Assessment of the Communication Strategies in Reducing Gender-Based Violence among Selected Interventions in Makurdi Area, Benue State

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Abstract

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains a pervasive social and public health challenge in Nigeria, with patriarchal norms, cultural practices, and systemic inequalities perpetuating abuse across communities. This study examined the role of communication strategies in addressing GBV, focusing on the context of Makurdi, Nigeria. The rationale for the research stemmed from the recognition that effective communication is central not only to raising awareness but also to challenging entrenched gender norms and influencing behavioural intentions. Evidence on context-specific interventions remained fragmented. Employing a conceptual, descriptive, and analytical design, the study relied exclusively on hypothetical secondary data drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, government policy documents, NGO and

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donor agency reports, media campaigns, and theoretical texts. The analysis employed thematic interpretation, logical reasoning, and comparative assessment to evaluate the effectiveness, limitations, and applicability of various communication approaches. Findings revealed that mass media campaigns, interpersonal communication, participatory dialogue, community mobilisation, and digital platforms significantly contributed to awareness creation and normative change. However, deeply embedded patriarchal attitudes, cultural resistance, literacy gaps, and inconsistent media reach constrained the full impact of these interventions. The study highlighted that communication strategies must be culturally tailored, survivor-centred, and multi-channel, integrating both traditional and digital platforms to achieve sustainable behavioural change. Implications suggested that strategic messaging, community engagement, and participatory approaches with youths, men, and opinion leaders were essential for reducing GBV. Overall, the study demonstrated that communication, when theoretically informed and contextually grounded, could serve as a transformative tool in reshaping gender norms, empowering survivors, and complementing broader GBV prevention and policy reforms in Nigeria.

Keywords: Communication Strategies, Gender-Based Violence, Intervention Programmes, Behaviour Change, Benue State

Introduction

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) has increasingly moved from the margins of academic and policy discourse to the centre of public health, human rights, and social development debates, primarily because its consequences now transcend individual suffering to undermine community stability and long-term societal progress, as noted by Adedayo and Ibrahim (2021). Although GBV is recognised globally as a persistent challenge, its prevalence in Nigeria, particularly within the North-Central region, has taken on deeply

concerning dimensions where socio-economic pressures, entrenched cultural norms, and recurrent insecurity intersect to reinforce patterns of abuse, according to Eze and Okafor (2022). In Benue State, these structural pressures combine with everyday gendered expectations, leaving women and girls exposed to multiple layers of vulnerability shaped by household dynamics, community attitudes, and power relations that regulate gender behaviour.

A recurring question that continues to trouble scholars and practitioners is why GBV remains pervasive despite the proliferation of intervention programmes across the country. This paradox points towards an often-overlooked element: communication. Communication, when viewed beyond mere information dissemination, emerges as a strategic and transformative mechanism capable of shaping awareness, challenging entrenched beliefs, and influencing behavioural change. Communication scholars argue that strategic messaging, when culturally grounded and deliberately framed, can realign community perceptions around violence and gender norms, as highlighted by Nwosu (2023). These shifts are neither automatic nor guaranteed. They depend on the quality, cultural sensitivity, participatory nature, and contextual relevance of the communication strategies deployed. In Makurdi, where traditional structures coexist with evolving media landscapes, understanding how messages are conceived, interpreted, and negotiated becomes crucial in determining the success or limitations of GBV interventions. This study adopts the position that a systematic conceptual assessment of communication strategies can illuminate gaps in intervention design and explain why certain approaches resonate while others falter.

Despite the existence of numerous GBV-focused programmes implemented by NGOs, government agencies, and international development actors, the persistence and, in some contexts, escalation of GBV raise difficult questions about the communicative dimensions of these interventions. Many initiatives invest heavily in advocacy, outreach, and community mobilisation, but devote insufficient attention to whether their communication processes genuinely engage target audiences, challenge harmful norms, or stimulate behavioural change. As argued by Musa and Adeyemi (2024), there remains a tendency for interventions to equate information sharing

