

## Influence of Social Media Messages on Adult Internet Users and Issues Relating to Domestic Violence against Cohabiting and Married Women in Southeast Nigeria

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### Abstract

The study focused on influence of social media messages on adult internet users and issues relating to domestic violence against cohabiting and married women (DVACMW) in Southeast Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined: level of awareness of social media messages on DVACMW among internet user; knowledge gained from the messages on DVACMW by the internet users; and their attitude towards DVACMW based on the messages. Survey research design was adopted. Population was 14,684,504, comprising adult internet users in Southeast Nigeria. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were analysed using percentages, mean and standard deviation. Findings reveal that 100 percent of respondents were aware of DVACMW. Awareness was mainly through Facebook (75.3%); Instagram (14.0%); Twitter (8.5%); and Tik-Tok (0.8%). Regularity of reading social media messages on DVACMW ranges from daily (22.0%); weekly (30.50%); biweekly (8.8%); monthly (9.5%) to rarely (29.3%). Furthermore, findings show high knowledge level ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.65 to 2.84) for up to 90 percent of the knowledge indicators studied. The messages also have high influence ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.43 to 2.66) on the respondents for up to 90 percent of the attitude indicators. The recommendations were made based on the findings.

**Keywords:** Domestic, Violence, Knowledge, Attitude, Social, Media, Internet, Users, Women.

### Introduction

Domestic violence may include any abusive treatment against a person sharing the same house with an abuser. It could be verbal, physical, financial, religious, digital, psychological, or sexual (Odenigbo *et al.*, 2023). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2021), 641 million ever-married/partnered women aged 15 years and older have been subjected to physical and sexual intimate partner violence at least once. Two-hundred and forty-five

million ever-married/partnered women aged 15 years and older had been subjected to recent physical and sexual intimate partner violence. Globally, the victims of domestic violence are principally women. Many African and Asian countries justify domestic violence based on infidelity, cooking flaws, lack of respect, or disobedience to husband and his people (Odenigbo *et al.*, 2023). A study by the National Population Commission (NPC) (2014) reports that one in three surveyed women agree that a man is

justified in beating his wife in some cases, including if she burns the food while cooking, argues with him, goes out without telling him, neglects the children, or refuses to have sexual intercourse with him. Another study on Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018 by NPC & ICF (2019) reports that 31 percent of women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence, and nine per cent have experienced sexual violence, and six per cent of women have experienced physical violence during pregnancy. Furthermore, 36 per cent of ever-married women have experienced spousal physical, sexual, or emotional violence. The prevalence of one or more of these forms of spousal violence was higher in 2018 than in 2008 (31%) and 2013 (25%). Astonishingly, the victims' current husbands (58.0%) orchestrate most physical abuse against women.

Women's safety and psychological stability have been exploited for decades. Various women die yearly in Nigeria because of emotional torture and battering, with others battling depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts (Odenigbo & Anyakoha, 2021). Liu *et al.* (2021) also reported that domestic violence has a short-term detrimental impact on people's mental health, as shown in victim and non-victim groups on Sina Weibo, the aftermath of domestic violence includes an increase in depressive symptoms, a higher risk of suicide, and a worse level of life satisfaction.

Similarly, the health effects of intimate partner abuse on the psychological well-being of a victim include mental health problems, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, eating disorders, suicidality, and alcohol and substance use (tobacco, and other drugs) (WHO, 2013).

The fight against domestic violence against married and cohabiting women would not be effectively mitigated by international organisations and governments without the intervention of the media as the watchdog and agenda setter for the people. The media owe it to the masses to enlighten and educate them on the issue of domestic violence against married and cohabiting women, enumerating the psychological, social, and health disasters that it poses to society.

The traditional media, especially the newspaper, have been criticized for low coverage and poor analysis of domestic violence stories (Owusu-Addo *et al.*, 2018; Mwai, 2016; Onyebuchi *et al.*, 2021; Odenigbo *et al.*, 2023). Digital technologies are significantly multifaceted, advancing rapidly daily and can promote domestic violence stories. It therefore becomes imperative to utilize these tools in exposing and campaigning against the dehumanizing treatment women suffer in marriages and cohabitations. Social interaction platforms, such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok, are becoming more popular among Nigerians of all ages and ethno-social backgrounds. It has become a fundamental part of their social life, providing opportunities and connections. It is no surprise that these platforms have received a torrent of intimate partner abuse stories from around the country.

