

# MEDIA AND SEXUAL REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS



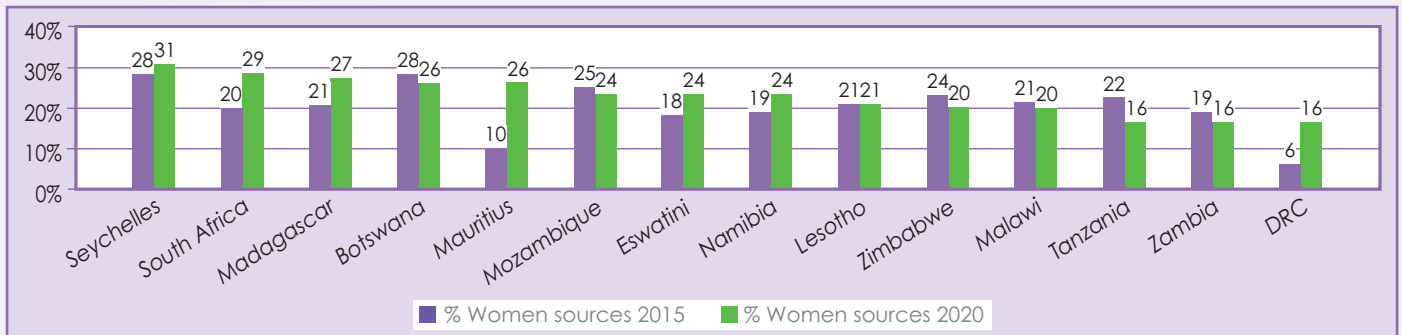
## Synopsis

This fact sheet is based on evidence gathered from the regional Gender and Media Progress Study conducted by Gender Links. The GMPS is a regional media monitoring research which occurs every five years focusing on what news and whose views make it to the news.

## Key facts

- Mainstream media can contribute meaningfully to efforts to address SRHR challenges by focusing public attention on these issues, making them more visible in development discourse, and providing accurate and comprehensive information.
- Women's voices in the Southern Africa region remain muted women sources comprise in Southern Africa has remained low at 21% in the region however there are variations across countries ranging
- SRHR issues do not make the news making up some of the least covered news topics.
- Gender Based Violence (GBV) accounts for half of SRHR coverage. At 2% each, sexual diversity, harmful practices, and menstrual health are the least covered SRHR topics.

# Women and men's voices in the news

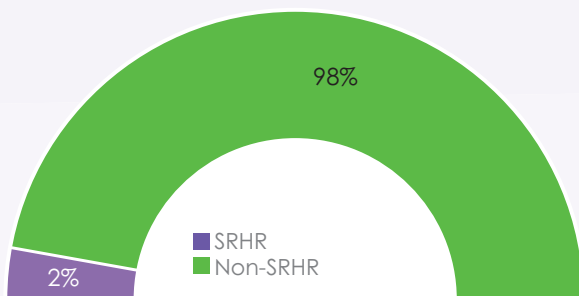


Source: Gender and Media Progress Study 2020.

The Gender and Media Progress Study (GMPS) 2020 shows that women are underrepresented as news sources in the media, constituting only 21% of sources, in the 14 countries monitored overall. Whilst women are in the majority in Southern Africa at 52%, this is not mirrored in news content. Women's voices range from a high of 31% in Seychelles to merely 16% of sources in DRC. Throughout the region: all countries are still well short of the 50% target. Therefore throughout the region male perspectives continue to dominate news in the region.

of SRHR issues as they link to political controversies rather than within stories about healthcare, sexuality, or maternal and child health.

**Official views from spokespeople and experts**, as opposed to personal experiences, dominate SRHR coverage in the region. Spokespeople constitute 44% of sources, while personal experiences ranked among the lowest of all source categories, at 3%. This shows that the media frequently misses opportunities to tell the real stories of girls, women and families affected by SRHR issues - those who researchers and gender activists know face considerable challenges in realising their sexual and reproductive health rights.



Source: Gender and Media Progress Study 2020.

