



People marching through the city of Johannesburg during the 16 Days of No Violence Against Women 2009 campaign to reclaim women's right to safety.

Photo: Jennifer Elle Lewis

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND THE MEDIA

The prevalence of gender based violence (GBV) in Southern Africa is very high. Countries such as South Africa have among the highest levels of sexual violence in the world. The media has a critical role to play in reducing the levels of GBV by covering stories that promote prevention and ensuring that people who experience violence receive effective care and support. More often than not the media is part of the problem rather than of the solution. Yet the media has a huge potential role to play in changing attitudes, perceptions, and mindsets where gender violence is concerned.

Over the past decade, GL has conducted training workshops with the media in 12 SADC countries and all nine provinces of South Africa. GL and GEMSA have trained gender activists on strategic communications making use of the Sixteen Days of Activism campaign that extends from International Day of No Violence Against Women on 25 December to Human Rights Day on 10 December.



Coverage of gender violence has been monitored in the regional and global studies. GL has also worked with GEMSA chapters in conducting periodic monitoring of the Sixteen Days of Activism campaign. Key findings emerging from these studies are that:

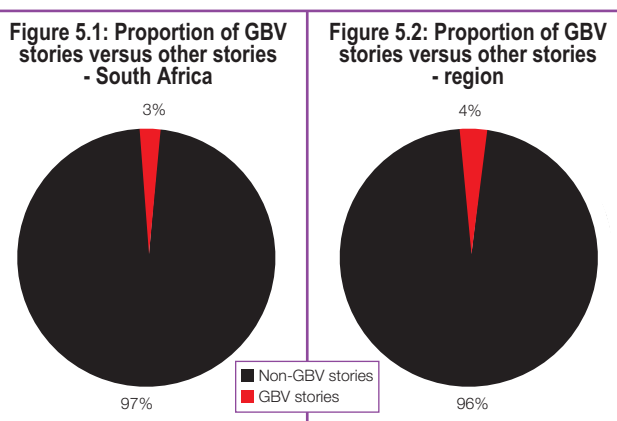
- To the extent gender issues are covered, gender violence tends to get more coverage. In the GMBS, gender specific issues constituted 2% of all

coverage, with GBV constituting half of this or 1% of the total;

- However, gender violence is often treated as relatively minor compared to other kinds of crime;
- Certain types of gender violence get much higher coverage, e.g. sexual assault;
- There is very little coverage of where those affected can get help;
- There is very little coverage of those who protest against gender violence;
- Much of the source information is from the courts. This has a heavy male bias;
- The voices of those affected are not heard;
- Experiences of women are often trivialised;
- Coverage is often insensitive, for example in the use of images, names etc. that could lead to secondary victimisation;
- Women are often portrayed as victims rather than survivors;
- Women are often portrayed as temptress (asked for it to happen);
- Men are portrayed as being unable to control their sexual urges;
- There is a tendency to exonerate the perpetrators;
- There is a tendency to sensationalise; and
- Most gender violence stories are written by men/court reporters.

This chapter examines the media's coverage of GBV compared with other topics. It also looks at the GBV sub-topics, who speaks on them, their function and who reports on these topics.

Topic



The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development calls on SADC member states to halve the levels of GBV by 2015. Figure 5.1 (South Africa) and figure 5.2 (regional) show that GBV stories and stories that mention GBV constitute only 3% of all coverage in South African media and 4% in the regional media, despite the high levels of GBV.

