

Patterns in Making Victims' Gender Visible or Invisible in News Media Reporting of Boko Haram's Massacres and Kidnappings

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Boko Haram, a terrorist group based in Nigeria, has systematically conducted gender-based mass kidnappings and killings throughout its history, and these gendered crimes have included both male and female victims. This research examined newspaper articles on Boko Haram's gendered crimes reported from July 2013 to February 2021, with a focus on the relative visibility of the gender of the victims. The genders of male and female abductees were clearly identified; however, the gender of male massacre victims was relatively invisible irrespective of whether they were men or boys. A failure to report the gendered nature of the massacres may contribute to lower awareness and, thus, reduced security resourcing needed to address such severe human rights violations.

Keywords: gender, visibility, gender-based violence, news media

The name Boko Haram can be loosely translated as "Western education is sin" (Sergie & Johnson, 2014, para. 4). The group has strongly advocated radical social and educational reforms throughout Nigeria (Bello, 2021), aiming at eliminating all Western influences and replacing Western education and standards with "undiluted" Islamic laws and procedures that are identical to Sharia. Boko Haram might have deemed offensive any consideration of improving women's empowerment through education instead of seeing it as a key issue of human rights and development. Thus, in April 2014, the group gained international notice and notoriety for the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls and the subsequent #BringBackOurGirls campaign promoted by the then First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama. The crime garnered international outrage and support to seek the return of the girls, of which at the time of publishing, 90 were still missing (Lewis, 2023). Boko Haram also used female kidnapping and suicide bombers as part of its strategy to increase its media coverage (Zenn & Pearson, 2014).

The gendered nature of Boko Haram's tactics was used before and after the Chibok kidnapping. Boko Haram has committed gender-selective kidnappings and executions against adults and children throughout much of its history. This insurgent group is believed to have kidnapped up to an estimated

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10,000 boys and men to be forcibly conscripted or enslaved (Hinshaw & Parkinson, 2016; Topol, 2017) and kidnapped hundreds of women and girls for pressured conversions to Islam, to marry Boko Haram combatants, to be used for sexual and domestic enslavement, or to be used for tactical strategy (Amnesty International, 2015; Omilusi, 2015; Zenn & Pearson, 2014). While Boko Haram has also engaged in bombings where the killing has been more indiscriminate or done based on religion or engagement in secular education, a significant portion of the abductions and killings were gender based.

Academic literature to date has addressed Boko Haram's gendered crimes with an almost exclusive focus on women, girls, and children. Barkindo, Gudaku, and Wesley (2013) report on Boko Haram's violence against Christian women and girls, defining gender-based violence as that conducted by males or male institutions against women and girls, thus definitionally excluding recognition of boys and men as victims. Pereira (2018) and Zenn and Pearson (2014) directed their attention to female victims of Boko Haram's violence and briefly mentioned that insurgent violence is also directed toward men and boys. Pogoson and Saleh (2019) focused on female vulnerability to violence in Nigeria and argued that Nigeria's security forces needed to prioritize the protection of women from violence. When discussing Boko Haram's and al Shabaab's¹ tactics, Matfess (2020) omitted any mention of men and boy victims and compared the violence toward women with violence against civilians, thus comparing female gender identity with noncombatant identities. A report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2015) on Boko Haram mostly excluded recognizing men and boys as victims of this gender-based violence while also acknowledging in other parts that men and boys were specifically targeted to be murdered or kidnapped. Likewise, Boukhars (2020) identified Boko Haram's gendered crimes as being solely about the kidnappings of women and girls. In an edited book titled *Boko Haram and International Law* (Iyi & Strydom, 2018), a section containing three chapters focused on the welfare of girls and women in the conflict while the entire book mentioned the word "boys" a total of three times in reference to incidents of their victimization. The Boko Haram academic gendered victim discourse and analysis relates almost exclusively to females and tends to exclude males. To date, there appears little attention and acknowledgment of the civilian male victims in the literature or discourse.

Media and Gender Visibility

Boko Haram has a history of victimizing based on gender. The kidnapping of the Chibok girls and other female kidnappings and the usage of girls as suicide bombers (United Nations Security Council, 2017) have been internationally recognized as gender-based crimes. While the Chibok girls received repeated worldwide media attention, garnering strong and enduring public attention and awareness, the crimes against males by Boko Haram are less known (Rothman, 2014).

