

How Does Media Representations of Domestic Abuse Victims Impact Public Perception and Reporting Behaviours in the UK over the Last Twenty Years?

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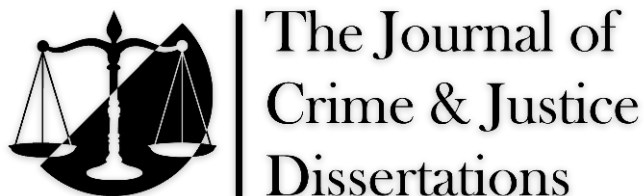
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Abstract

Media representation of domestic abuse victims in the UK has evolved from sensationalism and victim-blaming to more nuanced portrayals, impacting public perception and reporting behaviours. This thesis investigates the evolving landscape of media representation of domestic abuse victims and its consequential impact on public perception and reporting behaviours in the UK over the past two decades. Through a comprehensive examination of media portrayals spanning various platforms, including news articles, television programs, and social media, this study aims to elucidate the intricate relationship between media depiction of domestic abuse victims and the attitudes and behaviours of the public. Moreover, it seeks to uncover the ways in which media representations have shaped societal understanding and responses to domestic abuse. More so, by utilising a mixed-methods approach, encompassing both secondary qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study conducts a thorough literature review to synthesise existing knowledge and identify key trends and patterns in media representation. Additionally, qualitative analysis of media content offers insights into the nuances of portrayal, while quantitative data analysis provides statistical validation and broader context to the findings. The selected methods were chosen as the most appropriate for addressing the main question due to their complementary nature and ability to provide a holistic understanding of media representation of domestic abuse victims. The key findings of this thesis concluded the relationship between media portrayal of domestic abuse victims and its impact on public perception and reporting behaviours in the UK over the last two decades. Furthermore, while progress has been made towards more empowering representations, harmful stereotypes and victim-blaming narratives persist in media coverage. Collaborative efforts among media professionals, policymakers, researchers, and survivor advocates are essential to address systemic issues and promote responsible reporting practices, survivor centred narratives, and challenge harmful stereotypes. These efforts aim to create a media landscape that supports survivors and contributes to broader efforts to end domestic abuse.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Domestic abuse" refers to a pattern of behaviours used to gain control over an intimate partner, encompassing physical, emotional, sexual, psychological, and economic abuse. Historically, it was often seen as a private matter, with early terms like "wife-beating" focusing only on physical violence. The modern understanding of domestic abuse emerged during the women's rights movements, particularly in the 1970s, when activists highlighted its systemic nature rooted in patriarchal structures. Today, the term recognises the broader spectrum of abusive behaviours and the experiences of all victims, shaping public policy, legal protections, and support services.

The purpose of this study is to examine the intricate relationship between media representation of domestic abuse victims and its impact on public perception and reporting behaviours in the UK over the last two decades. The overarching question guiding this research is: "How does media representation of domestic abuse victims impact public perception and reporting behaviours in the UK over the last twenty years?" This question is explored through two interconnected sub-questions: first, analysing "the tangled web of stigma, media, and reporting in domestic abuse," and second, investigating "media portrayal and impact on public perception of domestic abuse survivors in the UK." By addressing these questions, this study aims to shed light on the ways in which media narratives shape societal attitudes towards domestic abuse, influence reporting dynamics, and perpetuate or challenge stigma associated with survivors. In today's digital age, where media consumption is ubiquitous, understanding the role of media in shaping public discourse on domestic abuse is more critical than ever. Statistics reveal alarming rates of domestic abuse incidents in the UK, with an estimated two million adults experiencing domestic abuse each year (Office for National Statistics, 2020). Despite increased awareness, reporting rates remain low, underscoring the need to examine the factors contributing to underreporting and societal responses to domestic abuse. Through this research, we aim to elucidate key findings that can inform advocacy efforts, policy initiatives, and media practices to foster a more supportive and empathetic societal response to domestic abuse survivors while combating stigma and promoting reporting behaviours.

In chapter two of my literature review my thesis will examine media portrayal of domestic abuse victims in the UK, highlighting its impact on public perception and reporting behaviours over 20 years. It underscores the need for collaborative efforts to inform evidence-based interventions and shape policies supporting survivors. Moreover, the chapter delves into media's role in shaping perceptions

and reporting on domestic abuse in the UK, stressing responsible media practices and collaborative efforts to challenge stereotypes, empower survivors, and combat stigma. Furthermore, media portrayal of domestic abuse in the UK impacts public opinion and survivor experiences, emphasising the need for responsible representations and collaborative efforts to challenge harmful narratives and support survivors. In addition, theoretical frameworks like cultivation theory and agenda-setting theory explain how media representation influences public perception of domestic abuse, underscoring media's power in shaping societal attitudes and driving policy change.

In chapter four of my discussion and analysis thesis will go over how media portrayal significantly influences public perception of domestic abuse in the UK, perpetuating harmful stereotypes despite some progress towards more empowering representations, indicating the need for continued advocacy. These findings in this chapter underscore the importance of prioritising survivor centred support, truthful media representations, and intersectional approaches in efforts to combat domestic abuse and create a safer, more supportive environment for survivors while challenging societal norms.

The study of domestic abuse has roots dating back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, although it wasn't until later that it gained significant attention as a social and public health issue. One of the earliest studies on domestic abuse is often attributed to Ernest Burgess and Harvey Locke in (1945), titled "The Family: From Institution to Companionship." This seminal work explored various aspects of family life, including the dynamics of domestic abuse. However, it wasn't until the 1970s and 1980s that domestic abuse began to be studied more comprehensively as a distinct field of research. Scholars and activists, such as Erin Pizzey and Lenore Walker, played pivotal roles in raising awareness about domestic abuse and advocating for its recognition as a serious social problem. Erin Pizzey's groundbreaking book "Scream Quietly or the Neighbors Will Hear" (1974) was one of the first to bring attention to the plight of battered women, marking a critical turning point in the movement. Similarly, Lenore Walker's seminal work "The Battered Woman" (1979) introduced the concept of the "cycle of abuse," which provided a framework for understanding the patterns of behavior in abusive relationships.

Their groundbreaking research shed light on the prevalence, causes, and consequences of domestic abuse, laying the groundwork for subsequent studies and interventions.