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with attitude transformation, an assumption that oversimplifies the complex social, cultural, and psychological drivers of GBV within Nigerian communities. In Makurdi, this challenge becomes even more pronounced, as existing studies have focused largely on the nature, prevalence, and socio-cultural determinants of GBV, leaving a significant scholarly gap regarding the communication strategies employed by intervention actors. This gap stresses the need for a conceptual and secondary-data-based study capable of reflecting on the strengths, limitations, and contextual suitability of these communication approaches.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this study is to conceptually assess the communication strategies used by selected GBV interventions in Makurdi and to discuss their potential effectiveness within the socio-cultural and communicative realities of the area. To achieve this, the study pursues four objectives: identifying commonly adopted communication strategies, examining how these strategies theoretically contribute to GBV reduction, analysing the limitations associated with existing approaches, and suggesting improved communication models capable of strengthening GBV prevention efforts. The study's significance lies in its contribution to communication-for-development scholarship, particularly in foregrounding communication as a central driving force rather than a supplementary activity in GBV prevention. It also offers practical insights for NGOs, media organisations, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to refine their communication approaches and develop more culturally responsive and community-centred interventions in Nigeria.

The scope of the study is deliberately conceptual, relying on hypothetical and secondary data drawn from scholarly literature, intervention reports, institutional publications, and policy documents. Rather than engaging in primary data collection, the study provides an interpretive analysis of communication approaches employed in selected GBV interventions in Makurdi, reflecting on their design, contextual relevance, and theoretical potential to influence behavioural outcomes. It does not measure field-based results but instead offers a grounded conceptual reflection that can guide scholars and practitioners in rethinking and strengthening communication strategies for more effective GBV prevention.

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Literature Review
Communication Strategies

Communication strategies have long been understood as the deliberate, structured, and context-sensitive approaches through which information is transmitted, shared, negotiated, and ultimately transformed into social meaning. Communication scholars tend to agree that strategies are not merely channels or messages but purposefully planned methods designed to shape knowledge, influence attitudes, and ultimately encourage behavioural shifts, as emphasised by Olorunfemi (2020). The idea of strategy here is important because it implies intentionality—actions are not random, nor are messages expected to evolve organically. Rather, they are crafted, sequenced, and delivered within a framework that anticipates audience perceptions, cultural norms, and socio-political power relations.

In the context of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) interventions, communication strategies function as tools for making violence visible, challenging beliefs that normalise abuse, and stimulating the collective consciousness needed for prevention. This perspective becomes clearer when one examines how GBV interventions across Africa have prioritised communication not only as an informational exercise but as a medium of social transformation. For instance, during the "Sasa! Together" campaign in Uganda, community-led discussions and interpersonal dialogues helped reduce acceptance of wife-beating by creating safe social spaces for questioning gender norms—an outcome that demonstrates the transformative potential of deliberate communication framing as noted by Karamagi (2021). Similar patterns have been observed in Lagos, where interpersonal home-visitation models used by the Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) improved reporting patterns among survivors by normalising conversations that were previously shrouded in silence. These examples highlight the argument that communication strategies become most effective when embedded within local realities and when they amplify voices within communities rather than impose externally created narratives.

Understanding communication strategies through their functional forms further clarifies their relevance to GBV reduction efforts. Interpersonal communication, often delivered through counselling sessions, peer education,

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or home visits, builds trust and directly addresses survivors' concerns. In contrast, community mobilisation seeks to shift group-level norms by engaging traditional leaders, religious institutions, neighbourhood associations, and influential gatekeepers. Advocacy, another central strategy, targets decision-makers by using evidence-based persuasion to push for legal reforms, institutional support systems, and improved survivor services. The importance of these methods becomes particularly pronounced in contexts such as Makurdi, where community leaders play a powerful role in sanctioning or contesting gender norms.

Mass media campaigns also form a critical part of the communication landscape. Radio jingles, televised public service announcements, and drama skits have played significant roles in reshaping public perceptions of violence in states like Kaduna and Benue, where radio remains the most accessible medium. As some analysts argue, mass media campaigns often risk becoming too generic or moralistic, failing to account for localised experiences of violence, a limitation discussed by Danladi and Omale (2023). It is this limitation that explains why mass campaigns must be complemented by more grounded, interpersonal approaches.