**SRHR hardly makes it to the news:** In the news there is an evident bias towards certain topics for example business, politics and sports. Through the process of 'agenda setting', particular news stories are prioritised over other stories. Coverage of Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights topics is very minimal in the region making up 2% of stories covered as shown in the Gender and Media Progress Study 2020.

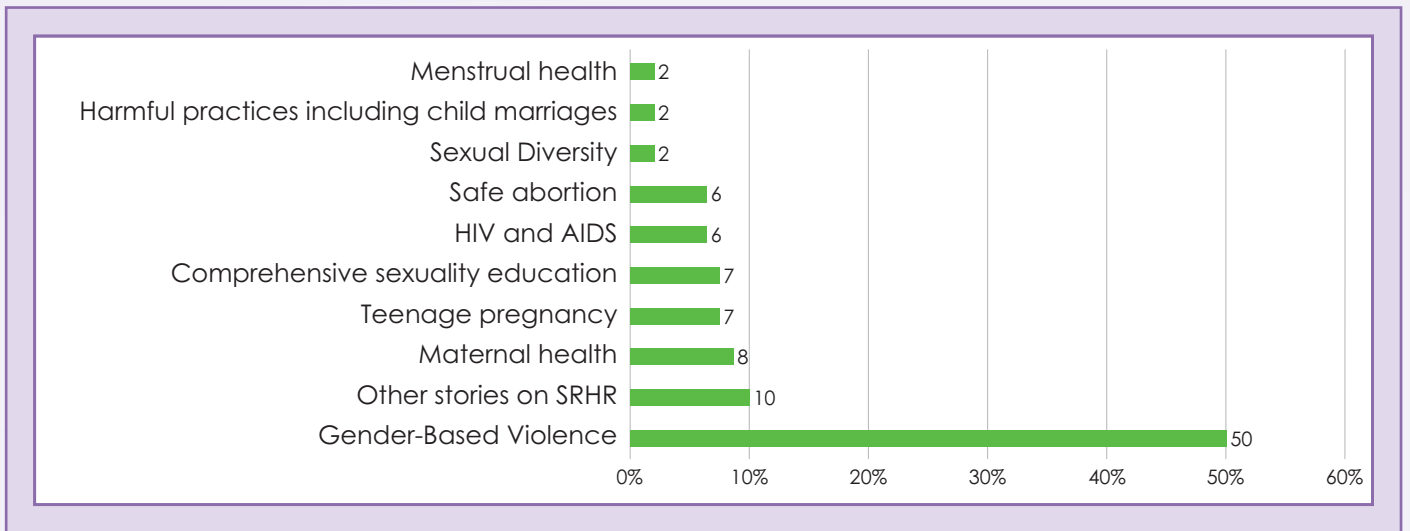
**Women's voice eclipsed on SRHR:** Even in coverage of SRHR issues, men's voices still eclipse women's voices. Journalists accessed women sources on SRHR in only 43% of stories. This imbalance may be due to frequent presentation

**There are more male reporters covering SRHR in Southern Africa.** Men reporters and presenters 58% surpass women reporters and presenters in coverage of SRHR. Only 42% of women reporters identified in the monitoring period covered SRHR issues, while 48% of women presented on SRHR stories. The fact that men outnumber women in covering SRHR issues may be one reason why SADC media speak with more male sources on SRHR topic



Journalists in Eswatini undertaking media monitoring exercise during media training by GL in Eswatini December 2020. Picture by Thandokuhle Dlamini

# SRHR topic breakdown



Source: Gender and Media Progress Study 2020.

**Gender Based Violence:** Media monitoring shows that half of the stories across the region that covered SRHR were focused on Gender Based violence. Dominant themes covered on were classified as general issues. There is very little focus on prevention as well as support for survivors. This is a worrying phenomenon because the media loses an opportunity to be the solution to prevention of GBV and be a vehicle to send out highly needed information about support for survivors.