The mainstream media both reflect and influence public perception and values, including portrayals of gender that typically align with and reinforce the normative and stereotyped understanding of males and females (Fitts, 2009; Ross, 2010). Males are cast in agentic (e.g., protector, perpetrator) roles, while female casting is more passive (e.g., vulnerable, needing protection), with language and reporting adjusted to fit these scripts. Media invisibility can signal what is less important (Stillman, 2007), and selective visibility (or

¹ Al Shabab is a Somalian-based Islamist insurgent group (Omeni, 2020).

invisibility) can reify gender beliefs (Shor, van de Rijt, Miltsov, Kulkarni, & Skiena, 2015). Researchers have called for more attention and care not to reinforce and perpetuate gender norms in the language of news (Jóhannsdóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2015).

While researchers have linked male visibility with stereotypical qualities of men, the reverse may be true for invisibility in specific domains. In one study of Canadian newspaper articles published over four years, focusing on violence, of the articles that literally or connotatively highlighted the gender of the victim/s, only 2.8% of headlines highlighted male victims compared with 97.2% highlighting women (Boyce, 1994). In reporting on human trafficking (Hebert, 2016; Richards & Reid, 2015) and wartime rape (Houge, 2008), female victims have been made visible and males largely invisible. One possible explanation is that in print media, men and males, as a category, are not deemed as "ideal victims," vulnerable, innocent, legitimate, or worthy of compassion (Greer, 2007). Conversely, males are associated with the perpetration of violence rather than victims in need of protection (Höijer, 2004; Leiby, Bos, & Krain, 2021; Reynolds et al., 2019). A critique of the reporting of 9/11 found that the press constructed the men as heroic protectors and the women as the primary victims, thus reifying gendered roles even though male deaths outnumbered those of women by a multiple of three (Rodgers, 2003). As Boko Haram's gendered crimes are reported by mainstream media in Nigeria, and often internationally, the reporting of these crimes provides contemporaneous data about how victims' gender is reported. This research explores how newsprint articles make visible or obfuscate the gendered identities of the victims of Boko Haram's gendered crimes.

Method

Given the ability of news to shape and reflect public perception and narratives about victims, it is important to understand how visible the victims' gender is in the reporting of gender-based crimes. This research determines whether the gender of the victims may influence how gender-based crimes are reported. It reviews online archival Boko Haram news articles, seeking reports of specific gender-based crimes and analyzing the usage of language that reveals or obfuscates the gender of the victimized group to examine the balance between reporting gender-based crimes against males and against females.

The methodology uses a form of content analysis (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007). This quantitative approach has been popular for systematically analyzing gendered portrayals in various media formats (Neuendorf, 2011). This approach is a text-based strategy used to infer the cognitive schemas and values embedded in texts.

The data collection was commenced and completed in 2022. The first step was to identify a time line of attacks by Boko Haram from the initial wave of specifically gendered attacks being reported. Internet and library searches were conducted to identify time lines of key attacks by Boko Haram (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Mantzikos, 2014; Subrahmanian, Pulice, Brown, & Bonen-Clark, 2021; Wikipedia, 2023), and Google News historical dates were checked for evidence of gendered attacks. The lead author checked newspaper articles and, where necessary, official sources such as United Nations reports for each of the dates to determine whether there was a possibility of a gender-based selection of victims. If attacks involved indiscriminate targeting, targeting based on non-gender identities (e.g., religion), or

involved people in combatant roles, they were excluded. The dates selected ranged from July 6, 2013, to February 26, 2021, including 12 incidents involving victimizing males and five incidents whereby females were targeted.

Once the dates were established, the Google News search engine was used. The date range of the searches included a day before the crime to two days after the crime, to account for time-zone differences and delays in reporting the news. The search term "Boko Haram" was used to prioritize articles reporting the relevant attack. The headlines were scanned for potential coverage of the attack, and articles whose headlines indicated information congruent with the specific attack were opened and double-checked for relevance. A maximum of the first five articles that addressed the attack were selected. Not all searches listed five or more articles on each attack. Each available article text was saved as an electronic document to safeguard against potential changes or withdrawals of online versions.