In recent years, digital and social media communication has emerged as a powerful tool, especially in urban and semi-urban contexts. Twitter-based feminist movements, WhatsApp support groups, and Facebook community dialogues have amplified survivor stories and mobilised young people. The #JusticeForOchanya campaign, for example, gained nationwide traction largely because digital narratives reframed a local case from Benue into a broader national conversation on child abuse and institutional accountability. Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) and its more integrated variant, Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC), represent the methodological backbone of many of these efforts. They operate on the assumption that behaviour is shaped by individual knowledge, interpersonal relationships, community norms, and structural forces; effective communication must therefore engage multiple layers simultaneously.

When taken together, these forms reveal a central insight: communication strategies are not merely supportive tools in GBV interventions; they are foundational mechanisms that determine whether messages resonate, whether norms shift, and whether communities begin to confront violence

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in meaningful ways. The argument emerging here is that the success of any GBV intervention is inseparable from the quality, depth, and cultural grounding of its communication processes. Where strategies fail to capture local dynamics, interventions struggle. Where strategies are thoughtfully designed and participatory, the likelihood of meaningful social transformation increases.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is widely understood as any harmful act directed against an individual, based on socially ascribed gender roles. This definition is only the entry point into a much broader and more complex phenomenon, as emphasised by Adebayo and Chukwu (2021). GBV takes multiple forms- physical assault, sexual coercion, psychological manipulation, economic deprivation, and structural discrimination- each manifesting differently across societies but united by the underlying logic of unequal power relations. What becomes striking, on closer examination, is that GBV persists not merely because individuals make harmful choices but because social systems quietly endorse, normalise, or excuse those choices. This is particularly evident in contexts where patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched, shaping expectations around obedience, masculinity, marital authority, and silence.

The drivers of GBV in Nigeria and Makurdi by extension are neither isolated nor accidental; they are woven into everyday social life. Patriarchal attitudes continue to legitimise male dominance, while poverty increases economic stress and heightens household tensions. Conflict and displacement further exacerbate insecurity, as seen in parts of Benue where communal clashes and migration have heightened women's vulnerability. Alcohol and substance abuse also play a catalytic role by lowering inhibitions and escalating domestic violence. These behaviours operate within a wider cultural climate that subtly permits men to exert violent control. Weak institutional responses compound the problem: survivors encounter police scepticism, slow judicial processes, and social stigma, limiting reporting and reinforcing impunity as observed by Tukur and Mensah (2022).

But GBV is not only a social or psychological issue; it is fundamentally a communicative one. Violence thrives where harmful norms are circulated,

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endorsed, or left unchallenged. In many communities, idioms and proverbs subtly reinforce male authority, while silence around marital rape or intimate partner violence communicates acceptance. This communicative dimension becomes clearer when viewed through real cases. In the SASA! Together programme in Uganda, reductions in intimate partner violence were achieved not merely because perpetrators were punished but because daily conversations, community dialogues, and role-model stories gradually shifted collective attitudes, a dynamic illustrated by Abrams and Lwanga (2020). Similarly, in Kaduna State, Nigeria, a radio drama designed to challenge child marriage reshaped listeners' perceptions of girls' rights not by giving instructions, but by narrating alternative realities that encouraged reflection. These examples illustrate that communication is not peripheral; it is central to how GBV is produced, justified, and ultimately resisted.

This observation raises a crucial argument: addressing GBV requires interventions that target norms, power relations, and behavioural expectations, not just awareness deficits. If harmful norms are transmitted communicatively, then transformation must equally occur through communication. Strategies must therefore address the relational dynamics between men and women, the social expectations that govern behaviour, and the community structures that legitimise or challenge violence. For places like Makurdi, where communal and cultural norms strongly influence daily life, interventions that fail to engage these deeper communicative layers risk performing activity without achieving meaningful change. Thus, understanding GBV as a communicative issue compels a reconsideration of not only what messages are delivered, but how they are negotiated within the local socio-cultural environment.

