on the audience since the journalist understands the extent to which the common person believes in the media. The journalist must not allow gender stereotypes inherent in his or her mind to interfere with the coverage. Cases of domestic violence on either gender should be given equal prominence in terms of priming and coverage of domestic violence stories needs as sober a mind as when covering other stories. The journalist must avoid basing his or her exposition on just one witness without making efforts to make confirmations. Some of these witnesses have their own biases and report so emotionally that you doubt if it was fact or fiction.

As the journalist goes to the scene, he or she should not go there as a female or male journalist, but as a professional journalist with a purpose deeper than merely informing. He or she should go there not to expose a man who was beaten by his wife or a wife who was beaten by her husband, but to expose a gross vice which needs to be eliminated in public interest.

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