

## **BROADCAST COVERAGE OF TERRORISM AND COMPASSION FATIGUE AMONG AUDIENCE MEMBERS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

This study was carried out to ascertain the extent to which exposure to broadcast coverage of terrorism increases compassion fatigue among audience members in Akwa Ibom State. A mixed method consisting both content analysis and survey was adopted as the research design. For the content analysis, eight radio stations were selected and a combined 5,840 broadcast days was the population with a sample of 374, which was selected using the Taro Yamane formula. For the survey, the sample size was 400, out of the population of 6,661,279 which was the population of Akwa Ibom State in 2024. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used for this study, and each stage used a particular sampling technique until the respondents were accessed. The findings of the study revealed that broadcast stations extensively covered terrorism. Also, more than 60% of the respondents frequently exposed themselves to coverage of terrorism on television, and also thought that the way the broadcast media covered and reported terrorism, while enhancing public understanding of terrorism-related events, contributed to spreading and increasing fear and anxiety in society. Furthermore, frequent exposure to broadcast coverage of terrorism significantly contributed to escalating compassion fatigue among more than 80% of the respondents. It was concluded that frequent exposure of broadcast audience to distressing and traumatic content, including terrorism-related news, in the long run, caused audience members to become less sympathetic because the scenes depicted in such content had become part of their daily existence. Hence, it was recommended that broadcast stations should endeavour to limit the frequency as well as the intensity of terrorism coverage and also prioritize responsible and ethical reportorial practices, including verifying information before it is broadcast, avoiding sensationalism, and providing broader contexts as well as diverse viewpoints when covering terrorism.

### **Introduction**

The concept of terrorism has been defined in different ways by different scholars. However, the common notion of terrorism is that it is the use of threats or actions which are designed to influence the government and/or intimidate the public for the purpose of advancing a particular cause, which could be political, religious or ideological. According to Khairil, Zakria, Arifin, and Razman (2017), the following are the basic elements of terrorism:

- i. the systematic violence carried out by individuals, groups or nations
- ii. the political, religious or ideological motifs behind carrying out these violent acts
- iii. the intention of spreading fear in society in imposing the desire.

From the foregoing, it may be said that terrorism involves many forms of violence (shootings, bombings, kidnaps, assassinations, arson, etc) and indiscriminate target of civilians, military facilities and State officials, among others, as a way of persuading governments or some powerful institutions or authorities to yield to some specific demands of the perpetrators. According to UNODC (2018), contemporary terrorist violence is distinguished in law from conventional violence by the classic terrorist triangle: A attacks B, to convince or coerce C to change its position regarding some action or policy desired by A. The attack spreads fear as the violence is directed, unexpectedly, against innocent victims, which in turn puts pressure on third parties, such as governments, to change their policy or position.

Around the globe, terrorism has, sadly, become one of the defining features of contemporary society. More than two million people have died from numerous terror attacks orchestrated by various terrorist groups throughout the world since 2010. Groups such as the Islamic State (IS), Al-Shabaab, Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and JamaatNusrat Al-Islam walMuslimeen (JNIM) have mushroomed over the years to become a potent threat to the stability of different countries and continents (Ngige, Badekale and Joda (2016); Ekwueme and Obayi; 2012). Furthermore, according to the Global Terrorism Index (2023), more than 43 countries in the world have experienced terrorism-related deaths since 2020.

The Nigerian State is also witnessing violent insurgencies within its borders, most notably the Boko Haram uprising which began in 2009, in Bauchi; and has since spread to other Northern states, leaving hundreds of followers, Nigerian law enforcement officers and civilians dead. This group has carried out attacks targeting civilians, security forces, and infrastructure.

It is often argued that the mass media and terrorism are intertwined in a symbiotic way. Terrorism and conflict are the bread and butter of journalism. They provide ready-made material for the media to exploit. In media circles, bad news is good news; therefore, the more unusual, weird or negative an event is, the more the mass media celebrate it. More so, media audience are usually excited to read detailed stories on how these events unfold; and in the process of satisfying the growing information needs of the audience members, media houses can increase their profit margins (Ngigeet. al., 2016; Akpan and Onwubere, 2020). On the other hand, the media are said to supply the oxygen of publicity for terrorists by providing a platform to progress their cause.