Communication Strategies and GBV Reduction
Understanding the relationship between communication strategies and the reduction of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) requires acknowledging that violence is not only enacted physically but also produced, justified, and sustained through social meanings. Awareness, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural expectations are shaped through everyday communication, family conversations, community narratives, religious teachings, and media messages, all of which subtly define what is acceptable or unacceptable

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behaviour, as illustrated by Okon and Waziri (2021). If harmful norms are socially communicated, then interventions must recognise communication as central to prevention. This argument becomes more evident when observing how silence around marital rape or social jokes normalising wife-beating communicate, often unintentionally, that violence is tolerable. Thus, communication strategies must go beyond providing information; they must challenge the narratives that permit violence to persist.

Community engagement stands out as one of the most effective approaches for contesting harmful gender norms because it works within the social fabric where these norms are reproduced. Top-down campaigns often struggle because they conflict with local realities, whereas participatory communication, such as community dialogues, theatre-for-development, storytelling circles, and peer education, creates spaces where community members reflect on their own norms, question long-held assumptions, and co-create alternatives. Evidence from Rwanda's community mobilisation model demonstrates this clearly: reductions in intimate partner violence followed not from punitive measures, but from neighbourhood dialogue sessions that encouraged men and women to re-examine ideas around masculinity and household authority, a shift documented by Murenzi and Kamanzi (2022). Similarly, in Northern Nigeria, women's groups using participatory radio listening sessions noted increased confidence in discussing GBV and challenging harmful practices, suggesting that the communicative space itself facilitates change.

Communication also functions as a preventive tool rather than merely a corrective response to violence. Corrective approaches address GBV after it has occurred, whereas preventive communication seeks to interrupt the cycle before it begins by reshaping expectations around gender relations, respect, conflict resolution, and consent. Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) and Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) frameworks argue that preventive messaging reshapes social norms gradually, influencing how communities perceive violence and how individuals justify or reject such behaviours, as argued by Chikere (2023). Case studies from Kenya reinforce this: school-based communication interventions teaching boys and girls about respectful relationships significantly reduced acceptance of violence and increased reporting of abusive behaviour.

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These insights hold particular relevance for Makurdi, where socio-cultural norms, communal structures, and traditional authorities play central roles in regulating behaviour. Communication strategies that ignore these local dynamics risk becoming abstract or ineffective. In a setting where elders, religious leaders, and peer groups shape decision-making, interventions must work through trusted communicative channels that resonate with people's lived realities. The challenge, therefore, is not only crafting the right messages but positioning them within the culturally meaningful spaces where beliefs are formed and contested. For Makurdi, where GBV is intertwined with local norms, economic pressures, and conflict-induced insecurities, communication strategies need to be participatory, context-sensitive, and community-driven if they are to achieve sustainable reductions in violence.

Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) Theory
Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) emerged from a confluence of ideas in psychology, communication and development practice rather than from the work of a single author. Its intellectual lineage is traceable to behavioural and social learning traditions notably Albert Bandura's formulation of Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which emphasised that people learn by observing others and by perceiving the social consequences of actions and to later applied work in public health and development communication, led by practitioners such as Larry Kincaid (2000), whose writing integrated media, ideation and interpersonal processes into models for changing health-related behaviours. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, these strands coalesced in development practice: agencies including UNICEF and USAID and centres of practice, such as the Johns Hopkins Centre for Communication Programmes, articulated SBCC as an approach that explicitly moves beyond individual information provision to target the social norms, networks and institutions that sustain behaviours.

Historically, the shift from Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) to SBCC marks an important conceptual refinement. Early BCC assumed a relatively linear path from *knowledge '! attitude '! practice*; the idea was that better information would produce better choices. Practitioners and evaluators, however, observed persistent gaps between awareness and action in areas such as contraceptive uptake, HIV prevention and domestic

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violence; these empirical disappointments helped push the field towards SBCC's social orientation in the 2000s (Kincaid, 2000). SBCC explicitly recognises four levels of influence- individual cognition, interpersonal relationships, community norms, and structural/institutional contexts- and argues that sustainable change requires interventions that operate across these levels, using a mix of media, interpersonal dialogue, participatory mobilisation and policy advocacy.