**HIV and AIDS:** The media is regressing in coverage of HIV and AIDS. The proportion of stories on HIV and AIDS made up just 6% of the total SRHR stories monitored in the GMPS. This trend is quite worrying, considering the resurgence of HIV and AIDS amongst the young people especially young women. Monitoring revealed that 26% women speak on HIV and AIDS in the Southern Africa media, while 33% women reporters report on this topic. Most of the stories covered in the region on HIV and AIDS are on

## 1.8m male, 88k female condoms distributed during lockdown

**Prevention Mission Report**  
 The Ministry of Health and Child Care (MOHCC) has announced that it has distributed 1.8 million male condoms and 88,000 female condoms during the lockdown period. The condoms were distributed to various health facilities across the country. The MOHCC stated that the distribution of condoms is a key strategy to prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The condoms were distributed to various health facilities across the country, including community health centres, clinics, and hospitals. The MOHCC also announced that it has distributed 1.8 million male condoms and 88,000 female condoms during the lockdown period. The condoms were distributed to various health facilities across the country. The MOHCC stated that the distribution of condoms is a key strategy to prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The condoms were distributed to various health facilities across the country, including community health centres, clinics, and hospitals.

Prevention 29% while the least covered stories are on Advocacy Treatment Rights General stories on HIV as well as Culture and tradition which were all covered at equal proportions.

**Sexual Diversity:** There is little coverage or in some instances no coverage of sexual diversity in most SADC countries making up proportion of only 2% of coverage under all SRHR topics which focused mainly on advocacy and protests. This continues to show a systemic devaluation of the topic and lack of diversity in the media. In most scenarios media houses do not consider this as a topic of importance hence it does not make it on the news agenda.



**Safe Abortion:** Abortion remains a predominantly contentious issue due to religious, medical and legal constraints across the region and in contentious issues media are less likely to engage women as they seek voices of authority who are mainly men. It becomes difficult to also access women's voices as women who undergo abortions may not be willing to talk as this is seen as a moral issue a taboo in society but also

illegal in many countries across the region. The dominant themes reported on regarding safe abortion included Legal and policy frameworks, Advocacy and campaigns and Abortion incidences. In the stories monitored for the GMPS the monitoring shows women speak the less on Safe Abortion and the sources quoted on these stories are mainly spokespersons.



theme covered on harmful practices across all media monitored in the GMPS was centred on Child marriage as well as traditional customary and religious practices.



**Harmful practices:** Although harmful practices such as child marriages are on the rise in the region, the coverage on the issue remains limited. This may also contribute to the lack of information and awareness on the issue. The GMPS reveals that women's voices are heard less on harmful practices. It is spokespersons who predominantly tell the stories on harmful practices. It is important to increase the voices of those most affected by harmful practices. Young people's voices also remain limited. Hearing and understanding things especially a young girl's perspective encourage empathy in a way that research and facts are unable to.<sup>1</sup> One of the best media strategies in reporting about child marriages is to move beyond awareness of the problem to covering solutions to the problem and successes<sup>2</sup>. The dominant

**Menstrual Health:** According to the GMPS the dominant themes covered on menstrual health include provision of free sanitary ware, Education on menstrual health including educating men and boys, Lack of support from teachers, family, peers. Again, of the menstrual health stories reported on men were the dominant sources of information.

**Maternal Health:** Media coverage of maternal health is one potential factor in how health policy agendas are set and funds are appropriated.<sup>3</sup> Of all Maternal health issues maternal mortality covered over 32% of maternal health stories covered in the region during the GMPS monitoring. This was followed by Access to health services antenatal, postnatal care (27%), Birth control, fertility, sterilisation, termination (14%), Other maternal health and financing (9%).



## Conclusions

There is a need for continued media engagement to strengthen news coverage. The media needs support to build and strengthen its capacity and its ability to view news through a gender lens here is a need for continued media

engagement to strengthen news coverage. The media needs support to build and strengthen its capacity and its ability to view news through a gender lens.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/articles/child-marriage-emerging-trends-in-the-media/>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.media-diversity.org/media-needs-to-go-beyond-raising-awareness-in-its-fight-against-child-marriages/>  
<sup>3</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290625082\\_Newspaper\\_coverage\\_of\\_maternal\\_health\\_in\\_Bangladesh\\_Rwanda\\_and\\_South\\_Africa\\_A\\_quantitative\\_and\\_qualitative\\_content\\_analysis](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290625082_Newspaper_coverage_of_maternal_health_in_Bangladesh_Rwanda_and_South_Africa_A_quantitative_and_qualitative_content_analysis)