Given this search was archival undertaken up to years after the reports, not all reports originally published would therefore have been available. The search was undertaken in Australia, which may have been influenced by regional settings in the Google algorithm, and was conducted from June 17 to July 8, 2017, and on February 3, 2022.

After compiling the articles, the headlines and contents were reviewed for the identification of civilian victim gender and the use of non-gendered words for victims. Two researchers independently counted and then compared the results. Differences were resolved by mutually rechecking the articles and coming to a consensus. For example, in a hypothetical example, the killing of *boys* would be regarded as using a gendered identity descriptor. This scenario indicates victims of murder and their gender. Whereas, if the same incident were reported as the killing of *pupils*, or as inspecting *bodies*, it would be counted as a non-gendered descriptor of the victim. References to gendered or non-gendered identities of individual victims were not counted. Only gendered or non-gendered references alluding to plural victims were counted.

Table 1. Criteria for Data Counting.

Category	Criteria
Date range	The dates selected ranged from July 6, 2013, to February 26, 2021.
Gendered crime	The newspaper articles must relate to crimes committed by Boko Haram, with gendered victimization being a dominant feature of the crime.
Victim status	The victim/s must be identified as victimized by Boko Haram, for example, physically attacked, kidnapped, and/or killed.
Victim word	Identify terms used to designate plural victims.
Victim noncombat status	The victim/s must be identified as having civilian and noncombatant status, or this must be reasonably implied. Sect members, vigilantes, police, and military are not counted.
Distinguish gender/ non-gendered descriptors	Count gendered victim designators. Count non-gendered designators.

Event	Count only victims of the event of primary focus and not victims mentioned from other territories or events.
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In addition to seeking specific gendered or non-gendered terms, we also rated the articles in their entirety. This categorical rating should assist the reader in considering the impact of the articles' victim gender portrayal on the readers of the articles.

The articles were rated based on the following factors:

- Omitted—The headline and article omit information that the crime and victims were gendered. Readers will have no evidence in the article that the crime was gendered. The gender of the victims is omitted.
- Discoverable—The article mentions gender directly once or may indirectly allude to the gender of the victims (e.g., it may note that the victims were students at a boys' school). In these articles, gender is not emphasized, so it is almost invisible and may be missed because of a skim reading of the article.
- Visible—The headline mentions the gender of the victims, or the gender of the victims is mentioned twice in the article text. In these articles, the reader will be made aware of the gendered nature of the victims.
- Reinforcing—The gender of the victims is repeated more than three times. In these articles, the gender of the victims is reinforced, and the reader is reminded that the gender of the victims is central to understanding the nature of the crime.

Table 2 shows how articles for each event were tabled, using the reporting of the attack on July 6, 2013, as an example. After the data were compiled for all the separate incidents and articles, the data were summarized in Tables 3 to 5.

Table 2. July 6, 2013. Attack Example.

Reference	Headline	Content	Rating	%
Associated Press (AP, 2013a)	30 Killed in School	<i>Students, pupils,</i>	Omitted	0
	Attack in Northeast Nigeria	<i>students, pupils, them, them, victims, survivors, students, children, bodies, children</i>		
AP (2013b)	Children Burned	<i>People, pupils, people,</i>	Omitted	0
	Alive in School Attack in Nigeria, 42 Dead	<i>students, pupils, students, them, them, bodies, victims, students, children, bodies, children</i>		
RT (2013)	Nigeria School Massacre: 41 Children Killed, some Burned Alive	<i>Students, students, survivors, students, them, them, those, survivors, victims, children, bodies, victims, students</i>	Omitted	0
McElroy (2013)	Extremist Attack in Nigeria Kills 42 at Boarding School	<i>Children, pupils, pupils, children, children, victims, students, students, survivors, children, victims, students, students</i>	Omitted	0
Agence France Presse (AFP) (2013a)	School Massacre: 42 Killed in Nigeria's Yobe	<i>People, students, witnesses, students, students', students</i>	Omitted	0

Note. Non-gendered terms are in italics.