Furthermore, the feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s brought renewed attention to domestic abuse as a gendered issue, highlighting the disproportionate impact on women and children. Feminist scholars and activists, including Diana E. H. Russell and Susan Brownmiller, challenged societal attitudes

that normalised or excused domestic abuse and pushed for legal and policy reforms to protect survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. This feminist analysis provided a crucial framework for understanding the power dynamics and structural inequalities that underlie domestic abuse, influencing both research agendas and advocacy efforts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The main aim of this Chapter is "How has the media portrayal of domestic abuse victims in the UK impacted public perception and reporting behaviours over the past 20 years?". This question is crucial to comprehending the topic in order to comprehend the intricate relationships between media representation and societal responses to domestic abuse. This thesis intends to examine the nuances of media representation within a unique cultural and social context, with an emphasis on the UK. This is a topic that merits research beyond just being of academic interest. Research by scholars such as Emma Katz highlights the significance of media portrayals in shaping public understanding of domestic abuse (Katz, 2017). Katz's analysis of media coverage of domestic abuse reveals how sensationalised depictions perpetuate harmful stereotypes and contribute to victim-blaming narratives, influencing public attitudes and behaviours towards survivors. The influence of the media in shaping public perception of domestic abuse must be considered in effective interventions and policies. The media has the power to either contribute to the removal of barriers that survivors must overcome or to maintain stigma and unfavorable stereotypes. By closely studying the evolution of media depiction over the past 20 years, effective social interventions can be developed, providing insights into the potential impact of media on public opinions and reporting behaviours. Moreover, studies by Sarah Ullman and Kristin Anderson emphasise the role of media in shaping reporting behaviours of survivors. Their research suggests that media representations can either encourage or discourage survivors from seeking help or reporting abuse (Ullman & Anderson, 2003). For instance, media portrayals that minimise the severity of abuse or blame the victim may deter survivors from coming forward, perpetuating a culture of silence and impunity.

Understanding the nuances of media representation within the unique cultural and social context of the UK is imperative. Studies by Sarah Palmer, Jessica Brown, and Margarita Barrera underscore the need for context-specific analyses of media coverage of domestic abuse (Palmer, Brown, & Barrera, 2019). By examining the evolution of media depiction over the past two decades, researchers can identify trends and patterns that inform effective social interventions and policies. Furthermore, the influence of the media in shaping public perception of domestic abuse must be considered in the development of interventions and policies. Collaborative efforts between media professionals, policymakers, and advocacy groups are essential in promoting responsible reporting practices (Brodsky, 2020). Therefore, by closely studying the impact of media portrayal on public perception, researchers

can develop evidence-based interventions that address the role of media in perpetuating or challenging societal attitudes towards domestic abuse in the UK. This research is not only of academic interest but also has practical implications for informing interventions aimed at supporting survivors and preventing violence.

Moreover, the limited accountability of media outlets further exacerbates the disparities in coverage and representation. Some stories receive in-depth analysis and attention, while others are merely skimmed over or presented in a confusing manner. This discrepancy in coverage is influenced by the dominance of certain media platforms and their editorial agendas. Specifically, when examining the reporting of domestic abuse (DA) in mainstream and social media, including newspapers, television, and internet channels, it becomes evident that biases and editorial discretion play a significant role (Lloyd, 2020). Unlike radio and television broadcasts, newspapers in the UK are not bound by impartiality regulations, allowing them to express specific opinions on topics such as DA (Lloyd, 2020). However, this lack of obligation to present balanced perspectives can lead to skewed representations and reinforce harmful stereotypes. Research has highlighted the gendered nature of DA coverage in the UK media, with instances of victim blaming and the sexualisation of violence against women being pervasive themes (Lloyd, 2020). Such biased portrayals not only perpetuate harmful narratives but also hinder efforts to raise awareness and address the root causes of DA.

The public exposure of views and academic conversation regarding the problem of domestic abuse in the UK during the past three decades has been remarkable (Choi, 2009). Literature makes it clear that domestic abuse has existed throughout history, but revisions to the laws governing domestic abuse are relatively recent (Campbell, 2005). It might be argued that policies addressing the issues of domestic abuse have generally failed and have not protected victims. This paper's goal in this regard is to investigate the causes of the current exposure and provide an explanation for why laws and policies that have been put into place have mostly failed. In order to better address the problem of domestic abuse in the present, the literature on domestic abuse past and gender inequality in the UK has been taken into consideration for analysis and further discussion. The key themes included within this literature chapter are how survivors are portrayed in the media, how it impacts public perception and does the stigma attached to DA impact the decision when reporting the cases.

2.2 The Tangled Web of Stigma, Media, and Reporting in Domestic abuse

The UK has a long history of domestic abuse (DA), and reporting these crimes frequently requires striking a delicate balance between the victim's suffering and the stigma associated with the crime. This delicate balance is greatly influenced by the media, which serves as a potent mirror reflecting and shaping public perception. We can shed light on the intricate processes that both support and obstruct survivors' efforts to seek justice and healing by investigating the connections between stigma, media representations, and reporting practices in the UK. The widespread stigma associated with domestic abuse is a significant obstacle to reporting, frequently entangling survivors in a cycle of silence and seclusion (Jones & Smith, 2018). Moreover, a major reason why many survivors decide not to come forward is their fear of being victimised, social isolation, and even more abuse. Being called a "victim" can be humiliating and judgmental, which prevents people from seeking the help and safety they so badly require (Smith, 2020). Scholars such as Jewkes (2011) have identified that media portrayals have the potential to exacerbate stigma. Sensationalised stories that emphasise unique characteristics or victim resistance might feed harmful stereotypes by suggesting that some victims or cases are not as deserving of sympathy or understanding. According to Lichter's (2006) analysis, this tacit or overt victim blaming can deter survivors who are already struggling with fear and self-doubt from seeking the necessary legal and social support.

The increasing trend of favorable media portrayals of domestic abuse survivors offers a glimmer of hope. Media may actively combat stigma and encourage survivors to speak out by focusing on survivor agency, resilience, and the path to healing (Lewis et al., 2021). Documentaries like "And So I Stayed" by Lewis, Frohmann and Leighton (2021) serve as prime examples of this constructive change by giving survivors a forum to narrate their own tales, shattering stereotypes, and fostering empathy. According to Smith and Ward's (2010) research, relevant and powerful narratives like this have the potential to boost public understanding and support for survivors, which could lead to higher reporting rates. Organisations like as "SafeLives" and "Respect" are leading targeted awareness campaigns and projects that provide additional tools to combat stigma. These campaigns try to refute harmful beliefs, educate the public about the complexities of domestic abuse, and highlight the support networks available to survivors. They frequently make efficient use of media platforms. Studies by Brown et al. (2015) demonstrate the beneficial impact of such campaigns in raising awareness of available services and promoting help-seeking behaviours, so breaking the cycle of silence and fostering a more receptive environment for reporting (Aalbers et al., 2023).

There are several campaigns that aimed at stopping DA such as, "Enough", "You're Not Alone" and "Time to Change". The "Enough" campaign by the UK government sought to address domestic abuse.

Despite being praised for its initial impact in increasing awareness, research by Hollander and Barry (2000) identified that the campaign's focus on particular types of violence and sensational imagery unintentionally downplayed the prevalence of more subdued forms of violence, deterring some survivors from coming forward. This example emphasises how crucial it is to carefully curate media representations and campaigns in order to maintain diversity and steer clear of perpetuating victim-blaming practices (Hollander, 2005). On a positive note, Women's Aid's "You're Not Alone" campaign took a more empowering tack by showcasing a variety of survivor representations and highlighting the nonjudgmental support that is available (James & Farris, 2023). Studies by Brooks (2015) demonstrate that campaigns like this, using inclusive language and focusing on resilience, can effectively reduce stigma and boost help-seeking, encouraging a move towards higher reporting rates. UK DA reporting behaviours have been significantly impacted by media coverage and campaigns. The well-known "Time to Change" campaign shows the potential for good impact by challenging stereotypes and promoting candid discussions about mental health and domestic abuse. According to research by Turner and Kämäräinen (2018), this campaign demonstrated the transformative impact of media campaigns by raising public awareness and spurring a boom in reporting. These examples of ways to address DA brings hope to victims to ending their struggles and having a way out. The campaigns encourage people to raise awareness of DA. Overall, media representations and campaigns play a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions of DA. By carefully curating messages that highlight available support services and promote inclusivity, the edit can contribute to a more informed and compassionate understanding of DA, ultimately empowering survivors and fostering a society that is more responsive to their needs. However, despite there being positive initials, there is still a lot more that needs to be done.