In today's globalized world, according to Akpan and Onwubere (2020), television audience members do not invite such footages, but are left with no choice but to receive them

due to the lure and pervasiveness of the television as well as the innate desire on the part of the audience members to have the latest update on global events. Given this, it is probable that the ceaseless exposure of audience members to scenes of carnage, sorrow, affliction and suffering, in the long run, causes the audience members to become less sympathetic to the victims because they have gotten used to such scenes, and therefore become resistant to the sympathy and empathy which such scenes usually evoke or are meant to evoke in people (Watson and Hill, 2015; Akpan and Onwubere; 2020). This feeling is referred to as compassion fatigue.

Compassion fatigue occurs when a person, out of frequent or prolonged exposure to a situation, begins to develop a mental exhaustion so much that his sympathy stock begins to deplete. In essence, he or she, overtime, gets tired of showing compassion, sympathy or empathy when faced with such situations because they have become a part of his or her daily life. As such, issues such as war, starvation and other inhuman atrocities, including suicide cases, bomb explosions, murders, genocide, ethnic cleansing, fire disasters, etc. are celebrated among media professionals, who in turn transmit them to the audience members without much compunction.

Today, we have a number global radio and television stations such as CNN, BBC, Aljazeera, FOX etc. reporting on and transmitting images and footages of numerous global crises, including incidents of terrorist attacks worldwide. Additionally, the fast-paced 24/7 news cycle which is typical of these stations usually make it somewhat difficult for audience members to take breaks from consuming such news reports. Therefore, the audience members, including those in Akwa Ibom State, are also exposed to these transmissions, given the ubiquitous nature of television in Nigeria, as well as the innate desire on the part of the audience members to have the latest update on global events. If the audience's stock of sympathy depletes over time as a result of exposure to scenes and reports of carnage on television and radio, then it is possible that broadcast audience members in Akwa Ibom State being part of the global broadcast audience members can also suffer compassion fatigue due to frequent and prolonged exposure to scenes and reports of terrorism via the broadcast media. Therefore, this study examines the extent to which exposure to broadcast coverage of terrorism contributes to increasing compassion fatigue among audience members in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

In recent times, reports of terrorism in its various forms have dominated the global media landscape so much so that the audience members are exposed to footages and reports of terror or carnage caused by terrorist attacks almost on daily basis. Consequently, audience members in Akwa Ibom State, being part of the global broadcast audience, are inundated with images, reports and scenes of terrorist attacks which often involve killings, shootings, bombings, abductions, hostage situations, and much more; given the ubiquitous nature of the broadcast media. Given this, is it possible that broadcast audience members in Akwa Ibom State can overtime develop compassion fatigue due to frequent and prolonged exposure to such scenes and reports via the broadcast media? Therefore, the key question in this study is: to what extent does exposure to broadcast coverage of terrorism escalate compassion fatigue among audience members in Akwa Ibom State?

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

- i. What is the volume of terrorism coverage on broadcast stations?
- ii. To what extent are audience members in Akwa Ibom State exposed to broadcast coverage of terrorism?
- iii. How do audience members in Akwa Ibom State perceive broadcast coverage of terrorism?
- iv. To what extent does exposure to broadcast coverage of terrorism increase compassion fatigue among audience members in Akwa Ibom State?

### **Research Hypothesis**

To guide this study, the following research hypothesis was formulated:

There is no significant relationship between exposure to broadcast coverage of terrorism and compassion fatigue among audience members in Akwa Ibom State.

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Terrorism**

Terrorism has been defined in different ways by different scholars. According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, terrorism is systematic use of a terror, violent or destructive acts by group in order to intimidate a population or Government into granting their demands. Similarly, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018) defines terrorism as a method of coercion that utilizes or threatens to utilize violence in order to spread fear and thereby attain political or ideological goals. Tulga (2020) also sees terrorism as any form of

premeditated politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience. Therefore, terrorism can be seen as the use or threats or actions which are designed to influence the government and/or intimidate the public for the purpose of advancing a particular cause, which could be either political, religious or ideological.