Sub topics

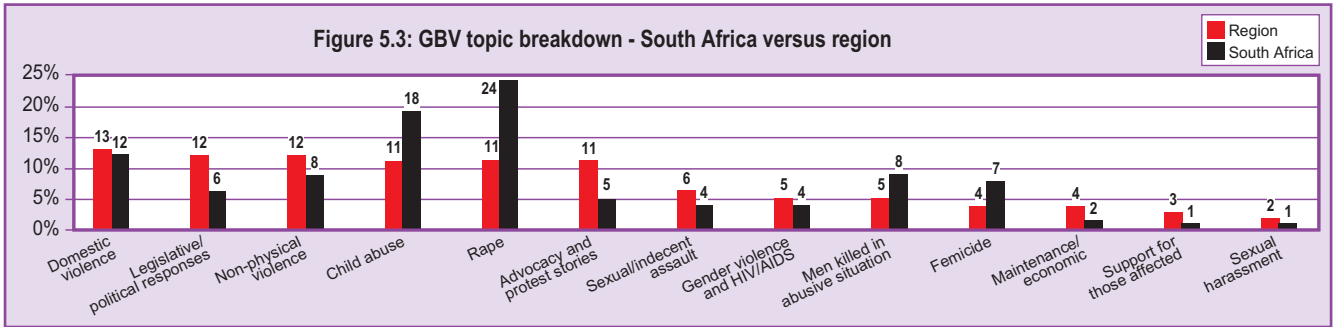
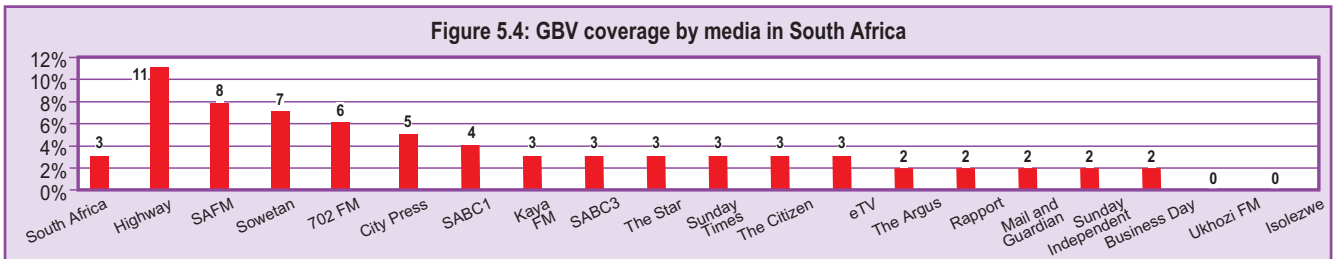


Figure 5.3 shows that rape (24% and 11% in the region) receives the most coverage in South African media followed by child abuse (18% and 11% in the region) and domestic violence (12% and 13% in the region). Non-physical abuse (8%), men killed in abusive situations (8%) and femicide (7%) receive the highest proportion of coverage after rape, child abuse and domestic violence.

Coverage of the relevant policy and legislation is very low in South Africa (6%) compared with (12%) in the region. Support to people affected by GBV and sexual harassment are largely absent in media coverage in South Africa and the region.



The highest proportion of GBV coverage was at the community radio station, *Highway Radio* at 11%. This was followed *SAFM* (8%), *Sowetan* (7%) and *702 Talk Radio* (6%). *Ukhozi FM*, the SABC radio station with the highest listenership in the country, had no GBV coverage during the period monitored.

Who speaks on GBV?

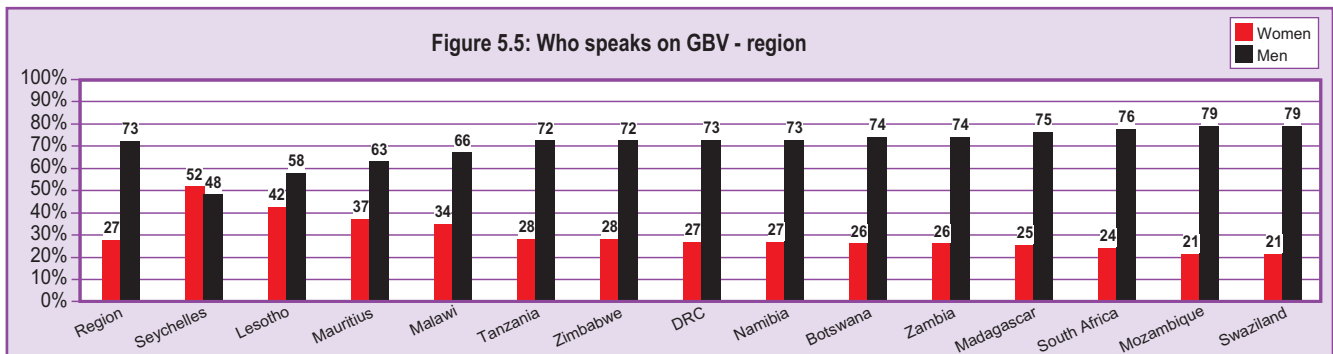


Figure 5.6 shows that men dominate as news sources in GBV stories in the region. The regional percentage of women sources is 27%, which is 3% higher than South Africa's average of 24%. Seychelles is the only country in the region with a higher proportion of women than male sources on GBV (52%) representation. Women's voices are least heard in this topic in Swaziland and Mozambique (21% and 22%, respectively).

Who speaks on what?