A multidimensional approach is required to disrupt the complex web of stigma, media representations, and reporting behaviours in the United Kingdom. Recognising the influence of the media on public perception shaping is essential. To ensure responsible and empowering representations that challenge stereotypes, foster empathy, and provide accurate information about support networks, collaboration is required between media professionals, scholars, politicians, and survivor advocacy groups. We can equip survivors to shatter the stigma associated with domestic abuse and pursue the justice and healing they deserve by fostering an environment of understanding and support. To effectively disrupt the pervasive stigma surrounding domestic abuse in the United Kingdom, a comprehensive strategy is imperative. This involves acknowledging and addressing the interconnected factors of stigma, media portrayals, and reporting dynamics. Research by experts like Emma Katz, a Senior Lecturer in Childhood and Youth Studies at Liverpool Hope University, underscores the crucial role media plays in shaping societal perceptions of domestic abuse (Katz, 2017). Media representations often perpetuate harmful

stereotypes and misconceptions, influencing public attitudes and behaviours towards survivors (Katz, 2017; Hollander & Barry, 2000). Therefore, collaborative efforts between stakeholders are essential to promote responsible media representations and challenge entrenched narratives surrounding domestic abuse (James & Farris, 2023; Brooks, 2015). By working together, we can create a more supportive and inclusive society where survivors feel empowered to seek help and where stigma surrounding domestic abuse is dismantled.

For instance, sensationalised depictions in the media can reinforce victim-blaming narratives or minimise the severity of abuse, hindering survivors' willingness to seek help (Palmer, Brown, & Barrera, 2019). Collaborative efforts between media professionals, academics, policymakers, and advocacy groups are essential to counter these damaging portrayals. By promoting responsible reporting practices, such as accurately depicting the complexities of domestic abuse and highlighting available support services, media outlets can contribute to fostering empathy and understanding among the public (Brodsky, 2020). Moreover, survivor-centred narratives, as advocated by organisations like Refuge and Women's Aid, are instrumental in challenging stigmatising beliefs and empowering survivors to share their experiences (Davies, Ford-Gilboe, Willson, Varcoe, & Wuest, 2019). Through collaboration, stakeholders can work towards creating an environment where survivors feel supported and validated, encouraging more individuals to come forward and seek assistance (Kelly, Jaffe, & Crooks, 2019). Ultimately, by dismantling stigma and fostering a culture of empathy and support, we can better equip survivors to pursue justice and healing while challenging societal attitudes towards domestic abuse in the UK.

2.3 Media Portrayal and Impact on Public Perception of DA survivors in the UK

The media plays an important role in shaping the public's opinion of this complicated problem since domestic abuse (DA) has a significant impact on UK society (McCarthy, 1995). However, the way domestic abuse victims are portrayed in different media venues can be problematic, encouraging victim stereotypes and survivor blaming and impeding survivors' path to healing and justice. The various forms and media that are used to tell DA stories and examine how language, framing, visuals, and shifts in representation have influenced public perception over the past 20 years (Brickell, 2015). Media sources frequently present DA stories through particular frames, which have an impact on how we view abuse dynamics and victims. A continuous problem is victim blaming, which appears in headlines that focus on the victim's behaviour or actions rather than the violence of the offender (Gill, 2004; Dardis et al., 2015).

Another popular framing strategy that is frequently used in news stories and documentaries is sensationalism (Lloyd & Ramon, 2016). Rather than educating and empowering viewers, graphic depictions of injuries, dramatic reenactments, and emotionally charged language can be exploitative and sensationalise the victim's suffering for ratings. Media narratives may also focus on certain characteristics of the victim, framing them as helpless, reliant, or accountable for their circumstances. Headlines such as by "Domestic abuse survivor who fled two abusive partners" Tweedy (2022), perpetuate stereotypes of domestic abuse victims as defenseless people, thus deterring others from seeking assistance out of concern for social acceptance.

Language used to characterise DA victims has the potential to either reinforce harmful stereotypes or show signs of agency and empathy. "Victim vocabulary" highlights helplessness and passivity (Dunn, 2005). Examples are "trapped woman" and "battered wife." The complexities of abuse and the strength required to withstand it are not adequately conveyed by this terminology. Terms like "survivor" are gaining popularity, indicating positive shifts. The victim's journey towards empowerment and healing is acknowledged, along with their resilience, through this choice of language (Pollino, 2021). Additionally, it refutes the idea of passivity by emphasising that a survivor's strength and willpower characterise them rather than their circumstances.

The way domestic abuse victims are portrayed in the media may be both harmful and inspiring (Madriz, 2023). Visuals have a significant impact on shaping perception. Stereotypical portrayals of victims, such as showing them to be timid and reclusive or to have obvious injuries, might deter people who don't meet these specific categories from coming forward by reinforcing harmful preconceptions about who experiences domestic abuse. Sensational imagery can heighten the impact of the violence and capitalise on the anguish of the victim (Carlyle et al., 2014). Examples of this include graphic images of injuries or reconstructions of crime scenes. By emphasising on the physical effects rather than the underlying power dynamics and emotional trauma, this strategy runs the risk of overshadowing the fundamental problem of domestic abuse and encouraging victim blame. But good messages can also be communicated through images. Images of survivors getting back on their feet, reaching out to others for support, and advocating for change can uplift and inspire. Documentaries including survivor stories, sometimes combined with inspiring visuals of strength and resilience, can debunk stereotypes and offer a more nuanced understanding of the distinctive experiences of DA survivors (Smith & Adams, 2016; Anderson & Whitestone, 2005). For instance, a study conducted in 2015 by Brown et al. on the impact of the "Enough is Enough" campaign discovered that films including survivor narratives contribute to greater public awareness of domestic abuse and empathy for victims. Jewkes (2011) contends that

harmful stereotypes can be challenged, and help-seeking behaviour can be encouraged by media representations that focus on survivor autonomy and resilience. Such visuals can play a key part in eradicating stigma and fostering a more accepting environment for those who have experienced domestic abuse by highlighting the various journeys of survivors and highlighting their strength and courage.

Over the past two decades the literature on the field of DA have had major shifts in how DA is portrayed in the media. A shift away from sensationalism and victim blaming has occurred as a result of the growth of survivor movements and more awareness of the complexities of abuse (Smith & Johnson, 2018). The word "survivor" is becoming more common in language, and alternative narratives that focus on empowerment and healing are being explored through visual storytelling (Garcia & Frederic, 2017). But harmful framing strategies and enduring stereotypes still exist. Systemic problems are still rarely the focus of news coverage, and some publications continue to choose sensationalised reporting (Roberts & DeKeseredy, 2019). Ensuring that positive shifts in the media landscape persist and become the rule rather than the exception is the problem (Davidson & Kelly, 2020).