Results

A review of the articles showed that 17 gendered crimes had been committed and reported from July 2013 to February 2021 by the Boko Haram group. Fifty-three articles reporting these gendered crimes were gathered, averaging 4.41 articles for each crime. Twelve of the crimes were committed against males, and five were committed against females. Headlines are particularly important as a filter for reading, so gender awareness can be displayed there. Content in the article can have direct references to victims as gendered, or implicit recognition of gender, such as when a school or dormitory is noted as all-male.

Reporting Gendered Killings

Boko Haram used gender-selective killings between 2013 and 2021. These were against noncombatant males, wherein individuals and groups were selected, pursued, rounded up, and summarily killed. The means of these killings were shootings, burning, or hacking with machetes. Victims were males of all ages; however, sometimes, specific age groups were targeted, while at other times, males of specific age groups were spared.

The data collected in Table 3, included 43 articles covering nine events. The number of victims of the massacres ranged from a low estimate of 28 noncombatant males killed in a single incident on September 29, 2013, to an upper number of 1,000 males in a massacre on August 6, 2014. The lower estimate of total killings based on the sum of the numbers reported is 1,096, and the upper figure is 2,040. Although the details of the massacres suggest that the victim's gender was a key criterion for selection, the victim's gender was rarely mentioned.

The headlines of 39 of 43 articles failed to identify the gender of the victims of the gender-selective massacres. These headlines referred to the victims using other salient details, such as the estimated number killed (e.g., hundreds; AP, 2013a; Becker, 2014), their developmental category (e.g., children; AP, 2013b), occupation (e.g., students, farmers), combatant status (e.g., civilians; Adams, 2013), or identities based on the category of human settlement they resided (e.g., villagers; BBC News, 2014b). None of the headlines identified the gender of the massacre victims when the victims were not schoolboys.

There were four headlines in the gendered massacre articles that were gendered (see AP, 2014a; Dixon & Abubakar, 2014; NBC, 2014; Nossiter, 2014). In 2014, two of the massacres that targeted schoolboys had two articles each (of the combined 10 articles) that identified the gender (and developmental status) by naming the victims as boys or schoolboys. The headlines of articles that involved schoolboys tended to prefer to identify the victims as students (e.g., "As Boko Haram Slaughters Students, Where is Nigeria's Army?" as cited in Murdock, 2014) or by the number killed in the school setting (e.g., "Boko Haram Storm Nigeria College Dorm, Leave 28 Dead," as cited in AFP, 2013b). The titling of the articles overwhelmingly avoided gendering the victims. While there were four massacres involving schoolboys, the headlines identified the gender of the children for only two of them.

In the 43 articles, there were 423 victim identifiers. Of these, 399 were non-gendered, while 24 were gendered identifiers, making a total average of 5.67% likelihood of using male gender descriptors to identify victims. More than half the articles ($n = 27$) were rated as Omitted, in that they failed to give any indicator that the massacres they were reporting on were gender-based violence, in either the content or the headline. Of the nine massacres from the sample, no indicators were reported about the gender of the victims of three massacres, whether men or boys. This included the massacre on June 5, 2014, which had an estimated 600 to 1,000 males killed.

Four of the articles were rated as Discoverable in that a part of the article may have alluded to information that led the readers to suspect that the victims were males. For instance, a report that identified the victims as students noted that the bomb had exploded at "a boys' science and technical school" (AFP,

2014, para. 1), implying that the intended victims were males. Seven of the 43 articles made the gender of the victims Visible for five massacres, and the remaining two linked with two massacres were rated as Reinforcing. In the Reinforcing position, 75% of the descriptors for the victims were non-gendered. There was no discernible pattern in the samples about which articles about massacres would report or omit details of the gender of the victims.

De-gendering the male victims did not mean that gender was fully omitted. Some articles did not gender the male victims killed, but gendered female mourners (Adams, 2013), female injured (Audu, 2014b), and additional bodies that included women (Aziken, Omonobi, Agande, Marama, & Binniyat, 2014). One article that mentioned once that males were killed also noted, "A hundred and six people, including an old woman, have been killed by the attackers, suspected to be Boko Haram gunmen," Senator Ali Ndume said" (Wilson, 2014, para. 3). The hundred and six people, all males, remained genderless by contrast to the one gendered victim, who died by shielding her grandson (BBC News, 2014b).