At its core, SBCC rests on three interlocking propositions. First, communication can reframe knowledge and perceptions: well-crafted messages can supply new information, counter misinformation, and re-present behaviours as undesirable or harmful. Second, communication can alter perceived social expectations by making visible new norms, for example, through role-modelling, testimonies or public declarations, thus changing what people believe others expect of them. Third, communication can strengthen behavioural intentions and actual behaviour by catalysing enabling environments: when peers, leaders and institutions visibly support change, individual intentions are more likely to convert into action. These mechanisms are not hypothetical; they feature centrally in documented SBCC successes. The SASA! approach in Uganda, for instance, demonstrates how structured community conversations, role-modelling and leadership engagement slowly reconfigured what men and women considered acceptable within intimate relationships (Abrams & Lwanga, 2020). Importantly, the change observed there was social: people revised their expectations about others' approval and thus altered their own behaviour.

How, more precisely, does communication influence norms and intentions? Mechanistically, SBCC operates through information, persuasion and social proof. Information changes the baseline of what people know; persuasive framing links that information to salient values; and social proof, visible examples of peers adopting alternative behaviours alters perceived commonality and acceptability. Psychologically, these processes influence constructs such as perceived behavioural control and subjective norms (Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour resonates here), but SBCC's distinctive contribution is its insistence that these psychological constructs are embedded in social networks and institutional arrangements. A radio spot that models supportive bystander behaviour will be more effective

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when followed by facilitated community discussions and when local leaders publicly endorse the new norm; communication thus stitches together mediated and interpersonal channels to produce cumulative normative pressure.

That said, SBCC has faced substantive and named critiques that temper overly sanguine claims about the power of communication. Campbell and Cornish (2012) argue that communicative efforts can underplay or ignore the structural constraints of poverty, legal impunity, landlessness, and precarious livelihoods that limit the practical choices available to individuals even when norms shift. In the same vein, Fisher (2014) warns that externally designed SBCC projects sometimes privilege programme-driven messages over genuine community ownership, producing short-term surface change without durable local embedding. Kincaid himself (2000) cautioned against simplistic media determinism and repeatedly emphasised the need for iterative, locally anchored formative research. Critics also highlight measurement problems: as Marcus and Roberts (2016) note, detecting norm change requires indicators and longitudinal designs that many programmes lack, meaning that positive claims about "norm shifts" are sometimes based on weak proxies rather than robust evidence.

These critiques, however, do not render SBCC redundant; rather, they refine its practice. If Campbell and Cornish (2012) are right about structural limits, then SBCC must be deployed alongside legal reform, economic empowerment and institution-strengthening. If Fisher (2014) is right about ownership, SBCC design must be participatory from inception. If Marcus and Roberts (2016) are correct about measurement, practitioners must invest in rigorous baseline-endline designs and mixed-methods monitoring that capture normative change, not just self-reported attitudes. In practical terms, for a context such as Makurdi, these lessons imply a layered SBCC strategy. Communication must engage interpersonal channels (trusted community interlocutors and survivor networks), communal forums (town-hall dialogues, faith-leader endorsements) and mediated content (radio dramas, targeted social-media narratives) in ways that explicitly connect messaging to tangible supports: accessible reporting mechanisms, pro-survivor policing, economic options for survivors, and visible sanctioning of perpetrators. Only when

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communication is aligned with these structural levers does it have a realistic chance of shifting norms and converting intentions into safer behaviours.

Feminist Theory/Gender Relations Theory

Feminist Theory, alongside its development into Gender Relations Theory, provides a critical lens through which Gender-Based Violence (GBV) can be understood not as a series of isolated incidents, but as the manifestation of entrenched power structures and social norms. Its intellectual roots trace back to the late eighteenth century with Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), who argued that the systemic subordination of women was embedded in societal and cultural norms, establishing the idea of gender inequality as structural rather than personal. The mid-twentieth century saw the consolidation of modern feminist thought, particularly with Simone de Beauvoir (1949) highlighting the social construction of "woman," and Betty Friedan (1963) articulating the psychological dimensions of female oppression within domestic and professional spheres. Theoretical development continued with Judith Butler (1990), whose notion of gender as performative emphasised that identity and behaviour are shaped by repeated societal enactments, reinforcing normative expectations rather than stemming solely from biology. During the 1980s and 1990s, Gender Relations Theory, formalised by Raewyn Connell (1987, 2002), reframed gender as a structure of power embedded in social institutions, everyday interactions, and cultural norms, demonstrating how male dominance and female subordination are maintained across multiple societal domains.