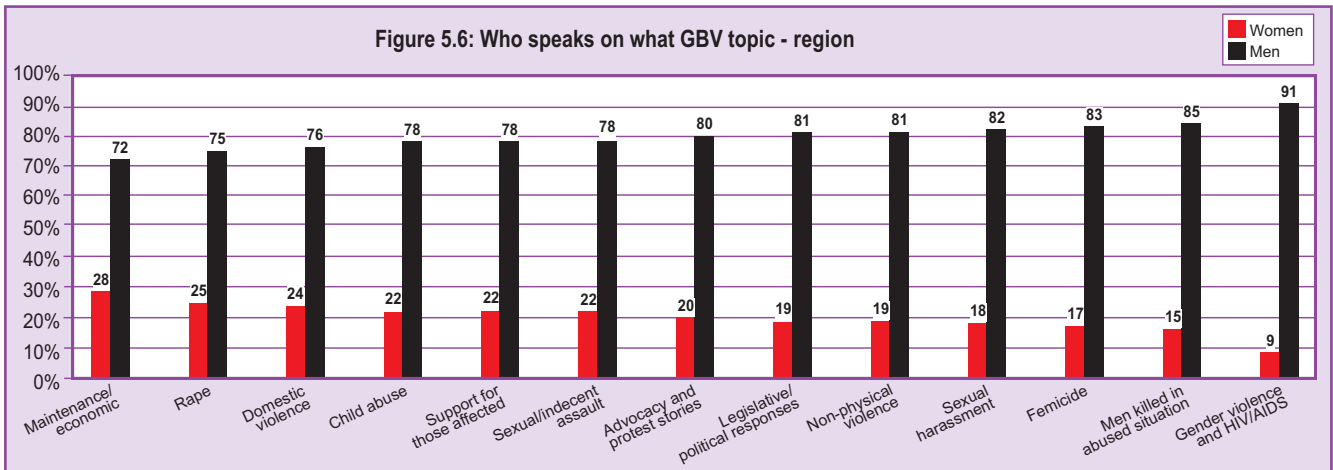
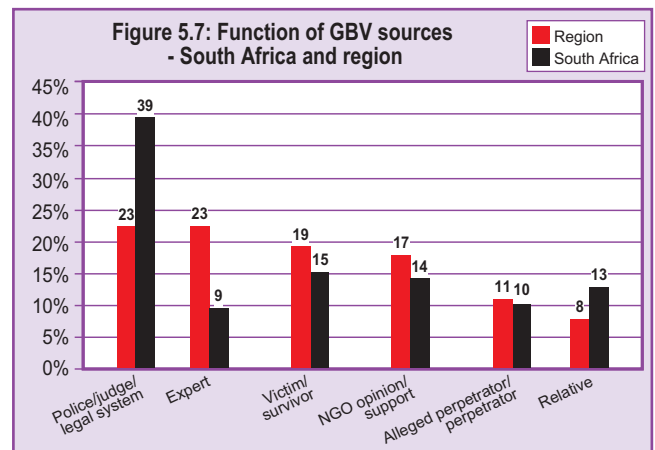


Figure 5.6 shows that men sources dominate across all sub-topics in the region. Women are better represented as sources on maintenance and economic stories (28%) followed by rape (25%). Women speak less on GBV and HIV and AIDS. This is despite the fact that they constitute a high proportion as victims/survivors.

Function of GBV sources

The voices of police/judges, the legal system and experts dominate in GBV coverage in the region (23%) and in South Africa (39%). In South Africa survivors constitute 15% of sources on GBV, lower than the regional average of 19%. Perpetrators constitute 10% of sources on GBV. Relatives in South Africa (13%) speak more on GBV than in the region

(8%). This points to the notion that others speak on behalf of victims/survivors.



Who reports on GBV?