There were some articles that appeared to give higher visibility to female vulnerability in reporting massacres of males. Female gendered words were used three times and male gendered words were used twice in an article where 29 boys were slaughtered while the female students were sent home (AP, 2014a). Another article addressed an incident where 43 (male) students were killed and 16 female students kidnapped. The gender of the male victims was mentioned once, while the female gender was mentioned seven times in relation to the female abductions and vulnerability (Vanguard, 2014). In a massacre after the Chibok kidnapping, hundreds of males were killed. One article did not gender the male victims but gendered female victimization of the Chibok kidnapping four times (Becker, 2014). Another article on a deadly town raid failed to gender the estimated 500 men and boys slaughtered but repeated the gender of the Chibok girls 12 times. The article spent 209 words on the slaughter, and 292 words on the kidnapped girls, with its final sentence making an appeal to give every girl the right to an education (Soergel, 2014). While the Chibok kidnapping served as an anchor that contextualized such crimes for international readers, it tended to emphasize the gendered dimensions of this crime, with the authors failing to give similar gendered attention to the current crimes being reported.

An article focused on a suicide bombing in a boys' school gendered the boys many times in addition to equally mentioning girls and women in relation to their vulnerability to Boko Haram (Dixon & Abubakar, 2014). It attempted to show that Boko Haram also opposed Western education for boys as it did for girls, however, its discourse on female vulnerability overshadowed the context of the article wherein boys were the primary victims. "Both male and female students have been targeted, but whereas boys tend to be killed, girls are often abducted as sex slaves. In the northeast, extremists have abducted hundreds of women and girls" (Dixon & Abubakar, 2014, para. 23). "According to Human Rights Watch, at least 500 girls in northern Nigeria have been abducted. Thousands of people in the north have been killed by Boko Haram since 2009, including hundreds of students and teachers" (Dixon & Abubakar, 2014, para. 27).

The reporting of gendered atrocities committed against men and boys appeared to minimize the male gendered dimension of the crimes. The gendered identities of the victims were mentioned in the headlines in four of the 43 articles, and in most articles, there was no mention of the gender of the male victims.

Reporting Gendered Kidnappings

Boko Haram, throughout its history, has engaged in kidnappings (Thurston, 2018). Kidnapping has been used to extract ransoms, raise funds through selling abductees, conscript fighters and suicide bombers into their organization, gain labor, increase converts, and reward fighters with sexual access and forced marriages (MacEachern, 2018; Okoli & Nnaemeka Azom, 2019; Omeni, 2020). Kidnappings are often (though not always) gender selective, and abductees are typically coerced into roles according to their gender (e.g., females used for domestic and sexual purposes and suicide bombing, and males used for combat and combat support; Omeni, 2020). This section will present and discuss the data on gender-selective kidnapping raids.

Table 4 shows a combined three kidnapping raids of males, with a combined estimate of 440 victims and more. In 13 articles, five (38%) headlines indicated the gender identity of the abductees. An example of a gendered title is "Boko Haram Kidnaps 100 Boys from Borno Village" (Varghese, 2014), while a non-gendered title's example is "Boko Haram Seizes 40 in Northern Nigeria" (AFP, 2015). An average of 69.71% of victim identifiers were gendered, while 12 articles (92.4%) were categorized as Reinforced and one (7.6%) as Visible. An example of text making the male victims visible is, "Suspected Islamist Boko Haram fighters have abducted dozens of boys and men in a raid on a remote village" (Ola, 2014, para. 1). The visibility of male victims was considerably higher when they were kidnapped than when they were massacred.

Table 3. Male Massacre Victims.