Several studies highlight the prevalence of domestic abuse against women and the importance of social media in raising awareness. According to Abdulgaffar *et al.* (2017), 74.9 percent of Nigerians have come across information regarding violence against women on social media, emphasising its significance in campaigning and empowering

survivors. Arisukwu *et al.* (2021) discovered that 97 percent of respondents were aware of domestic abuse, with 43.8 percent attributing it to early marriage. The amount of education has a major impact on their understanding of abuse.

Ikushika *et al.* (2017) analysed Facebook postings concerning violence against women and discovered that they comprised physical violence (26%), sexual assault (52%), and emotional abuse (6%). Carlyle *et al.* (2019) discovered that 53.4 percent of Instagram postings regarding intimate partner violence (IPV) exhibited physical assault, with 43 percent blaming victims. Ebrahimi and Mohamadlou (2019) discovered themes such as psychological trauma and children's concerns among mistreated mothers. Liu *et al.* (2021) linked domestic violence to an increased risk of depression and suicide, while Cirici *et al.* (2022) found that 87 percent of IPV victims had state anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, Rosser-Limiñana *et al.* (2020); LoCascio *et al.* (2021) observed that children exposed to IPV exhibited behavioural issues, with 37 percent showing attention problems and 15.2 percent engaging in rule-breaking behaviour.

Theoretically, ancient theorists like George Armitage Miller (1956) emphasized the impact of exposure to persuasive messages on attitudes. Anaeto *et al.* (2008) noted that exposure raises awareness, and a comprehended message guarantees knowledge, which, if accepted, reforms beliefs and attitudes. Odenigbo (2023) argued that new media could effectively influence public perceptions and behaviours regarding domestic abuse through social media campaigns.

### **Objectives of the study**

The study investigated influence of social media messages on adult internet users and issues relating to domestic violence against cohabiting and married women in Southeast Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined:

1. level of awareness of social media messages among adult internet users on domestic violence against cohabiting and married women (DVACMW).
2. level of knowledge gained from social media messages on DVACMW among adult internet users.
3. attitude of adult internet users towards social media messages on DVACMW.

### **Methodology**

**Design of the Study:** The study adopted online survey research design (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Regmi *et al.*, 2016).

**Area of Study:** The area of study was Southeast Nigeria, one of the six geopolitical zones in the country. This study targeted adult internet users in the five Southeastern states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo) of Nigeria. The choice of southeast geopolitical zone is because similar social media studies have been conducted on the other regions especially, Southwest and North Central. Hence, it becomes imperative to evaluate social media user's opinions on this topic in Southeast Nigeria.

**Population of the Study:** The population of the study is 14,684,504; comprising adult internet users in the Southeast geopolitical zone (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This category includes males and females aged 18 years and above who reside in Southeast Nigeria and have internet access.

**Sample for the Study:** The study used a sample size of 400 from a research population of 14,684,504. The sample size was calculated statistically using the Cochran (1979) Formula for sample size determination. The researchers were more interested in the quality of the replies than in the gender of the respondents. As a result, the e-questionnaire was shared to WhatsApp and Telegram groups populated by experts in the topic.

**Instrument for Data Collection:** The instrument for data collection was an e-survey questionnaire. The items covered the specific objectives of the study. The instrument was divided into two categories: demographic section (section A) requested information, such as age, gender, educational qualifications, religious affiliation, and marital status. Section B focused on items related to the objectives of the study. The instrument was validated by three research experts. Reliability of the instrument was analysed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient method in SPSS. The result showed that

the instrument had a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.809 indicating it is 80% reliable.

**Data Collection Method:** Four hundred copies of the e-survey questionnaire were administered to 400 respondents via WhatsApp and Telegram platforms. The e-questionnaire was programmed to be disabled after four hundred respondents from Southeast Nigeria had completed it. To ensure that only residents of Southeast Nigeria participated, the questionnaire began with the prompt, "Do you reside in Southeast Nigeria?" Once 400 responses were submitted, the Google Form link was set to expire.

**Data Analysis Techniques:** Data were analysed using frequencies (F), percentages (%), means and standard deviations. A Mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) of 3.50 and above was considered a very high level of knowledge, awareness or attitude, 3.00-2.50 is considered a high level and 2.49 and below is considered a low level.