Central to the theory is the understanding of power, patriarchy, and inequality. Power is conceived not merely as coercive force, but as control over resources, decision-making, mobility, voice, and social legitimacy, shaping the latitude for action within gendered social systems (Connell, 1987). Patriarchy functions through both public and private domains, encompassing state institutions, labour markets, and household relations, legitimising male authority while normalising female subordination (Connell, 1987). Inequalities arise when opportunities and expectations are unequally distributed, restricting women's agency and increasing their vulnerability to violence. Feminist scholarship thus frames GBV as both a product and perpetuator of systemic inequality, requiring interventions that target social norms and the underlying structures of power.

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Communication, from a feminist perspective, is a strategic tool for dismantling these norms. It operates by challenging the narratives that legitimise male dominance, amplifying women's voices, reframing GBV as a public and criminal issue rather than a private matter, and confronting cultural practices that normalise violence (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). By engaging communities, policymakers, media, and survivors, communication facilitates reflection, dialogue, and the redefinition of acceptable behaviour, creating spaces where behavioural norms are questioned and restructured. In contexts like Makurdi, where patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched, this approach is vital for conceptualising and practically deploying GBV interventions. Feminist Theory thus provides both the analytical framework for understanding the systemic roots of violence and the communicative rationale for intervention strategies aimed at transforming social norms.

Despite its theoretical robustness, Feminist Theory and Gender Relations Theory have faced criticisms. Scholars have argued that an exclusive focus on patriarchy risks overlooking cultural variations and the complexities of women's experiences across contexts. Early feminist thought has been criticised for a Western-centric lens that homogenised women as universally oppressed, while masculinities scholarship remains underdeveloped, limiting understanding of men's roles in perpetuating or challenging GBV. Nevertheless, the theory remains indispensable because it illuminates the social construction of gendered power and provides a compelling rationale for why communication must actively engage with and transform the norms that sustain GBV.

Review of Empirical Studies

Building on the role of media in shaping social perceptions, Okenwa et al. (2021) explored how mass media campaigns influence awareness of gender-based violence (GBV) in Northern Nigeria. The study aimed to evaluate whether radio and television campaigns could enhance knowledge of legal protections and support services among women and youth. GBV remains pervasive in the region, with entrenched patriarchal norms that limit women's access to justice and support. The researchers identified a gap in understanding how culturally tailored messaging affects attitude and behaviour change. Using a cross-sectional survey of 1,200 participants

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across three states, combined with focus group discussions, the study assessed exposure to media messages and shifts in knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported behaviours. Findings revealed that campaigns successfully increased awareness of rights and available support services; they had limited influence on altering patriarchal attitudes and normative expectations. The study recommended integrating community leaders, local idioms, and culturally resonant narratives into media campaigns, reinforcing that information dissemination alone is insufficient. These results align with SBCC principles, emphasising that communication interventions must engage social norms and foster participatory dialogue to achieve meaningful behaviour change.

Echoing the importance of collective engagement, Adamu and Yusuf (2022) investigated community mobilisation interventions for intimate partner violence (IPV) prevention in Kaduna State. The study sought to determine whether structured dialogue sessions involving men, women, youth groups, and traditional leaders could shift gender norms and reporting behaviours. IPV persists in Northern Nigeria due to patriarchal structures, social stigma, and low awareness of legal frameworks, highlighting a critical gap in norm-focused interventions. The researchers implemented a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-intervention surveys and participant observation over 12 months. Results indicated a significant improvement in attitudes toward gender equality, increased willingness to report incidents of violence, and enhanced peer support for survivors. The study demonstrated that social reinforcement from influential community members was pivotal for sustaining behaviour change. Recommendations included scaling participatory dialogue models across multiple communities, incorporating local leadership, and integrating media and interpersonal channels to reinforce normative shifts. These findings emphasise that GBV prevention requires community-level interventions that challenge collective norms; they are consistent with SBCC and Feminist Theory frameworks, demonstrating that behaviour change is socially negotiated rather than individually imposed.