Date	Articles	Victim Sub-Identity	Reported No. of Victims	No. of Articles Reviewed	No. of Headlines with GI	Total No. of NGI References	Total No. of GI References	Overall % of GI	Ratings
Jul 6, 2013	AFP (2013a), AP (2013a, 2013b), McElroy (2013), RT (2013)	Students	30–42	5	0	58	0	0	Omitted: 5
Sep 17, 2013	Adams (2013), Audu (2013), Channels Television (2013), Christian Solidarity Worldwide (2013), Reuters (2013)	Travelers	87–160+	5	0	56	3	5	Omitted: 3 Discoverable: 1 Visible: 1
Sep 29, 2013	AFP (2013b), Al Jazeera and Wire Services (2013), CBS News (2013), Marszal (2013), Nossiter (2013)	Students	28–50	5	0	29	0	0	Omitted: 5
Feb 15, 2014	Aziken et al. (2014), BBC News (2014b), Onuoh (2014), Reuters (2014a), Wilson (2014)	Villagers	106–121	5	0	55	4	6.75	Omitted: 3 Discoverable: 1 Visible: 1
Feb 25, 2014	AP (2014a), CBS/Wire Services (2014), Murdock (2014), NBC (2014), Vanguard (2014)	Students	29–43	5	2	57	8	12.3	Discoverable: 2 Visible: 2 Reinforced: 1
Jun 5, 2014	Abubakar (2014a, 2014c), Becker (2014), Marszal (2014), Soergel (2014)	Villagers	100–500	5	0	34	5	12.85	Omitted: 4 Reinforced: 1

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Aug 6, 2014	AP (2014b), Burnett (2014), Marama (2014)	Villagers	600-1000	3	0	17	0	0	Omitted: 3
Nov 10, 2014	AFP (2014), Channels Television (2014b), Dixon and Abubakar (2014), Nossiter (2014), Ross (2014)	Students	40-48	5	2	34	1	2.85	Omitted: 1 Discoverable: 1 Visible: 2
Nov 28 2020	Australian Broadcasting Commission/Wires (2020), Agence France-Presse, Reuters, Punch, and Trust (2020), Agence France-Presse (2020b), Alfa and Maclean (2020), AP (2020)	Farmers	76	5	0	59	3	4.83	Omitted: 3 Discoverable: 1 Visible: 1
	Totals			43	4	399	24	4.95	Omitted: 27 Discoverable: 4 Visible: 7 Reinforced: 2

Note. GI = Gendered identifiers of victims. NGI = Non-gendered identifiers of victims.

Table 4. Male Kidnapping Victims.

Date	Articles	Victim Sub-Identity	Reported No. of Victims	No. of Articles Reviewed	No. of Headlines With GI	Total No. of NGI References	Total No. of GI References	Overall % of GI	Ratings
Aug 15, 2014	Abubakar (2014b), Ola (2014), Reilly (2014), Varghese (2014)	Villagers	97-100	4	3	10	31	75.5	Reinforced: 4
Jan 3, 2015	AFP (2015), AP (2015), BBC News (2015), Waxman (2015)	Villagers	40	4	2	2	19	90.47	Reinforced: 4
Dec 11, 2020	Agence France-Presse (2020a), Australian Associated Press (2020), Olukoya (2020), Olukoya and Petesch (2020a, 2020b)	Students	300+	5	0	25	19	43.18	Visible: 1 Reinforced: 4
	Totals			13	5	37	69	69.72	Visible: 1 Reinforced: 12

Note. GI = Gendered identifiers of victims. NGI = Non-gendered identifiers of victims.

Table 5. Female Kidnapping Victims.

Date	Articles	Victim Sub-Identity	Reported No. of Victims	No. of Articles Reviewed	# of Headlines With GI	Total No. of NGI References	Total No. of GI References	Overall % of GI	Ratings
Apr 14, 2014	Al Jazeera and Wire Services (2014), Audu (2014a), Channels Television (2014a), Edmonds (2014), Kinder (2014)	Students	100–200	5	5	29	29	50	Reinforced: 5
Oct 24, 2014	BBC News (2014a), Reuters (2014b), Sanchez and Abubakar (2014), Tomlinson (2014)	Villagers	25–60	4	3	3	26	90	Reinforced: 4
Dec 7, 2014	BellaNaija.com (2014), Edwards (2014)	Villagers	20+	2	2	1	4	80	Visible: 2
Feb 19, 2018	Al Jazeera (2018), Hazzad (2018), Reuters (2018), Romo (2018)	Students	111	4	4	21	26	55	Reinforced: 4
Feb 26, 2021	Busari, Princewill, and Abrak (2021), Hope (2021), Ibrahim (2021), Olukoya and Petesch (2021), TRTWorld and Agencies (2021)	Students	300+	5	5	14	33	70	Reinforced: 5
	Totals			20	19	68	118	69%	Visible: 2 Reinforced: 18

Note. GI = Gendered identifiers of victims. NGI = Non-gendered identifiers of victims.