The term “terrorism” was first coined in the 1790s from the French Revolution and the “Reign of Terror,” when terror was used as an instrument of state policy to counter revolutionary elements in the population, save France from anarchy and military defeat and suppress hoarding and profiteering. Although terrorism in this usage implies an act of violence by a state against its domestic enemies, the term, since the 20th century, has been applied most frequently to violence aimed, either directly or indirectly, at governments in an effort to influence policy or topple an existing regime (Jenkins, 2024).

As literature on terrorism has evolved, the definition of the term has progressively been embellished. Contemporary scholarship attributes at least four distinctive characteristics to it. These attributes, according to Shughart (2006), are:

- i. terrorism is violence (or its threat) for political effect.
- ii. terrorism is a planned, calculated, and systematic act.
- iii. terrorists are not bound by established rules of warfare or codes of conduct
- iv. terrorism is designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target.

Based on the aforementioned, it may be concluded that terrorism entails a variety of violent acts, including shootings, bombings, kidnaps, assassinations, arson, etc, and the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, State officials and military installations in an effort to influence Governments or other influential institutions or authorities to comply with the demands of the perpetrators.

The French Revolution marked a turning point in the history of terrorism. According to Chaliand and Blin (2007), the French Revolution gave birth to what is known as state terrorism – acts of terrorism carried out by the government of a state against other state(s) or against its own citizens, including the intentional killing of an unarmed or disarmed person or persons in line with a certain government policy. During the French Revolutionary period (1789 – 1799), terrorism was associated with The Jacobins’ reign of terror in France where numerous acts of violence, including mass massacres and public executions, were employed to compel obedience to the State and also intimidate regime enemies (Chaliand and Blin, 2007; Shughart, 2006). In the late 20th and early 21st centuries some of the most extreme and

destructive organizations that engaged in terrorism possessed a fundamentalist religious ideology. According to GTI (2023), Islamist movements, including the Islamic State (IS) and Hamas lead a group of four dominant terrorist groups which account for an increasing number of deaths across different countries. The other two are the JamaatNusrat Al-Islam walMuslimeen (JNIM) and Al-Shabaab.

### **Compassion Fatigue**

According to Akpan and Onwubere (2020), compassion fatigue, also known as secondary traumatic stress (STS), refers to the apathy or indifference exhibited by a person or persons towards the suffering of others resulting from over-exposure to traumatized individuals. It occurs when one, out of prolonged exposure to a situation, begins to develop a mental exhaustion such that his sympathy stock starts to deplete. In such circumstances, compassion for victims of a negative situation is gradually lessened to a point that the compassion is burnt out. Pehlivan and Güner (2018)also describe compassion fatigue as a condition of gradual decrease in compassion over time. This decrease in compassion is associated with secondary exposure to stressful or traumatic events. Adamset. *al.* (2016) also see compassion fatigue as a gradual reduction in a person's capacity or interest in being empathic to or bearing the suffering of others and is the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced or suffered by a person. From the foregoing, it may be concluded that compassion fatigue is a condition characterized by a gradual reduction or depletion of sympathy overtime due to frequent indirect or secondary exposure to trauma, or from often helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person. This implies that people overtime get tired of showing compassion, sympathy or empathy when faced with traumatic situations because such situations have become normalized and have become a part of their daily lives.

Compassion fatigue has emerged as a natural consequence of working with people who have experienced or are experiencing trauma and suffering or extremely stressful events. The helpers can absorb the suffering of others and end up feeling weary and worn from this secondary traumatic exposure. Over time, their concern and empathy for the people they are trying to help expose them emotionally to the negative side effects associated with prolonged stress and trauma. Eventually, it becomes exhausting for them to continue to emphasize and maintain compassion.

Today, compassion fatigue is no longer unique to certain professions. With increased media exposure to suffering worldwide, it is likely that anyone can experience compassion

fatigue – especially people with high levels of empathy. Every day people hear news stories about injustice, political division, mass shootings, natural disasters, hate crimes, epidemics, and international conflicts, so it can become overwhelming to stay informed and engaged. The 24-hour coverage of trauma and world suffering on television and social media can cause stress, making people feel despair, and limit their ability to feel empathy. Eventually, they start feeling exhausted, and their ability to empathize starts to wane (Horkovska, 2023). This is in line with Akpan and Onwubere (2020), who state that consistent media reporting of trauma helps to decrease the stock of positive emotions in the audience members, for the simple reason that the scenes have become common place and the audience members have become used to the situation. At a point, the audience members appear drugged into the inactivity of accepting the traumatic scenes and the lot of the victims as natural.

