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# Domestic Violence as a Social Problem in Uganda: A Review of Media's Role in Awareness and Intervention

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***Abstract:*** *Domestic violence has emerged as a major social problem in Uganda, affecting women, children, families, and communities. This review article synthesizes literature on the prevalence, drivers, and impacts of domestic violence while focusing on how traditional and social media shape public awareness, advocacy, and policy responses. Findings reveal that while mass media and digital platforms have elevated the issue to national prominence, coverage remains inconsistent, often sensationalized, and limited by cultural stigma and weak legal enforcement. The article concludes with recommendations for improving media responsibility, strengthening policy, and enhancing community-level interventions.*

**Keywords**: Domestic violence, Uganda, social problem, mass media, social media, gender-based violence

## Introduction

Domestic violence, defined as physical, sexual, psychological, or economic abuse within intimate or family settings, is recognized globally as both a violation of human rights and a major public health concern. In Uganda, it constitutes one of the most pervasive social problems, undermining women's rights, family stability, and national development. Unlike personal troubles, domestic violence is systemic, with societal roots in poverty, patriarchy, and cultural acceptance of wife-beating.

The Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS, 2020) reports that 56% of married women aged 15–49 have experienced spousal violence. Despite this alarming statistic, domestic violence was historically perceived as a private family matter, discouraging external intervention. The rise of advocacy groups, legal reforms such as the Domestic Violence Act (2010), and sustained media coverage have transformed domestic violence into a recognized social crisis demanding collective action. This article reviews existing literature and media coverage, analyzing the ideal versus real practices of both traditional and digital media in elevating domestic violence as a public issue.

## Domestic Violence in Uganda: Scope and Impact

Studies highlight that domestic violence in Uganda cuts across rural and urban divides, with higher vulnerability in rural areas due to poverty, early marriages, and limited access to services (UWONET, 2021; MIFUMI, 2020). The Uganda Police Force (2021) reported over 13,000 cases during the COVID-19 lockdown, illustrating how crises exacerbate household violence. The health consequences include physical injuries, depression, trauma, and suicide, with hospitals in districts such as Gulu and Mbale frequently reporting cases linked to intimate partner abuse (ActionAid Uganda, 2021).

## Media and the Reframing of Domestic Violence

Traditional Media: Ugandan newspapers (*New Vision*, *Daily Monitor*), television stations (NTV, NBS, UBC), and radio (CBS, Capital FM, Radio Simba) frequently report on domestic violence. These platforms highlight high-profile cases, provide statistics, and host survivor testimonies. Media attention has pressured government institutions to enforce laws and sparked public debates involving cultural and religious leaders.

Social Media: Platforms such as X/Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and TikTok have provided survivors and activists with direct spaces for expression. Hashtags like End-Domestic-Violence and Justice-For-Survivors amplify awareness, while NGOs such as UWONET, FIDA-Uganda, and MIFUMI run digital campaigns for legal aid, shelters, and prevention programs. Social media thus democratizes advocacy but also poses challenges of misinformation and survivor stigmatization.

## Ideal versus Real Media Practices

The ideal role of media is to provide accurate, sensitive, and contextual reporting that: Highlights structural causes (poverty, patriarchy, substance abuse), Balances rural and urban realities, Directs survivors toward support systems, Protects survivor privacy and dignity.

In reality, coverage often leans toward sensationalism—using graphic details or dramatic headlines to attract audiences. Social media may amplify unverified claims, sometimes leading to moral panic. Yet, sustained visibility has been critical in normalizing discussions around domestic violence and placing pressure on policymakers.

**Interventions and Policy Gaps**

Legal and institutional responses include the Domestic Violence Act (2010), helplines by the Ministry of Gender, and NGO-led shelters and counseling programs. Partnerships such as the annual *16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence* rely heavily on media to mobilize communities. However, weak law enforcement, corruption, resource constraints, and stigma undermine progress (FIDA-Uganda, 2020).

**Gaps in Knowledge and Practice**

Rural neglect: Most media coverage focuses on urban centers, overlooking rural survivors.

Limited survivor-centered reporting: Few stories highlight rehabilitation, resilience, or preventive programs.

Weak integration of health services: Mental health impacts receive limited attention in both policy and reporting.

Cultural silence: Despite media coverage, patriarchal norms continue to justify violence, especially in rural areas.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

This review highlights domestic violence as a critical social problem in Uganda and underscores the central role of media in shaping awareness, advocacy, and policy. While both traditional and digital media have broken the silence, they must improve ethical reporting, avoid sensationalism, and expand focus to rural communities. Government must strengthen enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act, invest in shelters and psychosocial support, and coordinate better with civil society. Future research should explore survivor-centered storytelling, the role of digital influencers, and community-based media strategies to combat domestic violence.

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