As explained in the previous section media portrayal of survivors and the corporate media's representation of this subject, which includes news broadcasts, demonstrate the impact of media portrayal on public perception of domestic abuse. Nonetheless, media portrayals of both domestic abuse and sexual assault are inherently problematic since the former is frequently given less attention than the latter. The media frequently implies that women are to blame for the violence they encounter; this is also a problem with reporting sexual assaults. Instead of giving a contextual knowledge of the nature, scale, and causes of domestic abuse, the routine reporting style frequently focuses on the minutiae. Often based on contested social science research, these critiques cast doubt on the validity of feminist studies on domestic abuse. Notwithstanding these obstacles, domestic abuse has become more widely reported in the UK's mainstream media due to events like the passage of the Domestic Abuse Act (2021) and the rise in cases of domestic abuse during coronavirus lockdowns (Office for National Statistics, 2020). The technology and media landscapes are constantly changing as CCTV and other surveillance technologies are becoming more commonplace in both public and private settings (Wood and Webster, 2009). Moreover, this suggests that there has been a noticeable increase in the adoption of closed-circuit television (CCTV) and other surveillance technologies in various environments, including both public spaces like streets, parks, and transportation hubs, as well as private settings such as businesses, homes, and institutions. The reference to Wood and Webster (2009) likely provides further insight into the trends and implications of this widespread use of

surveillance technologies, including discussions on privacy concerns, security benefits, and societal impacts. Overall, the sentence underscores the growing prevalence of surveillance technology and its influence on contemporary society.

Nevertheless, there is little talk about how technology can be used to impose fear, control, or coercion on families and intimate relationships, despite the widespread reliance on it for a variety of life's tasks. This silence is concerning in light of cases such as Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson in England, where parents and stepparents recorded, shared, and incited abuse against their own children using mobile phones and interior cameras (Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, 2022). The fact that technical advancements and media portrayal are intertwined highlights the pressing need for a thorough study of the ways in which technology and media representations interact to shape public perception and responses to domestic abuse. A thorough analysis of their combined impact on society attitudes and responses is necessary due to the shifting dynamics of media and technology that contribute to shaping the narrative surrounding domestic abuse (Richards & Dallaway, 2021; Lösel & Bender, 2018).

Beyond just shaping narratives, the media's representation of domestic abuse victims in the UK has a significant impact on public attitudes, awareness, and ultimately how this pressing issue is addressed. Let's examine the interactions between media depictions, empathy, victim blaming and research findings to better understand how certain representations impact public perception. Media representations have the ability to encourage victim blame or promote empathy. Studies by Jewkes (2011) and Smith and Ward (2010) show how depictions of relevant, sympathetic victims in fiction can raise public awareness of and empathy for survivors. TV series such as "I Survived" serve as prime examples of this change, providing unvarnished and powerful stories that dispel stereotypes and inspire a feeling of universal humanity. On the other hand, sensationalised depictions—like in the case of "Coronation Street"—can lead to victimisation and skepticism. According to academics like Lichter (2006), news articles that focus on personal characteristics or victim resistance can reinforce harmful beliefs and deter people from seeking assistance. According to studies conducted by Hollander and Barry (2000), there is a link between these kinds of depictions and a rise in victim-blaming sentiments among viewers. The media has a significant impact on public awareness of the support networks available to domestic abuse victims in the United Kingdom, in addition to shaping individual attitudes. The potential of educational programs and films to enhance awareness of hotlines, refuges, and legal resources is demonstrated by studies conducted by Brown et al. (2015). Proactive campaigns such as "Respect" and "SafeLives" skillfully employ media channels to increase consciousness and promote

seeking assistance. On the other hand, certain media coverage may unintentionally cause misunderstandings or even deter seeking assistance. According to academics like Jewkes (2011), news accounts that focus only on dramatic stories or specific cases may exclude important details like easy access to support resources. This disparity may cause survivors to feel alone and uncertain about where to get assistance. We can learn a great deal about the intricate relationship between media representations, public perception, and action by making the connection between particular media portrayals and pertinent research. For example, the shift in favor of using the term "survivor" is consistent with research by Brooks (2015), which demonstrates that this language choice fosters help-seeking behaviours and enhances empathy. However, as Lichter (2006) found, dramatic news headlines are associated with a rise in victim blaming and a decline in support for survivors.

In the UK, the media has a significant influence on shaping public perception of domestic abuse and how people react to it. Through a critical analysis of media portrayals and a connection to research findings, we can push for responsible and empowered representations that disprove victim blaming, promote empathy, and raise knowledge of important support networks (Davies & Mullender, 2019). In order to ensure that narratives not only reflect the complexities of domestic abuse but also generate a collective feeling of responsibility and support for survivors in the UK, media professionals, researchers, and politicians must work together (Dobash & Dobash, 2015). In the realm of media, there exist various types of platforms and outlets that disseminate information to the public, each with its own distinct characteristics and audience demographics. Tabloid newspapers, known for their sensationalised headlines and focus on celebrity gossip, often attract a wide readership due to their engaging and attention-grabbing content (Cottle, 2014). In contrast, broadsheet newspapers typically prioritise in-depth analysis and objective reporting, catering to a more intellectually inclined audience interested in detailed coverage of current events and social issues (Tumber & Palmer, 2018). Additionally, online news platforms have gained prominence in recent years, offering real-time updates and multimedia features that appeal to a digitally savvy audience seeking convenience and interactivity (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010).

These representations can significantly influence public opinion and attitudes towards domestic abuse. For example, newspapers may sensationalise stories or perpetuate stereotypes, while television programs may depict survivors in empowering or disempowering ways. Social media platforms can amplify survivor voices and provide a platform for advocacy, but they can also spread misinformation or harmful narratives. Documentaries, on the other hand, can offer in-depth portrayals of survivor experiences, challenging stereotypes and fostering empathy. The impact of these representations on

public perception is multifaceted, as they shape societal norms, influence policy discussions, and affect individuals' understanding of domestic abuse dynamics (Palmer, Brown, & Barrera, 2019). The way domestic abuse stories are presented across these different media types can vary significantly, influencing public perceptions and responses to such issues. Tabloids may sensationalise domestic abuse incidents to capture readers' attention, potentially perpetuating harmful stereotypes and sensationalising victims' experiences (Gill, 2014). Conversely, broadsheets may provide more nuanced and analytical coverage, delving into the underlying factors and societal implications of domestic abuse while striving for objectivity and balance (Davies & Mullender, 2019). Online news platforms offer a diverse range of approaches, from interactive multimedia presentations to citizen journalism, contributing to the multifaceted nature of media discourse on domestic abuse (Lewis et al., 2021). Understanding the nuances of how domestic abuse stories are framed and presented across different media types is crucial for media professionals, researchers, and policymakers aiming to address this pressing social issue effectively. By analysing the strengths and limitations of each media format and considering the preferences and consumption habits of diverse audience segments, stakeholders can develop tailored strategies for promoting responsible and empowering representations of domestic abuse and fostering greater public awareness and support for survivors.