### **Terrorism and the Broadcast Media**

The relationship between terrorism and the broadcast media has been a subject of concern for numerous scholars over the years. Besides bringing the activities and actions of terrorist groups and organizations to the attention frame of the audience members through their surveillance and correlation roles in society (which bestows on them the obligation to watch events as they unfold and aptly report back to the society to enable the process of informed formulation of opinions and decisions), the broadcast media and terrorism are intertwined in a symbiotic way. This symbiotic relationship, according to White (2020), may be illustrated thus: ‘without television, terrorism becomes rather like the philosopher’s hypothetical tree falling in the forest: no one hears it fall and therefore it has no reason for being. And television, without terrorism, while not deprived of all interesting things in the world, is nonetheless deprived of one of the most interesting’. This perspective holds that both terrorist groups and broadcast stations can benefit from media attention to terrorism.

On the one hand, terrorism and conflict is the bread and butter of journalism. It provides ready-made material for media men to exploit. Hence, Awoviebeet. *al.* (2019) state that the broadcast space is an aggressively competitive market with stations constantly striving to be the first to break the news and provide the details of an event. Therefore, the broadcast media are bound to react to terrorist propaganda and acts of terror, since such are strikingly terrible news. Akpan and Onwubere (2020) similarly state that in media circles, bad news is good news; therefore, the more unusual, weird or negative an event is, the more the mass media celebrate it. This implies that terrorism provides for exciting and violent stories which help the mass media to sell their news products. This way, insurgent terrorists serve the audience-attracting needs of the mass media.

Furthermore, broadcast audience members are usually excited to watch or listen to detailed stories on how these terrorism-related events unfold. Thus, in the process of satisfying the growing information needs of the audience members, broadcast stations can increase their profit margins.

Terrorists exploit the media to increase visibility and more widely distribute their cause. Baran (2008) also states that terrorists commit violent acts while looking to achieve three universal objectives: to get attention; to gain recognition; and to obtain a certain degree of respect and legitimacy, and these objectives are attainable for those who are capable of receiving the most media coverage. This implies that an act of terrorism is nothing by itself without publicity, and the success of any terrorist campaign depends decisively on the amount of publicity it receives.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The Narcotizing Dysfunction Theory**

The narcotizing dysfunction theory was propounded by Paul Larzarsfeld and Robert Merton in 1949. This theory holds that as news about an issue inundates people, they become apathetic to it, thus substituting knowing about that issue for taking action on it. According to Larzarsfeld and Merton (1949), exposure to flood of information via the mass media may serve to narcotize rather than to energize the average reader or listener. Proponents of the narcotizing dysfunction theory are of the opinion that when mass media overwhelm people with information on a particular issue, they, overtime, become uninterested in it and fail to act on the information. The narcotizing dysfunction theory is relevant to this study in the sense that it addresses how compassion fatigue is a measure of prolonged exposure to social problems such as terrorism via television. By implication, continuous exposure to an avalanche of images and footages of carnages caused by terrorist attacks by broadcast audience members in Akwa Ibom State may serve to narcotize rather than energize them, and in the process rob them of any sympathy or human feelings which they would have developed for the victims of terrorism.

### **The Theory of Systematic Desensitization**

The theory of systematic desensitization was propounded by Joseph Wolpe in 1958 and is concerned with how continual exposure to a stimulus our decreases emotional responses to that stimulus overtime. This theory states that constant repetitions of violence in the media makes people jaded towards violence. In other words, continued exposure to



violence in the mass media may result in desensitization, that is, will likely undermine feelings of concern, empathy or sympathy which viewers might have toward victims of actual violence. As a result, people's reactions toward victims of actual violence become less prominent because as consumers of media, they have become used to seeing explosions, carnage and mayhem which characterize media violence on a regular basis.