Table 5, reporting on five raids, introduces the female abductees with a combined estimate ranging from 556 to more than 691. Of the 20 articles, 19 (95%) of the headlines signaled that they were gendered kidnappings. An example of a gendered headline is "Nigeria's Boko Haram 'Abducts More Women and Girls'" (BBC News, 2014a), while the only headline that did not gender the victims is "Despite So-Called Ceasefire, Boko Haram Kidnappings Continue" (Sanchez & Abubakar, 2014). Of the identifiers across the articles, 69% were gendered, which is similar to the proportions across the male abductees. Eighteen articles were classified as Reinforced (90%), and two were classified as Visible (10%). The following quote is an example of how gender has been centralized in the reporting:

Security officials have confirmed the abduction of at least 100 **female** students in Borno State. The **girls**, final year *students* at the Government Girls Secondary School Chibok, Chibok Local Government Area of the state, were kidnapped from their school on Monday night. (Adu, 2014a, paras. 2–3; emphasis added)

From a content perspective, a comparison of the reports on male and female abductees shows that the usage of gender identifiers was roughly equal, while the female abductees had more visibility in headlines.

Discussion

This research sample of newspaper articles, from July 6, 2013, to February 26, 2021, reporting the Boko Haram gender crimes gave greater gender visibility to female and male abductees than male massacre victims. This was irrespective of the number of victims in the events or the age range of the victims. Both male and female kidnappings were repeatedly reported (66%–100% of the time) in gendered terms. In contrast, articles on killings of boys and men used gendered terms to identify victims less than 50% of the time, and these articles tended to be significantly less visible than the kidnapping reports.

A contextual explanation for not reporting gender might be that local readers usually assume the massacre victims to be male, which is a normative frame of reference in armed conflict, unless otherwise stated. Boko Haram rarely kills females selectively (Oluwasolape, 2018), making the discriminate killing of males, combatant and civilian, normative for the region. Reporters may perceive little need to state the obvious when it comes to killings. In places, the reporting muted, yet implied, male gender deaths by gendering female collateral exceptions. Of note, it was not solely the journalists' narratives of the events but also often those they quoted, including family and government officials, that failed to use gender identifiers unless they were referencing a family member such as a son or father being killed. When it came to kidnappings, the gender of the kidnapped cannot be as easily inferred in contrast to killings, given both males and females are targeted (Omeni, 2020).

Male victimization is not typically recognized as being gendered, and males are not normatively and socially viewed as vulnerable, including in wars and insurgencies (Dolan, 2018; Kreft & Agerberg, 2023). If the gendered dimension of selectively massacring male boys and men in the tens and hundreds is not considered relevant to report, the gendering of male abductees appears puzzling. In these cases, the gendering of male victims might not have been because of moral injustice or the concern of harm to the innocent and relatively defenseless male victims. Rather, the gender might have been reported due to security ramifications for the

local readership. It is well known that Boko Haram kidnaps men and boys to forcibly conscript them into their group (Omeni, 2020). Kidnapping males brings an increased number of Boko Haram fighters, which in turn, increases the threat of violence and extortion to the surrounding populations (Okolie-Osemene & Okolie-Osemene, 2019). In addition, kidnapping reports generate ongoing interest and emotional suspense for readers and hence enhanced newsworthiness, given the open-ended nature of the crime. In contrast to this, the “open-and-shut” reporting on deaths ends with the recovered bodies and burials.