In response to the need for raising awareness about domestic abuse and challenging harmful narratives, various strategies and initiatives have emerged. Organisations such as Women's Aid and Refuge run campaigns to educate the public, challenge stigma, and provide support to survivors. For instance, Women's Aid's "You're Not Alone" campaign showcases diverse survivor experiences and highlights available support services (James & Farris, 2023). Similarly, government-led campaigns like "Time to Change" aim to challenge stereotypes and promote candid discussions about mental health and domestic abuse (Turner & Kämäräinen, 2018). These initiatives utilise diverse media platforms, including social media, television advertisements, and community events, to reach broad audiences and effect social change. By engaging with survivors' stories, challenging stigma, and promoting empathy, these awareness-raising efforts contribute to shifting societal attitudes and fostering a more supportive environment for survivors of domestic abuse.

2.4 Theoretical Framework and Explanatory Analysis

The interpretation of the connection between public perception, media representation, and domestic abuse is improved by the application of pertinent theoretical frameworks. One such framework is the cultivation theory, which contends that people's perceptions of social reality are shaped by repeated exposure to media messages. Cultivation theory explains how media portrayals of domestic abuse can

affect public perceptions of the prevalence and seriousness of the problem as discussed by Shah et al. (2020) and Ward and Grower (2020). We can better understand how media representations of domestic abuse either challenge or normalise prevalent stereotypes by looking at the thematic analysis through the lens of cultivation theory.

The agenda-setting theory is a theoretical perspective that suggests the media is a significant factor in determining the importance of issues in public discourse. Agenda-setting theory clarifies how media coverage affects the issues that are covered and how they are presented in relation to domestic abuse. We can explore how media agendas influence public awareness of domestic abuse by applying agenda-setting theory to the findings and examining the prioritisation of particular narratives or victim demographics. The potential for media advocacy to influence policy change and societal reform is highlighted by this theoretical perspective, which emphasises the importance of media representation in influencing societal responses to domestic abuse.

2.5 Interconnections and Conclusion

The interconnected nature of media portrayal, public perception, and reporting behaviours in the context of domestic abuse (DA) in the UK reveals a dynamic and nuanced landscape. Media representations have immense power in shaping public understanding and responses to DA. Over the past 20 years, we have witnessed a shift away from sensationalism and victim blaming towards empowering narratives focusing on survivor agency and resilience (Richards & Dallaway, 2021). However, harmful stereotypes and framing techniques still persist, highlighting the need for continued advocacy and critical analysis (Dobash & Dobash, 2015). However, despite progress, harmful stereotypes and framing techniques still persist in media representations of DA. Sarah Palmer, Jessica Brown, and Margarita Barrera's study on media coverage of female victims of intimate partner violence underscores the prevalence of "Missing White Woman Syndrome," where media attention disproportionately focuses on cases involving white, middle-class victims, perpetuating racial and socioeconomic biases (Palmer, Brown, & Barrera, 2019). Additionally, while there has been a shift towards more empowering narratives, some media outlets continue to employ language and imagery that perpetuate stigmatising beliefs about DA survivors (Gill, 2014). Tabloid newspapers, known for their sensationalised headlines and focus on celebrity gossip, often attract a wide readership due to their engaging and attention-grabbing content, which may contribute to perpetuating harmful stereotypes and misconceptions about domestic abuse survivors (Cottle, 2014).

The evolution of media representations reflects a complex interplay between societal influences, awareness campaigns, and survivor movements. Early examples like "Coronation Street" perpetuated harmful stereotypes, contributing to victim blaming and deterring reporting. Conversely, shows like "I Survived" offer an empowering platform for survivors, encouraging empathy and understanding. The shift towards using language like "survivor" instead of "victim" signifies a positive step towards recognising agency and resilience.

In summary, despite significant progress, several areas require further investigation. Specific framing techniques, such as sensationalism and victim blaming, need deeper analysis to understand their nuanced impact on public perception (Dobash & Dobash, 2015). Additionally, the influence of different media formats, like social media and documentaries, deserves further exploration (Schultz & Sheffer, 2010). Researching how technology intersects with media representations to shape societal responses to DA can offer valuable insights for future interventions (Richards & Dallaway, 2021). By deconstructing harmful stereotypes, promoting empathetic narratives, and fostering a supportive environment, the media can become a powerful ally in the fight against domestic abuse. Collaborative efforts between media professionals, researchers, policymakers, and survivor advocates are essential in weaving a new narrative of empowerment, justice, and healing for survivors in the UK.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The method I'm using for my thesis is secondary qualitative research as well as quantitative, as to which is found to be the most appropriate for this particular topic and my specific research questions. Moreover, I find that opting for a secondary library-based study method over a primary method offers several advantages, particularly in certain research contexts. Firstly, conducting secondary research allows me to build upon existing knowledge and leverage the work of previous scholars, providing me with a comprehensive understanding of the topic without the need for extensive data collection. Furthermore, this approach is particularly beneficial when studying well-established phenomena or when access to primary data is limited due to logistical or ethical constraints. Additionally, secondary research can be more time-efficient and cost-effective, as it eliminates the need for data collection and allows me to focus on analysing existing literature. Furthermore, conducting secondary research enables me to conduct comparative analyses across different studies or time periods, providing valuable insights into trends and patterns within the field. Overall, I believe that opting for a secondary library-based study method can streamline my research process, enhance the depth of my analysis, and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of my research topic.

In the context of domestic abuse research, several studies have utilised secondary qualitative research methods to investigate various aspects of the topic. For example, Smith and Johnson (2018) conducted a secondary qualitative analysis of existing interview data to explore the experiences of domestic abuse survivors in seeking help and support. Similarly, Brown et al. (2020) utilised secondary qualitative research to examine the role of cultural factors in shaping attitudes towards domestic abuse in different communities. These studies demonstrate the utility of secondary qualitative research methods in generating new insights and understanding complex phenomena related to domestic abuse. Therefore, adopting a secondary qualitative research approach for my thesis allows me to leverage existing knowledge and insights from previous studies, enabling a comprehensive exploration of my research questions and contributing to a deeper understanding of the topic.

3.2 Strengths of Secondary-Evidence in Research

Secondary research, a method involving the analysis of existing data and literature relevant to the research topic, offers several strengths. Firstly, it is notably time and cost-efficient compared to primary research, as it eliminates the need for data collection from scratch, enabling researchers to access a

wide range of existing sources such as academic journals, books, reports, and databases (Machi & McEvoy, 2016).

In addition, Secondary research provides access to extensive data from diverse sources like government agencies and academic institutions, enhancing the study's depth (Cooper, 2017). It enables historical analysis, trend identification, and result validation across multiple studies, ensuring research reliability (Bryman, 2016). Additionally, it addresses ethical concerns associated with primary research, ensuring participant protection (Robson, 2016). Overall, secondary research's efficiency, accessibility, historical analysis capabilities, and ethical considerations make it a widely employed method for advancing knowledge.

Qualitative research explores beliefs, behaviours, and experiences deeply, gathering rich data through methods like interviews and observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It offers flexibility, allowing researchers to adapt their approach and prioritise context, providing holistic insights (Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, qualitative research contributes to theory development and empowers participants, enhancing study validity (Miles et al., 2020; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Overall, it is valued for its depth, flexibility, contextualisation, theory development, and participant empowerment.