In essence, proponents of the theory of systematic desensitization are of the view that gradually exposing a patient to frightening stimuli will, overtime, significantly diminish the anxiety or negative effect that the stimulus once evoked. Therefore, the theory of systematic desensitization sheds light on how consistent exposure to distressing media coverage of terrorism can lead to emotional numbing and reduced compassion among audience members in Akwa Ibom State

## **Methodology**

The research design employed for this study was a mixed method of both content analysis and survey. Content analysis was adopted to analyse terrorism coverage by the broadcast stations of concern. The survey, on the other hand, measured the opinions, perceptions and emotional reactions to broadcast coverage of terrorism among members of the population.

For the survey, the population comprised residents of Akwa Ibom State of which projected figure at the period of the survey (2024) was 6,661,279, according to data from the National Population Commission (NPC). Therefore, the population for the survey was 6,661,279. A sample size of 400 subjects was selected based on the Taro Yamane method of sample selection. The multi-stage sampling procedure was used to access respondents, proportionately, from the three senatorial districts of Uyo (139), Ikot Ekpene (136) and Eket (125). With regard to the broadcast content to be analysed, the population comprised broadcast days (with a focus on full news bulletins, headline news and magazine programmes) of eight selected broadcast stations from January 2022 to December 2023. The stations were: BBC (radio and TV), CNN, Al Jazeera, Channels TV, Arise TV, Atlantic FM and Planet FM. Within this period, each station had 730 broadcast days. As such, the total number of broadcast days across the eight stations was 5,840. Therefore, the population of broadcast content to be analysed was 5,840. Using the Taro Yamane Formula a sample of 374 broadcast days was selected for analysis. Simple random sampling was used to select the content that were analysed. The content of the select broadcast stations were categorized and analysed as follows: i) Form of Terrorist Activity ii) Perpetrator of Terrorist Activity iii) Target of

Terrorist Activity iv)Responses to Terrorist Activity. The units of analysis, on the other hand, were breaking news broadcasts, full news broadcasts, specific magazine programmes, and news ticker content. Inter-coder reliability coefficient of 0.77 was established using Scott's *p* formula.

## Presentation Data and Analysis

### Presentation of Content Analysis Data

**Table I: Volume of Terrorism Coverage by Broadcast Stations**

	No. of Stories	Percentage
BBC TV	142	18
CNN	114	14
Al Jazeera	151	19
Channels TV	86	11
Arise TV	74	9
BBC Radio	118	15
Atlantic FM	52	6
Planet FM	61	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>798</b>	<b>100</b>

According to data in Table I, there were 798 terrorism-related stories across eight broadcast stations; and of the eight broadcast stations, Al Jazeera reported terrorism the most.

### Presentation of Survey Data

**Table II: Respondents' Frequency of Exposure to Broadcast Coverage of Terrorism**

	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Regularly	293	74
Occasionally	64	16
Rarely	36	9
Uncertain	4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100</b>

The majority of the respondents frequently expose themselves to broadcast coverage of terrorism according to data in Table II.

**Table III: Respondents' Most Patronized Medium for Terrorism Coverage**

Option	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Television	251	63
Radio	19	5
Internet and Social Media	127	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>397</b>	<b>100</b>

Data in Table III show that the majority of the respondents indicated that television is the preferred medium of terrorism coverage.

**Table IV: Respondents' Perception of Broadcast Coverage of Terrorism**

Option	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\bar{X}$	Decision
	4	3	2	1			

I Think the Broadcast media cover and present terrorism in a fair and balanced manner	75	250	44	4	<b>373</b>	3.06	Rejected
The way the Broadcast media cover terrorism enhances my understanding of such events	242	119	20	4	<b>385</b>	3.55	Accepted
I Think the broadcast media often magnify and exaggerate terrorist acts for dramatic effect	87	206	60	8	<b>361</b>	3.03	Rejected
Due to the way the Broadcast media cover terrorist attacks, I have become more afraid of either me or my loved ones becoming victims of a terrorist attack	256	101	28	4	<b>389</b>	3.56	Accepted

According to data in Table IV, the majority of the respondents, represented by a weighted mean score of 3.56, perceive broadcast coverage of terrorism as contributing to increased levels of fear and anxiety among viewers and listeners. Also, many of the respondents, represented by a weighted mean score of 3.55, think that the way the Broadcast media cover terrorism enhances public understanding of such events.