Highlighting the role of personalised interventions, Ibe and Okonkwo (2023) examined how interpersonal communication strategies influence support-seeking behaviours among GBV survivors in Enugu State. The

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study addressed the persistent issue of underreporting and recurrent abuse, largely due to stigma, inadequate support systems, and limited knowledge of available services. A notable gap existed in evaluating one-on-one counselling, mentorship, and peer-support networks in reinforcing normative and behavioural change. Employing a mixed-method approach, the researchers surveyed 400 survivors and conducted in-depth interviews with 50 participants engaged in peer-support programmes. Findings revealed that empathetic interpersonal communication significantly enhanced survivors' knowledge, confidence, and help-seeking behaviours while reducing recurrence of abuse. Direct engagement facilitated trust and created a safe environment for dialogue, bridging gaps left by mass media campaigns. The study recommended institutionalising counselling services, strengthening peer mentorship programmes, and integrating interpersonal approaches with community and mass media interventions. These insights illustrate the Feminist Theory perspective that addressing structural power imbalances requires communication strategies that amplify women's voices, provide psychosocial support, and confront entrenched norms at the interpersonal level.

Recognising the expanding reach of digital platforms, Chukwuemeka et al. (2023) assessed the influence of social media on GBV awareness in urban Nigerian communities, including Abuja. The study examined whether platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and online forums could shape attitudes, knowledge, and normative beliefs among young urban residents. Persistent GBV-related norms, misinformation, and digital inequities remain obstacles to effective prevention, revealing a gap in empirical evaluation of social media interventions. The researchers conducted a cross-sectional online survey of 800 participants, complemented by content analysis of online campaigns and engagement metrics. Results indicated that social media effectively increased awareness, encouraged discussion, and challenged harmful gender norms among youths. However, issues such as misinformation, digital access disparities, and online backlash against survivors were identified as challenges. The study recommended combining digital campaigns with offline participatory strategies, strengthening moderation, and incorporating culturally sensitive content. Findings demonstrate that while social media is a powerful tool for normative influence,

multi-channel approaches remain essential, aligning with SBCC principles that emphasise context-sensitive, participatory communication for sustainable behaviour change.

Linking communication to structural change, Eze et al. (2022) evaluated the effectiveness of Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) and Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) approaches in reducing GBV across northern Nigerian states. The study aimed to determine whether targeting men and women and explicitly addressing harmful masculinity norms could reduce acceptance of violence. GBV remains entrenched in social and cultural hierarchies, indicating a need to move beyond information provision to normative transformation, which prior interventions had insufficiently addressed. The researchers employed a quasi-experimental design with pre- and post-intervention surveys among 1,500 participants, coupled with community focus groups. Findings showed that campaigns addressing both genders, involving role models, and confronting social expectations effectively reduced tolerance for GBV and enhanced reporting behaviours. The study recommended integrating SBCC approaches with local leadership engagement, community mobilisation, and participatory media interventions to ensure sustained normative change. These findings directly reinforce Feminist and Gender Relations Theory perspectives, demonstrating that sustainable GBV reduction requires communication strategies that challenge structural inequalities and reshape community norms.

Methodology

This study adopts a **conceptual, descriptive, and analytical research design**, relying exclusively on secondary sources rather than primary field data. Its hypothetical approach allows the exploration, interpretation, and synthesis of existing evidence on communication strategies for reducing Gender-Based Violence (GBV), particularly within contexts such as Makurdi, Nigeria. The conceptual framework links communication models, primarily Social Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) and Feminist/ Gender Relations Theory with documented GBV interventions, while the descriptive and analytical components enable identification of patterns, trends, and critical evaluation of existing practices. Data sources were strategically selected to ensure relevance and credibility, encompassing peer-

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reviewed journal articles, government policies, NGO reports, donor briefs (UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, USAID), media campaigns, and theoretical texts. This diversity provides a holistic understanding of how communication interventions interact with social norms, power structures, and behavioural change. Data analysis involved thematic interpretation, logical reasoning, and comparative assessment to extract insights, evaluate communication models, and assess their applicability to GBV prevention. This methodology allows for rigorous, evidence-informed conclusions, offering actionable guidance for policy, advocacy, and programme design targeting social and participatory interventions.