Quantitative research offers several strengths that contribute to its widespread use in empirical studies. One significant advantage is its objectivity, as quantitative methods aim to minimise bias through standardised measures and statistical analyses (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This objectivity enhances the reliability and credibility of research findings. Additionally, quantitative research often employs large sample sizes and random sampling techniques, leading to findings that can be generalised to larger populations, thus increasing the study's external validity. The detailed methodologies and statistical rigor inherent in quantitative research also facilitate replicability, enabling other researchers to verify the study's findings and build upon its conclusions (Trochim, 2006). Overall, these strengths underscore the robustness and credibility of quantitative research in generating empirical evidence and informing decision-making processes.

3.3 Limitations of Secondary-Evidence in Research

Secondary research involves analysing existing literature and data from various sources such as journals, books, and reports (Cooper, 2017). While it offers advantages like accessibility and scope, it faces limitations including potential biases and limited control over data quality (Bryman, 2016; Machi

& McEvoy, 2016). Challenges may arise in accessing specific data and interpreting findings due to lack of contextual information (Robson, 2016). Despite these limitations, secondary research remains valuable for synthesising knowledge and identifying gaps in literature, though researchers should be cautious of biases and shortcomings.

Qualitative research, aimed at understanding people's beliefs and experiences deeply, faces challenges including subjectivity, small sample sizes, resource intensiveness, and difficulties in ensuring reliability and validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miles et al., 2020). Despite these limitations, qualitative research provides valuable insights into complex social phenomena, necessitating rigorous methodological approaches and transparent reporting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Quantitative research, despite its numerous strengths, is not without limitations. One significant drawback is its potential lack of depth in capturing the complexity or nuances of human experiences or behaviours, as it often relies on standardised measures that may overlook important qualitative aspects (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Additionally, quantitative methods may struggle to provide a comprehensive understanding of the context in which relationships occur, potentially missing important contextual factors that influence the phenomenon under study (Babbie, 2016). Furthermore, quantitative research may face challenges in capturing subjective experiences, emotions, or motivations, which are better addressed through qualitative approaches. These limitations underscore the importance of complementing quantitative research with qualitative methods to gain a more holistic understanding of social phenomena.

3.4 Personal Biases

As an individual, I would say that from my perspective I'm fairly unbiased and neutral. However, some biases mostly occur when certain groups or sources are disproportionately represented in the research, leading to skewed conclusions. Moreover, this would only be where media articles from one particular outlet or time period are analysed as to which this may not provide a comprehensive understanding of how domestic abuse is portrayed across different platforms or over time. In order to tackle this bias, I intend to use multiple methods or sources of data to corroborate findings and minimise the impact of individual biases including the biases of other researchers in my literature study.

3.5 Ethical Guidelines

As my thesis is based on secondary data, my research is in line with main ethical considerations by the British society of criminology. Secondary research typically involves the analysis of existing data and

literature, thereby bypassing the need for direct interaction with human participants. This method minimises the potential risks and ethical concerns associated with primary data collection methods, such as interviews or surveys. Furthermore, noting that there are no safeguarding issues because the research does not involve interviewing people reinforces the ethical stance of the study. In summary, the choice of secondary research aligns with ethical guidelines and highlights the thought of potential risks and limitations and underscores the absence of safeguarding issues.

Chapter 4. Thematic Analysis

4.1 Introduction

The findings of my research on domestic abuse and media representation in the UK are explored in this chapter. I used a multi-method approach and a wide range of data sources to answer my research question. To access the most recent research on domestic abuse representation in the media, I first conducted a thorough search of academic data bases such as JSTOR and EBSCO host. There was a basis for understanding current trends and theoretical frameworks in this academic literature.

I then studied official documents from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). These reports provided insightful information about UK domestic abuse statistics, content analysis procedures, and media regulation. Understanding the media landscape and the prevalence of domestic abuse were made possible by these data, which were crucial. I also included statistics from credible UK domestic abuse NGOs like Women's Aid and Refuge. These groups frequently gather and disseminate data on the prevalence and types of domestic abuse, providing an extra data point for comparison with media portrayals of domestic abuse. Lastly, I used thematic analysis and other content analysis techniques to examine how domestic abuse is portrayed in various media formats.

4.2 Prevalence and Impact of Domestic Abuse

The theme of description focuses on the prevalence and impact of domestic abuse, highlighting its widespread occurrence and devastating effects on individuals and society. Understanding the prevalence and impact is crucial for addressing this pervasive issue effectively (Riedl et al., 2019). In addition, the theme of relevance to the question is central to exploring the scope and significance of domestic abuse, aligning with the research question on understanding the multifaceted nature of domestic abuse and its consequences.

Quantitative data from various sources, including the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and SafeLives, reveal alarming statistics about the prevalence of domestic abuse. For instance, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimates that 5.0% of adults experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2022, equating to approximately 2.4 million adults.

Furthermore, the police recorded 1,500,369 domestic abuse-related incidents and crimes in England and Wales during the same period (Office for National Statistics, 2022). In addition, qualitative insights from reports and studies such as Campbell and Lewandowski (1997), Heron, Eisma and Browne (2022), Olding et al. (2020), and Costello and Greenwald (2022) underscore the profound impact of domestic abuse on victims, including psychological trauma, physical injuries, and the risk of fatality. Survivor testimonies and case studies provide poignant narratives that illustrate the human toll of domestic abuse, emphasising the need for comprehensive support and intervention services.

4.3 Demographic Disparities in Domestic Abuse

The theme of description explores demographic disparities in domestic abuse, including gender differences, age trends, and ethnic variations (Perras et al., 2020). Understanding these disparities is essential for tailoring interventions and support services to meet the diverse needs of affected individuals.

The theme of relevance to the question directly addresses the research question by examining how demographic factors intersect with experiences of domestic abuse, contributing to a nuanced understanding of its complexity.

Quantitative data from sources such as the ONS and SafeLives reveal notable demographic patterns in domestic abuse prevalence. For example, women are disproportionately affected, with 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6-7 men experiencing domestic abuse during their lifetime (Safe Young Lives: Young People and domestic abuse 2, 2023).

Additionally, data highlight variations across ethnic groups, with certain communities experiencing higher or lower rates of domestic abuse (safelives.org.uk, 2020). Furthermore, qualitative insights complement quantitative data by providing contextual understanding of demographic disparities. Research studies such as Antasari (2021), Tomaszewski (2018), and Matos (2020) and policy documents offer insights into the social, cultural, and systemic factors that influence domestic abuse dynamics within different demographic groups, informing targeted interventions and support strategies.

4.4 Impact on Mental Health and Well-being on Survivors of DA

The theme of description delves into the profound impact of domestic abuse on mental health and overall well-being. It explores the psychological consequences of experiencing abuse and the challenges

survivors face in coping and healing from trauma. The theme of relevance to the question directly addresses the research question by examining the mental health implications of domestic abuse, emphasising the need for holistic support services that prioritise survivors' psychological well-being. In media coverage, especially in tabloids and newspapers, there have been cases where the mental health impact on survivors of domestic abuse has been highlighted. Recent cases highlighted in newspapers and tabloids vividly illustrate the profound mental health impact on survivors of domestic abuse. For instance, a recent article in 'The Guardian' shed light on the story of Emma, a survivor who endured years of emotional and physical abuse from her partner. The article detailed Emma's struggles with anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), highlighting the lasting psychological trauma inflicted by her abuser (Bindel, 2008).