**Table V: Responses on the Extent to which exposure to Broadcast Coverage of Terrorism Increases Compassion Fatigue among Respondents**

	SA	A	D	SD	Total	$\bar{X}$	Decision
	4	3	2	1			
Frequent exposure to terrorism-related news contributes to increasing my level of compassion fatigue	313	52	24	8	<b>397</b>	3.68	Accepted

According to data in Table V, the majority of the respondents (79%), represented by a weighted mean score of 3.68, strongly agreed that exposure to terrorism-related news contributes to increasing their levels of compassion fatigue.

### Hypothesis Testing

$\sum X$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum Y$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$
397	91257	397	101040	95933

Source: Computed by the researcher using field data (2024)

$$r = \frac{4(95933) - (397 * 397)}{\sqrt{(4 * 91257) - (397)^2(4 * 101040) - (397)^2}}$$

$$r = \frac{383,732 - 157,609}{\sqrt{(365,028 - 157,609)(404,160 - 157,609)}}$$

$$r = \frac{226,123}{\sqrt{207,419 * 246,551}}$$

$$r = \frac{226,123}{\sqrt{51,139,361,869}}$$

$$r = \frac{226,123}{226,140}$$

$$r = 0.99$$

The critical value of  $r$  at degree of freedom 2 and level of significance 0.05 is 0.95; which is lower than the calculated correlational coefficient value of 0.99. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis and uphold the alternate, which states that there is a significant relationship between exposure to broadcast coverage of terrorism and compassion fatigue among audience members in Akwa Ibom State. Hence, it may be concluded that there is a high prevalence of compassion fatigue among broadcast audience members in Akwa Ibom State due to frequent exposure to broadcast coverage of terrorism.

## Discussion of Findings

### Research Question One: What is the volume of terrorism coverage on broadcast stations?

According to data in Table I, there were more than 798 terrorism-related stories across the eight stations of concern from 2022 to 2023. If this figure is divided by the sample size (374), the result (2.13) would suggest that each station on average aired two terrorism-related content daily. Therefore, it may be inferred that broadcast stations extensively cover terrorism.

This finding is supported by Akpan and Onwubere (2020) and Kente and Sheyigari (2021). According to Akpan and Onwubere (2020), there is hardly a day that passes without the broadcast media (particularly television) transmitting reports, images or footages of traumatic events into the homes of the consuming public. Nigeria's broadcast space is filled, daily, with such traumatic events, and this is the trend globally. Kente and Sheyigari (2021) similarly state that the broadcast media globally are no strangers to the coverage of violent conflicts, including acts of terrorism – suicide bombings, massacres, abductions and other deadly acts – at national and international fronts.

Also, from the data in Table I, it may be seen that local broadcast stations do not cover terrorism as much as foreign broadcast stations, given that local stations (Channels TV, Arise TV, Atlantic FM and Planet FM) contributed only 34% of the total volume of terrorism coverage, compared to foreign/international broadcast stations (BBC Radio and TV, CNN and Al Jazeera) which contributed 66%. Therefore, it may be further inferred that terrorism is reported more by international broadcast stations than local stations. This contradicts the finding of Gever and Nwabuzor (2018), that there is higher frequency of insurgency and terrorism coverage on local broadcast stations (NTA, FRCN and AIT) than there is on foreign

stations (CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera). The finding that foreign broadcast stations report terrorism more frequently than their local counterparts is also supported by Horkovska (2023) who states that transnational radio and television stations such as CNN, BBC, Aljazeera, as well as their numerous counterparts, due to the fast-paced 24 hours a day news cycle which is typical of these stations, consistently report and transmit images and footages of numerous global crises, including incidents of terrorist attacks worldwide, so much so that it becomes somewhat difficult for audience members to take breaks from consuming such news reports.

**Research Question Two: To what extent are audience members in Akwa Ibom State exposed to broadcast coverage of terrorism?**

According to the data in Table II, the majority of the respondents (74%) indicated that they regularly exposed themselves to broadcast coverage of terrorism. Given the percentage of respondents who indicated that they regularly exposed themselves to broadcast coverage of terrorism and that television, a broadcast medium, was the most patronised medium of coverage of terrorism among the respondents (as shown in Table III), it may be inferred that broadcast audience members in Akwa Ibom State are frequently exposed to coverage of terrorism on television.