The reporting approach tending toward concealing the gender of the victims and the gendered nature of the killings is also consistent with examples of the reporting of androcides. Jones (2001) examined media reporting on the Kosovo genocide of males and found that the reporting of these tended to erase the gender by identifying victims with non-gendered identities and labels, such as civilians, corpses, or ethnic Albanians. Jones noted this de-gendering was contrasted with a gendered focus on female rape victims, which amplified the moral atrociousness of crimes against women and girls. Holter (2002) noted that the gendered aspects of war killings are typically muted, partly attributed to the notion of male expendability. Males being killed may elicit less reader concern and newsworthiness (Greer, 2007) than identifying the victims with other identities, such as civilians or students.

One of the consequences of the reduced visibility of the male massacre victims is that readers (particularly international readers) may not have access to a key detail of the killings and thus fail to grasp the gender dimensions that are a central motivation to the crime. Subsequent historical chronologies of Boko Haram attacks have tended to omit mention of the male gender of victims or recognition of the gendered nature of the crimes when gender was not clearly reported in the articles (see Agence France-Presse et al., 2020; Anyadike, 2013; Busari et al., 2021; Comolli, 2015; Ekumaoko & Ezemenaka, 2023; Mantzikos, 2014; Faluyi, Khan, & Akinola, 2019; Subrahmanian et al., 2021). Male victims may not gain social awareness or recognition of their stories, and neither may governmental, security, and nongovernmental organizations’ (NGOs’) resources be made available to address the specific gendered risks that vulnerable male civilians face (Dolan, 2018). In addition to recognizing the human rights of males to receive equal protection from harm (Leiby et al., 2021), it is important to note that in Nigeria, males are often sole or primary financial providers for families (Akanle, Adesina, & Nwaobiala, 2018), so adult male deaths have an additional significant impact on families left behind.

In writing about mass killings, Jones (2002) noted the importance of taking a gender-inclusive approach, which includes gendering male victims as well as understanding the nature of the crimes, lest males at risk receive inadequate protection. Gorris (2015) notes that the “UN have historically silenced or structurally rendered men and boy victims invisible—because they have been geared almost exclusively to the visibility and protection of women and girls” (p. 414). The scholarly community and NGOs writing on Boko Haram’s gender-based crimes have also tended to minimize and ignore the human rights abuses against Nigerian boys and men in contrast to emphasizing the importance of prioritizing the protection of women and girls (e.g., see Okoli & Nnaemeka Azom, 2019; Okolie-Osemene & Okolie-Osemene, 2019). More gender-informative news reporting, alongside categorically recognizing gender-based crimes against males (such as sex-selective massacres), may be important steps in raising awareness toward enhanced safety and protection for vulnerable noncombatant males in regions of insurgency and civil wars.

Limitations

The search was not exhaustive but it was a convenience sampling that minimized selection bias by selecting up to the first five articles that were displayed with the search terms and dates used. For readers seeking information on these events, these articles may be found more easily if searched within Google News and hence be more influential to readers' understanding. A more thorough, comprehensive search and data collection may lead to increased confidence, generalizability, and possibly different conclusions. With additional searching, other articles for each event might have been located, and these may have shown different visibility for male and female victims. While the findings align with what others have written about male victimization being deprioritized and minimized in relation to male deaths (Dolan, 2018; Holter, 2002), these findings should be taken cautiously, and more research is needed. Likewise, this research reflects reporting focused on only one region, one set of events in time in that region, and was limited to English-only articles, therefore, generalizability is limited.

Conclusion

This article reviewed Boko Haram's gendered violence as reported by the newsprint online media, with a specific focus on how visible the gendered victimization was. It found that the reporting of male and female abductions showed similarly high gender visibility in article content; however, when reporting massacres against male adults and boys, there was substantially less visibility to indicate these as gendered crimes. Interpretations from the regional context and newsworthiness arguments were offered to explain both the relative visibility or invisibility associated with both gendered kidnappings and massacres.

The implications of de-gendering massacred males in press reporting mean that the public has diminished access to key details, that events are partially understood, and that this may in turn, affect public perception of male vulnerability and government and NGO attention and resourcing. For this insurgency, Hamid and Baba (2014) recommended that media "obligations are to be fulfilled mainly through setting high professional standard of truth, accuracy, objectivity and balanced information in the discharge of their duties" (p. 18). This standard of truth should include appropriate gender visibility extended to massacres that are clearly gendered in motivation and victim selection.

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