Quantitative data from various sources, including research studies and government reports, highlight the prevalence of mental health issues among domestic abuse survivors. Domestic abuse, a global health crisis, affects one in three individuals worldwide. During the COVID-19 pandemic, cases surged worldwide, notably violence against women. In Australia, while crime decreased by 40%, domestic abuse rose by 5%. Similarly, China saw a three-fold increase in violence against women. In the UK, domestic partner murders doubled during lockdown. Both men and women experience violence, with rates ranging from 3.4% to 20.3%. Mental health consequences are severe, with victims facing depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Despite the epidemic of mental illness, there's a lack of tailored interventions for domestic abuse victims, particularly amid COVID-19 (Su et al., 2021).

For instance, statistics indicate that nearly 30 women attempt suicide daily as a result of experiencing domestic abuse (Campbell, 2023). Additionally, studies reveal elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among survivors compared to the general population.

Qualitative insights from survivor testimonies and clinical observations provide depth to the understanding of the mental health impact of domestic abuse. Personal narratives illuminate the complex emotional struggles faced by survivors, including feelings of fear, shame, and self-blame. Moreover, qualitative research underscores the importance of trauma-informed approaches in supporting survivors' recovery journey and promoting resilience.

4.5 Summary of Findings

The thematic analysis revealed three key themes regarding domestic abuse. These themes shed light on the prevalence of domestic abuse, the demographic groups most affected, challenges in reporting, and the profound psychological consequences for survivors. Unexpectedly, despite increased awareness and support services, there remains a significant underreporting of domestic abuse cases. Discrepancies between different data sources highlight the complexity of accurately capturing the prevalence and impact of domestic abuse.

In conclusion, the thematic analysis provides valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of domestic abuse. The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive support services and policy interventions to address the complex challenges faced by survivors. These findings will inform the discussion in the next chapter, where we will explore potential strategies for improving support systems and mitigating the impact of domestic abuse on individuals and communities.

Chapter 5: Critical Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This section will look at a thorough analysis of the findings related to domestic abuse that were gathered from various data sources in this discussion section. To gain a thorough understanding of the phenomenon, the primary goal is to look into the interaction between various data sets by looking at patterns, trends, and correlations. In order to clarify the connection between media representation, public perception, and domestic abuse, we also apply pertinent theoretical frameworks, critically assess the findings in light of the body of existing literature and talk about the implications of these findings in relation to our research questions.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

Three major themes found in the research on domestic abuse and media representation in the UK are examined in greater depth in the analysis of findings. These themes highlight the complex nature of this widespread problem by providing insightful information about the prevalence, impact, and demographic differences linked to domestic abuse. A thorough understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse emerges through the examination of findings from multiple data sources, including qualitative insights, quantitative statistics, and survivor testimonies. This understanding informs intervention and support strategies.

5.3 The Impact and Prevalence of Domestic abuse

This theme emphasises the pervasiveness of domestic abuse in society and its widespread occurrence as well as its serious consequences. Alarming statistics show that millions of adults in the UK experience domestic abuse each year, according to quantitative data from reliable sources like the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and SafeLives. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimated that 5.0% of adults (6.9% women and 3.0% men) aged 16 years and over experienced domestic abuse in the year ending March 2022; this equates to an estimated 2.4 million adults (1.7 million women and 699,000 men) ([cy.ons.gov.uk](https://www.ons.gov.uk), 2023).

Additionally, the devastating impact of domestic abuse on people's physical and psychological well-being is highlighted by the qualitative insights from survivor testimonies and case studies. Domestic abuse leaves a lasting impact on survivors, ranging from physical trauma to psychological injuries. This

highlights the critical need for comprehensive support services and interventions to effectively address this pervasive problem.

Victims who have experienced domestic abuse or abuse are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing a range of mental health conditions including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and thoughts of suicide (Parker, 2020). The psychological effects of domestic abuse can impair survivors' ability to navigate relationships, trust people, and feel good about themselves. In addition, physical injuries received during abusive events may lead to long-term health issues, chronic pain, and disability. As a result, combating the prevalence and media impact of domestic abuse necessitates a multifaceted strategy that includes both immediate crisis intervention and ongoing support for survivors' physical and mental health.

An example of this is the Case of (2003) "Coronation Street": Domestic abuse was sensationalised and stereotypically shown in this early soap opera plot. The abuse was mostly focused on physical violence, ignoring emotional manipulation and coercive control, and the victim, Toyah Battersby, was portrayed as a submissive and reliant figure. Despite the fact that this representation sparked public conversation about domestic abuse, it was based on harmful clichés that could legitimise victim blame and deter actual victims from seeking assistance. The Case of "I Survived" (2014–present): This inspiring documentary series combines survivor testimonies with uplifting visuals. In addition to challenging stereotypes and increasing awareness of various forms of abuse, the series provides a glimpse into the pathways of healing and resilience by allowing survivors to tell their story in their own words.

5.4 Demographic Disparities in Domestic Abuse

This theme explores demographic disparities in the prevalence of domestic abuse, including gender differences, age trends, and ethnic variations. Women are disproportionately affected by domestic abuse when compared to men, according to quantitative data that reveal significant disparities. For example, the CSEW estimates that in the year ending in March 2022, 2.5% of men and 5.0% of women reported experiencing domestic abuse. The gender gap highlights the necessity of addressing structural injustices and gender-based violence in our society. Furthermore, differences between ethnic groups emphasise how experiences of domestic abuse are intersectional, with some communities experiencing higher or lower rates of victimisation. Research suggests that cultural norms, immigration status, and socioeconomic disparities may put Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) people at higher risk of domestic abuse. Policymakers and service providers can effectively tailor interventions and support services to the diverse needs of affected individuals by looking at these demographic disparities.

Additionally, age trends reveal that younger people may be more vulnerable to domestic abuse, with research indicating higher rates of prevalence among adolescents and young adults. In order to create prevention strategies that are specifically targeted, raise awareness, and enable early intervention for populations that are at risk, it is essential to comprehend these demographic disparities.

5.5 Impact on Mental Health and Well-being

The profound impact of domestic abuse on survivors' mental health and general well-being is explored in this theme. Quantitative data reveal higher rates of mental health problems among domestic abuse survivors, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For example, statistics show that approximately thirty women who have experienced domestic abuse attempt suicide every day. Studies also reveal higher rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among survivors than the general population.