This finding is in line with Orlu-Orlu (2017), Ugande and Chile (2017), and Akpan and Onwubere (2020). According to Orlu-Orlu (2017), audience members, to a large extent, exposed themselves to NTA and Channels TV coverage of the Chibok schoolgirls' abduction as well as other reports related to the Boko Haram crisis. Similarly, Ugande and Chile (2017) note that issues surrounding Boko Haram attacks were often featured in the broadcast media and generated significant audience attention given that respondents indicated that these were the most important issues at the time and agreed that they frequently discussed these issues among themselves. Akpan and Onwubere (2020) further note that the broadcast media feed the audience members every minute of the day. This is because they have become part of people's lives so much so that it has become difficult for the audience members to be divorced from the activities on the screen. As a result, the audience members do not need to invite the footages and reports of terrorist-related activities (which dominate the global media landscape) that is beamed into their homes through television. They are left with no choice but to receive these contents because of the lure and pervasiveness of the television as well as the innate desire on their part to have the latest update on global events.

**Research Question Three: How do audience members in Akwa Ibom State perceive broadcast coverage of terrorism?**

As shown in Table IV, broadcast audience members in Akwa Ibom State, based on their responses, generally hold a negative perception concerning broadcast coverage of terrorism given that the majority of their responses (represented by a weighted mean score of 3.49) showed a high percentage of strong agreement with the notion that broadcast media, through the way they cover and report issues of terrorism, contribute to increasing the level of fear and anxiety in society. This indicates that the majority of the respondents are of the opinion that broadcast coverage of terrorism contributes to spreading and increasing fear and anxiety among broadcast audience members.

However, many of them (represented by a weighted mean score of 3.44) seem to hold a rather positive perception concerning terrorism coverage, given that their responses show an equally high percentage of strong agreement with the notion that broadcast coverage of terrorism enhances public understanding of terrorism-related events, but a little lower than that of those who think it contributes to spreading and increasing fear and anxiety among broadcast audience members. Therefore, it may be inferred that broadcast audience members are of the opinion that broadcast coverage of terrorism contributes to spreading and increasing fear and anxiety in society, and also think that the way the broadcast media cover and report terrorism enhances public understanding of terrorism-related events.

This finding is in line with Gulerand Piazza (2024) and Akpan and Onwubere (2020). According to Gulerand Piazza (2024), even though the actual odds of being a victim of a terrorist attack is relatively low, most Americans are either afraid or very afraid of terrorist attacks or being victim of a terrorist attack and this is as a result of frequent consumption of terrorism-related media content. This implies that individuals who frequently expose themselves to broadcast coverage of terrorism often tend to present higher levels of fear of terrorism and of them being victims of a terrorist attack. Similarly, Akpan and Onwubere (2020) also note that the broadcast media, through the exercise of their responsibilities of surveillance and correlation, enhance public understanding of numerous social issues (including terrorism) by providing explanations, interpretations and comments on the meaning of events and conditions in the society and world, thereby indicating relations of power and facilitating innovation, adaptation and progress. However, the exercise of these great and primary functions is not without some unintended, often negative consequences, one of which being that the broadcast media, by disseminating news with traumatic and horrible scenes (often related to terrorist attacks), often cause panic among audience members.

By implications, heightened fear and anxiety as a result of exposure to terrorism coverage may have a significant impact on individual behavior in the society. Individuals may

become withdrawn and could resort to avoiding public spaces due to fear of the possibility of an attack. Individuals may also perceive certain activities, such as travel, shopping, etc as being too risky and as such may refrain from indulging in them. Furthermore, broadcast audience members' perception of coverage of terrorism as contributing to increasing collective levels of fear, panic and anxiety in society has a tendency to erode public trust in the government as well as institutions saddled with the responsibility for ensuring public safety and security.