## Findings

**Table 1: Percentage Responses on Level of Audiences' Awareness of Social Media Messages on Domestic Violence against Cohabiting and Married Women (DVACMW) among Adult Internet Users in Southeast Nigeria**

S/N	Awareness Indicators	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)
1.	I am aware of DVACMW	Yes 400(100)	No 0(0)	-	-	-
2.	My awareness of DVACMW on social media was mainly through	Facebook 301(75.3)	Instagram 56(14.0)	Twitter 34(8.5)	TikTok 3(0.8)	Others 6(1.5)
3.	I read about these messages on DVACMW on social media	Daily 88(22.0)	Weekly 122(30.5)	Biweekly 35(8.8)	Monthly 38(9.5)	Rarely 117(29.3)

*Note:* % = percentage; F = Frequency

Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of respondents' awareness of social media messages on DVACMW in Southeast Nigeria. The Table shows that

400 (100%) respondents are aware DVACMW. The Table also shows social media platforms where awareness of DVACMW came mainly from majority of respondents (75.3%) chose Facebook, while (14.0%) are through Instagram, (8.5%) favoured Twitter, (0.8%) selected TikTok, and (1.5%) through other means the ones stated in the Table. Data analysis

on how often these messages on DVACMW are seen on social media shows that 88 (22.0%) respondents selected daily, 122 (30.5%) favoured weekly, 35 (8.8%) chose biweekly, 38 (9.5%) indicated monthly, and 117 (29.3%) said they rarely notice these stories on DVACMW.

**Table 2: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation on Audiences' Knowledge Level on Domestic Violence against Cohabiting and Married Women (DVACME) Gained through Social Media Messages**

S/N	Knowledge Indicators	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	Social media provide informative messages on DVACMW	3.31	0.56	HL
2	Continuous dissemination of stories of abused women on social media might increase DVACMW	2.25	0.90	LL
3	Health issues associated with DVACMW portrayed on social media: Depression	3.65	0.53	VHL
4	Post-traumatic stress disorder	3.30	0.76	HL
5	Anxiety disorder	3.21	0.75	HL
6	Alcohol and drug misuse	2.84	0.91	HL
7	Pregnancy complication/miscarriage	3.28	0.80	HL
8	Unintended pregnancy	2.88	0.95	HL
9	Sexually transmitted diseases	2.93	1.00	HL
10	Suicidal thoughts/ suicide	2.89	1.10	HL

$\bar{X}$  = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; N = 400; HL = High level; LL = Low-level; VHL = Very high level

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of respondents' knowledge level on DVACMW gained through social media messages. The Table shows that one of the 10 knowledge indicators (No. 3) namely, "Health issues associated with DVACMW portrayed on social media:

Depression" ( $\bar{X}$  = 3.65) has the highest knowledge level mean while eight indicators each obtained mean score ( $\bar{X}$ ) ranging from 3.31-2.84 which indicate high knowledge levels. Only one indicator obtained low knowledge level of  $\bar{X}$  = 2.25.

**Table 3: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation Attitude of Respondents towards Social Media Messages on DVACMW**

S/N	Attitude Indicators	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision
1	Witnessing DV during childhood increases the tendency to violate others	2.95	0.823	HAI
2	Witnessing DV during childhood increases the tendency to accept abuse as a norm	2.66	0.83	HAI
3	Social media education on DVACMW could result in attitudinal change	3.13	0.75	HAI
4	Alcohol/drug misuse could trigger DVACMW	3.64	0.55	VHAI

		3.15	0.81	HAL
5	Infidelity could trigger DVACMW			
6	Social influence could trigger DVACMW	2.82	0.80	HAI
7	Mental disorder could trigger DVACMW	3.29	0.78	HAI
8	Family orientation could trigger DVACMW	2.92	0.77	HAI
9	Anger could trigger DVACMW	3.43	0.73	HAI
10	Bad cooking could trigger DVACMW	2.34	1.00	LAI
11	Jealousy could trigger DVACMW	3.02	0.93	HAI
12	A lack of respect could trigger DVACMW	3.00	0.98	HAI

$\bar{X}$  = Mean; SD = Standard deviation; N = 400; HAI = High attitude influence; VHAI = Very high attitude influence; LAI = Low attitude influence.

Table 3 shows mean ( $\bar{X}$ ) responses and standard deviation (SD) on 12 indicators that could influence respondents' attitude toward social media messages on DVACMW. The Table shows that item No 4 has very high mean score of  $\bar{X} = 3.64$  while No 10 has low score of  $\bar{X} = 2.34$ . The remaining 10 items obtained high attitude influence mean scores of  $\bar{X} = 3.43 - \bar{X} = 2.66$ .