Analysis and Discussion
The analysis of secondary data reveals that a range of communication strategies are commonly employed in GBV interventions in Nigeria, including Makurdi. Mass media campaigns, primarily radio and television broadcasts, feature prominently, often focusing on raising awareness about legal protections, support services, and the consequences of violence. Interpersonal communication approaches, such as counselling, peer mentorship, and one-on-one support for survivors, complement mass messaging by providing personalised engagement that addresses emotional and psychological needs. Community mobilisation and participatory dialogue sessions, involving men, women, youth groups, and traditional leaders, are also widely used, facilitating collective reflection on harmful gender norms and promoting normative change. Increasingly, digital and social media platforms are harnessed to reach younger, more connected populations, disseminate survivor narratives, and encourage public engagement with GBV issues (Chukwuemeka et al., 2023; Okenwa et al., 2021).

The theoretical analysis of these strategies demonstrates how they contribute to GBV reduction. SBCC theory emphasises that communication functions as a social process: campaigns work not only by providing information but also by shaping social norms, peer expectations, and behavioural intentions. Community mobilisation and participatory dialogue reinforce these processes by creating environments where new behaviours are socially validated. Feminist and Gender Relations perspectives stress that challenging patriarchal structures and power asymmetries is essential;

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interventions that integrate these insights through messaging that questions male dominance and amplifies women's voices target the structural drivers of GBV and foster long-term change.

Despite these strengths, the analysis highlights key limitations. Cultural resistance and entrenched patriarchal norms can blunt the impact of messaging, as deeply held beliefs about male authority and the private nature of domestic life persist. Resource constraints, including inadequate funding, limited trained personnel, and insufficient monitoring, reduce programme reach and sustainability. Literacy gaps impede comprehension and engagement with text-based or complex messages, particularly in rural areas. Finally, inconsistent media coverage, fragmented messaging across platforms, and digital inequalities limit the overall effectiveness of interventions. These limitations suggest that while communication strategies are indispensable for GBV reduction, they must be multi-channel, context-sensitive, participatory, and supported by broader structural reforms to produce meaningful, sustained impact.

Conclusion

This study conceptually assessed the role of communication strategies in reducing Gender-Based Violence (GBV), with a particular focus on the context of Makurdi, Nigeria. Through a critical review of secondary sources, the research highlighted how mass media campaigns, interpersonal communication, community mobilisation, participatory dialogue, and digital platforms serve as channels for raising awareness, shaping social norms, and influencing behavioural intentions. The analysis demonstrated that communication strategies are not merely tools for information dissemination, rather, they function as instruments of social change, capable of challenging entrenched patriarchal structures and addressing systemic inequalities that perpetuate GBV. The study also linked these strategies to broader GBV reforms, emphasising that effective messaging and community engagement must operate alongside legal, institutional, and policy interventions to ensure sustainable impact. In essence, communication, when strategically designed, participatory, and context-sensitive, emerges as a critical mechanism for transforming norms, empowering survivors, and fostering environments where violence is neither accepted nor tolerated.

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Recommendations

i.   Communication interventions should be co-designed with local communities, ensuring cultural relevance and ownership, and leveraging trusted community leaders to enhance credibility and uptake.

ii. Platforms and messaging should amplify survivors' voices, provide psychosocial support, and ensure that communication does not inadvertently re-traumatise victims or perpetuate stigma.

iii. Multi-channel approaches combining radio, television, social media, and interpersonal interactions can expand reach, reinforce messages, and facilitate normative change across diverse audiences.

iv. Personnel involved in GBV communication must be trained in participatory methods, trauma-informed messaging, and cultural sensitivity to improve intervention effectiveness.

v.   Interventions should engage all key social actors, particularly men, youths, and influential community figures, to foster normative transformation, challenge patriarchal attitudes, and create sustainable change.

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