**Research Question Four: To what extent does exposure to broadcast coverage of terrorism increase compassion fatigue among audience members in Akwa Ibom State?**

According to data in Table V, the majority of the respondents (represented by a weighted mean of 3.68) agreed that frequent exposure to terrorism-related news contributed to increasing their level of compassion fatigue. Given this, it would not be out of place to say that there is a significant relationship between exposure of audience members to broadcast coverage of terrorism and audience members' level of compassion fatigue. The strength of this association was tested using the PPMC, and the result showed that there is indeed a significant relationship between exposure of audience members in Akwa Ibom State to broadcast coverage of terrorism and their level of compassion fatigue. Therefore, it may be inferred that exposure to broadcast coverage of terrorism significantly contributes to increasing compassion fatigue among audience members in Akwa Ibom State.

This finding is in line with Robert, *et. al.* (2021); Kanwal and Yousaf (2022), Chao, *et. al.* (2020), Hanan, *et. al.* (2021), Akpan and Onwubere (2020), and Horkovska (2023). According to Robert, *et. al.* (2021), greater exposure to media coverage of terrorism via television and the internet was positively associated with numerous negative psychological effects, including post-traumatic stress symptoms. Similarly, Kanwal and Yousaf (2022) state that the majority of University students in Pakistan who indicated that they often viewed potentially traumatic media content, such as wars, natural disasters, graphic details of accidents, human physical abuse and acts of terrorism, also indicated that they often experienced stress, anxiety, symptoms of depression, eating disorders and other psychological issues, which have a significant negative impact on their academic performance and their mental health. Chao, *et. al.* (2020) also state that frequent media use during periods of crises (such as the outbreak of a pandemic or the advent of a terrorist attack) is significantly associated with more negative psychological outcomes, including negative affect, depression, anxiety, and stress. Akpan and Onwubere (2020) also state that consistent media reporting of trauma helps to decrease the stock of positive emotions in the audience members, for the

simple reason that the scenes have become common place and the audience members have become used to the situation. At a point, the audience members appear drugged into the inactivity of accepting the traumatic scenes and the lot of the victims as natural. This further manifests in salient inactions – which amount to actions – of quietly withdrawing the emotional support for the victims. Horkovska (2023) also states that every day, people hear news stories about terrorism related incidents, including mass shootings, suicide bombings, war crimes, torture, kidnappings and abductions; so, it can become overwhelming to stay informed and engaged. The 24-hour coverage of trauma and world suffering, particularly on television, often causes stress, making people feel despair, and limit their ability to feel empathy. Eventually, they start feeling exhausted, and their ability to empathise starts to wane.

This finding is also in line with the major postulates of the narcotizing dysfunction theory which holds that as news about an issue inundates people, they become apathetic to it, and they may mistake knowing about that issue for taking action on it. Therefore, the mass media's overwhelming flow of information often causes the populace to become passive in their social activism. By implication, frequent exposure to an avalanche of images and footage of carnage caused by terrorist attacks often has a numbing or desensitizing effect on broadcast audience members in Akwa Ibom State. Rather than energize or mobilize them to take some course of action or feel empathetic towards the victims of terrorism, it often overwhelms them, thereby leading to a sense of numbness and emotional detachment. As a result, they have become less sensitive and less reactive to the human suffering depicted in such reports, and this can ultimately kill their capacity for sympathy or empathy towards victims of terrorism as well as other forms of world suffering.

## **Conclusion**

From the findings, it is hereby concluded that broadcast coverage of terrorism significantly contributes to escalating compassion fatigue among audience members. Therefore, frequent exposure of broadcast audience members to distressing and traumatic content (including terrorism-related news coverage) often, in the long run, causes the audience members to become less sympathetic because the scenes depicted in such content have become part of their daily existence.

## **Recommendations**

- i. Broadcast stations should endeavour to limit the frequency as well as the intensity of terrorism coverage. They can do this by scheduling breaks between news segments



- and offering other light-hearted content which can provide audience members with some much-needed relief from frequent exposure to distressing or traumatic content.
- ii. Broadcast audience members in Akwa Ibom State can help themselves by engaging in mindful consumption of terrorism-related news.
  - iii. Broadcast audience members in Akwa Ibom State should prioritize self-care and also seek emotional support in order to enhance their resilience and emotional wellbeing. They can do this by engaging in activities which promote relaxation (such as meditation, yoga, nature walks, etc), exercising frequently so as to maintain physical and mental wellbeing, connecting with friends and family members with whom they can share their feelings and experiences, or seeking professional help from mental health professionals who can provide support and guidance tailored to specific needs.

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