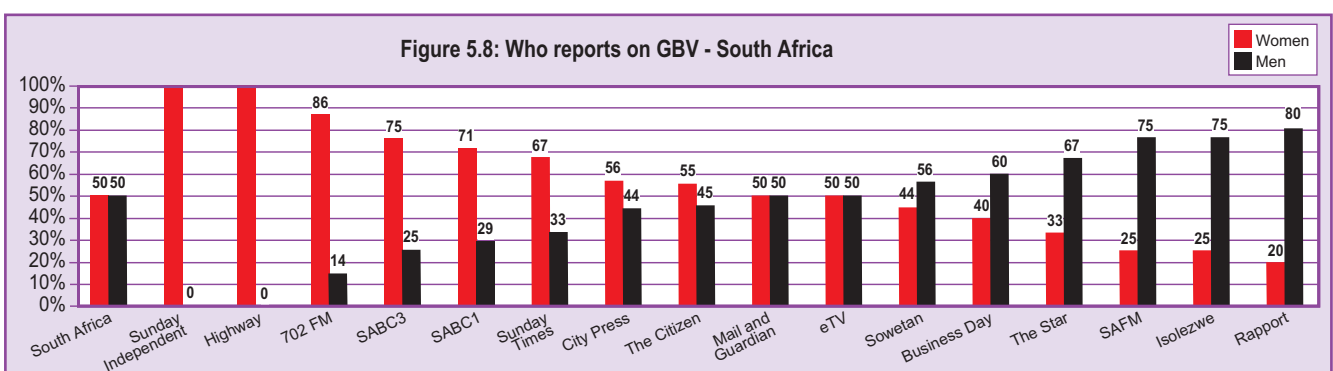


Figure 5.8 shows that there is an equal proportion of women and men reporters covering GBV. However, proportions differ significantly across media houses. For example in *Sunday Independent* and *Highway Radio*, all those who reported GBV

were female. The *Sunday Times*, *City Press*, *The Citizen*, *702 Talk Radio*, *SABC 3* and *SABC 1* have more female than male GBV reporters. The *Mail & Guardian* and *eTV* have equal proportion of men and women covering GBV. The *Sowetan*, *Business Day*, *The Star*,

SAFM, Isolezwe and Rapport have more men reporters than women reporters on this topic.

Linking these findings to the proportion of GBV yields interesting results. Although the Sunday Independent has women covering GBV, GBV constituted only 2% of coverage. Highway Radio

had the highest proportion of coverage on GBV and a 100% female crew.

SAFM and Sowetan rank second and third in the proportion of GBV coverage. Both these media entities have more men than women reporting on GBV.

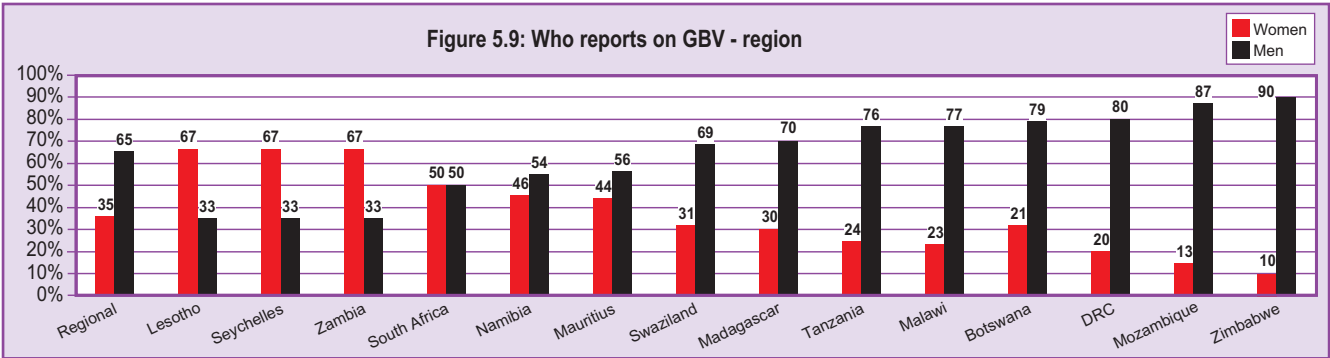


Figure 5.9 shows that men make up 65% of all reporters on GBV in the region. Lesotho, Seychelles and Zambia have the highest percentage of women reporters on GBV at 67%. South Africa follows with the same number of women and men reporters.

Men dominate in the rest of the countries with Zimbabwe recording the highest proportion (90%) followed by Mozambique at 87% and DRC at 80%. These figures are consistent with the low proportion of women reporters overall in these countries.

How GBV is covered

The following article that appeared in the *City Press* on the 29 November 2009 illustrates the power of reporting GBV through the voices of those most directly affected. In this article a women writes about her experiences of violence and how she found the courage to leave. The article is entitled *The beating never stopped*.

The story details the trauma of abuse, narrated by the survivor. After seven suicide attempts, four hospital admissions, a foetus flushed down the toilet and blows to her body a woman walks away from an abusive relationship. She wants one thing from her ex - an apology to her mother for what he made her go through.



THE BEATING NEVER STOPPED

After suicide attempts, hospital admissions and countless blows to her face, JACKIE MAPIENKO is glad her relationship is over

THE ONE thing that I still want from my ex is an apology for my mother.

When we split up, he sent me a text message apologising for everything he had ever done to me, but it's no apology. I have tried apologising on his behalf, but my mother always says more than that. On many occasions I could hear her sobbing in her bedroom after he had thrown me out of his house and I had run home to her.