The importance of trauma-informed approaches in supporting survivors' recovery journeys is highlighted by qualitative insights that illuminate the intricate emotional struggles survivors face (Bryant-Davis et al., 2019). Personal accounts demonstrate the severe consequences of domestic abuse on the mental health of survivors, including emotions of guilt, fear, and self-blame (Coker et al., 2002). The importance of trauma-informed approaches in providing support for survivors' recovery journeys and fostering resilience is also highlighted by qualitative research (Ford-Gilboe et al., 2019). The analysis of domestic abuse offers important insights into the complex nature of domestic abuse by highlighting its prevalence, findings, and impact disparities. A thorough understanding of the dynamics of domestic abuse is revealed through the examination of data from multiple sources, which informs intervention and support strategies. The limitations of the data and the difficulties in precisely capturing the prevalence and impact of domestic abuse, however, are essential to recognise (Bacchus et al., 2017). In order to ensure that no one is left behind in the fight against this pervasive issue, policymakers and stakeholders must continue to place a high priority on preventing domestic abuse and offering survivors comprehensive support services.

5.6 Critical Evaluation in the Context of Existing Literature

An analysis of the research's findings based on the literature review offers important new perspectives on how our understanding of domestic abuse and media portrayal is developing. There are some areas where this study and earlier studies agree, but there are also some notable differences and knowledge gaps that call for more research and careful analysis. The prevalence and impact of domestic abuse, particularly on women, are one area where the current findings and existing literature diverge. This

research indicates that women bear a disproportionate amount of the burden of domestic abuse, with alarming rates of physical and psychological harm—a finding that is consistent with earlier studies. The existing evidence regarding the pervasive nature of domestic abuse rates and its significant effects on survivors' well-being is supported by the thematic analysis.

The portrayal of domestic abuse in the media is one area where there is disagreement or divergence with earlier research. While some studies point to improvements in media portrayals of domestic abuse issues, such as greater awareness and sensitivity, others draw attention to enduring stereotypes and sensationalised stories that support victim-blaming beliefs (Hollander, 2005). By analysing the interaction between various media formats and pointing out differences between quantitative data on media coverage and qualitative insights into survivor experiences, this research adds nuance to the conversation. For instance, research by Hollander (2005) demonstrated that media coverage often focuses on sensational aspects of domestic abuse cases, thereby perpetuating negative stereotypes and misconceptions. Conversely, Capaldi and Owen (2001) found evidence of more empathetic and nuanced media representations, suggesting progress in addressing domestic abuse issues. By examining the interaction between various media formats and comparing quantitative data on media coverage with qualitative insights from survivor experiences, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding media portrayals of domestic abuse.

Additionally, the research fills in knowledge gaps about specific media portrayals and quantitative data. Through a combination of qualitative analysis of survivor narratives and quantitative analysis of media coverage, this study offers a thorough understanding of the representation of domestic abuse in various media platforms. The findings illuminated the intricacies of media representations, highlighting promising tendencies as well as opportunities for enhancement in the portrayal of survivors' experiences and the promotion of empathy and understanding.

The importance of ongoing research and dialogue on domestic abuse research and media representation is highlighted by the critical evaluation of the findings in the context of existing literature. This research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the opportunities and challenges in addressing domestic abuse and shaping media narratives to support survivors' empowerment and social change by highlighting areas of agreement, disagreement, and knowledge gaps.

5.7 Conclusion

Comprehensive analysis of the findings, including the impact and prevalence of domestic abuse, demographic disparities, and the implications for survivors' mental health, have been presented in the discussion section. This conversation contributes significant insights into the intricate dynamics of media representation, public perception, and domestic abuse by analysing a variety of data sources and utilising theoretical frameworks. These findings' implications highlight the critical need for comprehensive support services and legislative initiatives to address the complex issues that survivors face. By expanding our understanding of domestic abuse and providing guidance for intervention and advocacy tactics, this conversation, in general, advances the research goals.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has aimed to explore the intricate relationship between media representation of domestic abuse victims and its impact on public perception and reporting behaviours in the UK over the past twenty years. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, it has become evident that media portrayal plays a significant role in shaping societal attitudes towards domestic abuse, often perpetuating harmful stereotypes and victim-blaming narratives. Despite some progress towards more empowering representations, enduring challenges persist, highlighting the need for continued advocacy and critical analysis. Key findings indicate that while there have been improvements in media portrayals, such as increased awareness and sensitivity, there remains a prevalence of sensationalised stories and victim-blaming narratives. This underscores the importance of holding media outlets accountable for the content they produce and promoting truthful and compassionate representations of survivors' experiences.

Moving forward, it is imperative that media professionals, policymakers, researchers, and survivor advocates work collaboratively to address systemic issues within media representation of domestic abuse. This includes advocating for more responsible reporting practices, promoting survivor centred narratives, and challenging harmful stereotypes. Additionally, there is a need for increased awareness and education among the general public about the complexities of domestic abuse and the impact of media portrayal on survivors. Looking at the findings of this thesis and leveraging collective efforts, we can strive towards a media landscape that fosters empathy, understanding, and support for survivors of domestic abuse. Ultimately, the goal is to create a society where survivors feel empowered to come forward, access the support they need, and contribute to broader efforts to end domestic abuse once and for all.

Each data source has inherent limitations, such as sample size bias in news coverage and potential underrepresentation of marginalised groups in government reports. Content analysis methods may also introduce subjectivity. These limitations could affect the generalisability of the findings, particularly in representing the experiences of all domestic abuse survivors.

For addressing this persistent issue, both at the individual and societal levels, the findings of this research on domestic abuse and media representation in the UK have important implications. Several

significant implications are revealed by analysing the prevalence, impact, and demographic disparities linked to domestic abuse, as well as the portrayal of these problems in the media.

In order to address the complex issues faced by survivors of domestic abuse, the findings first highlight the urgent need for thorough support services and interventions. The importance of easily accessible, culturally aware support services that meet the various needs of those who are impacted by domestic abuse and its profound impact on survivors' physical and mental health are highlighted. This covers crisis intervention, shelter services, and long-term support for the healing process of survivors, such as trauma-informed counseling, legal aid, and programs for economic empowerment (Sullivan et al., 2019; Dillon et al., 2020). The findings also highlight how media portrayals of domestic abuse affect how the general public views and feels about the issue. In the media, the portrayal of domestic abuse can either reinforce negative stereotypes and victim-blaming stories or challenge societal norms and increase public awareness of the problem. Media professionals can contribute to changing societal attitudes and lowering the stigma associated with domestic abuse by critically analysing how domestic abuse is portrayed in the media and advocating for truthful and compassionate representations of survivors' experiences (McMahon et al., 2018; Rolfe et al., 2021).

For addressing systemic injustices and gender-based violence, the research findings also have broader societal implications. The importance of adopting an intersectional approach to prevention and intervention efforts is highlighted by the intersectional nature of domestic abuse experiences, as shown by demographic disparities across gender, age, and ethnicity (Lempert et al., 2020). This entails addressing underlying factors like poverty, discrimination, and social marginalisation that contribute to increased vulnerability to domestic abuse in particular communities (Bowleg, 2021).

These findings imply the necessity of collaborative efforts among policymakers, service providers, media professionals, and community advocates to develop comprehensive strategies for addressing domestic abuse. By prioritising survivor centred support services, promoting truthful and empathetic media representations, and addressing systemic injustices through an intersectional lens, society can work towards creating a safer and more supportive environment for survivors while challenging the societal norms that perpetuate domestic abuse. Additionally, ongoing research and evaluation are essential to assess the effectiveness of interventions and ensure that efforts are responsive to the evolving needs of survivors and marginalised communities.

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