### Discussion

The results indicate that all respondents are aware of domestic violence against cohabiting and married women. This awareness was through social media, especially Facebook. Respondents reported seeing stories of domestic violence weekly on social media. These findings align with findings of Arisukwu *et al.* (2021), who reported that respondents were highly aware of domestic violence, and findings of Abdulgaffar *et al.* (2017), who indicated frequent exposure to violence on social media. The findings of this study are also consistent with those of Ikushika *et al.* (2017) which revealed that most domestic violence uploads came from Facebook groups. Similarly, Carlyle *et al.* (2019) found that Instagram messages increased engagement in intimate partner violence.

The findings on knowledge show high mean scores for knowledge indicators ( $\bar{X} = 3.65 - 2.84$ ). These implies that

respondents agree that social media messages about DVACMW are informative and that these messages can help curb the issue. Most respondents also recognised depression, PTSD, anxiety, substance misuse, pregnancy complications, unintended pregnancy, STDs, and suicidal thoughts as health challenges associated with DVACMW. These findings align with Abdulgaffar *et al.* (2017) study, where respondents attested that social media helps in campaigns against violence against women. Ebrahimi and Mohamadlou (2019) discovered that psychological consequences like depression and anxiety were the most prevalent themes in their study on domestic violence. Similarly, Liu *et al.* (2021) affirmed that domestic violence victims face increased depression, higher suicide risks, and diminished life satisfaction. Cirici *et al.* (2022) also reported significant psychological symptoms among IPV victims, including depression and PTSD.

However, most respondents disagreed that continuous dissemination of stories on DVACMW could increase abuse, aligning with Carlyle *et al.*'s (2019) conclusion that Instagram messages enhanced engagement and provided insights for better IPV prevention efforts. Overall, research question three indicates

respondents have substantial knowledge of social media messages on DVACMW.

The findings on attitude indicate that respondents believe witnessing domestic violence during childhood increases the tendency to both accept abuse as normal and to perpetrate violence. This concurs with Rosser-Limiñana *et al.* (2020), who assert that children exposed to intimate partner violence (IPV) exhibit more externalizing behaviour problems and face psychosocial imbalances due to the need to adapt to and overcome these situations.

Regarding the relevance of social media education on DVACMW (domestic violence against cohabiting and married women), most respondents agree that it can lead to attitudinal change. Abdulgaffar *et al.* (2017) support this, noting that social media helps in campaigns against violence, while Carlyle *et al.*, (2019) found that Instagram messages increased engagement in IPV prevention efforts.

The study also suggests that respondents strongly agree that triggers of DVACMW include alcohol/drug misuse, infidelity, social influence, mental disorders, family orientation, anger, jealousy, and lack of respect. LoCascio *et al.* (2021) found psychological disorders to be strong predictors of IPV. Basar *et al.* (2019) indicate men often see violence as acceptable. Ajayi *et al.* (2022) reveal that male privilege, religious beliefs, rape myths, and cultural practices contribute to violence against women. Overall, the findings suggest that social media messages on DVACMW significantly shape audiences' attitudes toward domestic violence.

### **Conclusion**

The study demonstrates a comprehensive awareness of domestic violence against

cohabiting and married women (DVACMW) among respondents in Southeast Nigeria, primarily driven by social media, with Facebook being the predominant platform. The informative nature of social media messages is acknowledged, and these messages are believed to play a crucial role in curbing domestic violence. Health issues linked to DVACMW, such as depression, PTSD, anxiety, and substance misuse, are widely recognized. The study highlights that childhood exposure to domestic violence increases the likelihood of accepting or perpetrating abuse. Social media education is seen as instrumental in changing attitudes towards DVACMW. Key triggers for DVACMW include substance misuse, infidelity, social influence, mental disorders, and lack of respect, emphasizing the need for continued awareness and intervention efforts.

### **Recommendations**

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

1. The media should enhance and diversify social media campaigns to raise awareness about domestic violence, leveraging platforms like Facebook for maximum reach and impact.
2. The government should implement educational programs in schools and communities to address domestic violence, focusing on healthy relationships, conflict resolution, and recognizing abuse signs.
3. The government should strengthen mental health services for domestic violence victims, ensuring accessible counselling and integrating mental health education into social media campaigns.

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