She held back her tears every time she visited me in hospital after another episode of depression.

After I had received a packet of responses to my relationship, she read them to me and I cried myself sick.

She begged me to leave him, calling the police and ordering me to open a case against him. But I threatened to divorce her if she did anything to hurt him. Weeks went by when I didn't say a word to her. I hated her then for the way she held up to my sad tale.

But once through my misgendered rage did she turn her back on me when I visited her? I would call her from her bathroom after he had hit me and cry myself to sleep because that I hung up as soon as he mentioned the words "leave him".

Over was an intense relationship where his actions would be repeated if he thought I was talking to other men.

I was lying in yet another hospital bed, crying and screaming with my mother. I begged my mother to tell him. She made the call and he arrived.

"I was heavily sedated, but I still remember him saying dishearteningly: 'What are you doing here? I didn't know you were such a weakling.' My mother was standing a few metres away and heard.

That was the first and the last time he visited me in hospital. He told me to give up and stop putting stress on his situation. He left me there and continued with his life until I was crawling back to him.

The beating never stopped. One day, while I frantically searched for my ex boy after one of our fights, I roughly shoved his laptop bag too quickly. It fell to the floor.

He flipped, yelling, "If that thing is broken, I'm going to break your neck."

And then he tried.

He knocked me repeatedly on the head with his wooden and threatened me with a wire hanger. Then he locked me in the cupboard and let me out only when I promised to stop crying and screaming. He threw me on the bed and said he wanted me the biggest handful in my entire body while I cried and begged him to stop.

He said with me on a Sunday after he had left home, declaring his undying love for me. I wiped his tears and pretended never to leave him.

It also didn't help that our three-year relationship was a secret. One of his female friends told him I was a bitch who was trying to ruin his life and career. She was certain, he told me, that he would never date someone like me. He is a highly regarded professional who looks as if he would have a fly.

She hated me for what I was doing. I had to leave and I hated her for her ignorance. I felt trapped. Nobody would ever believe me about her Nine Gray persona. She ordered me to shut up. Big mouth about what went on in our relationship. I obeyed and the cycle continued.

I should have left the day he turned his back on me when I found out I was pregnant with his child. He told me love the baby would raise his perfect life and his future plans. He found me crying and sobbing in my bed one morning after another or sleeping eight, and he gave me \$100 and a large slab of chocolate.

"So you will do this thing," he said.

Although my gut was screaming hell, no, I agreed.

He sat with me on a Sunday after noon while I finished my three-week break down the toilet. I was in pain, and he was relieved. I went to tell the doctor's appointments alone.

When my gynaecologist asked where he was, I lied and said he was out of the country.

I told my mother and friends I had miscarried. The shame of that decision still haunts me.

I was obsessed with everything about him - his eyes, his braces - and I thought that he would change when I thought was the one stick in his armor.

We walked to school on a lonely road on the way from Harare airport earlier that year.

A long-haired dog at a age had gone wrong. He was upset with the service. I was nervous about his anxiety. I had time to relax down so we could enjoy our treat and he told me not to be disappointed. We both ate and continued his loving tone. He held me from this one.

"My phone's dying. I don't have money." I laughed, but it did me deaf ears. He sneered and I had to hitch a lift, sneered and alone.

When I finally got to his house, I found him watering his garden with all my belongings already packed on the couch.

The drama was finally over.

He was tired and so was I. After four hospital admissions, seven visits to my mother, countless hours in my car and a heart that still loved him regardless, I am glad it ended.

And I thank God for my mother, who taught me that I did not serve my life. Hopefully one day she will see that too.

He knocked me repeatedly on the head with his sneaker and thrashed me with a wire hanger. Then he locked me in the cupboard

The details are vivid and the horror of living through abuse and returning to this dead-end scenario is well captured. If the story aims to unnerve it does this, well. The survivor takes responsibility of going back to this horror relationship. She takes responsibility of hearing but not listening to advice, especially her mother's.

The burden of abuse is carried by many and the survivor wants her ex to carry his. The apology to her mother is the abuser signing on the dotted line - him taking responsibility for his violent behaviour.

It was not meant to be an academic exercise so the lack of statistics and other voices does not deter from the brutality of gender based violence meted out against this individual.

The writer refers to her former husband as one who exhibited a “Mr Nice Guy persona”. In this instance, the phrase caricatures an abuser who would be overly nice in front of the survivor's friends or relatives so much that if she complained to them, they would not believe her.

The story treats the subject matter and the subject with care and respect. It encourages women to walk away and not shoulder the burden of abuse. It encourages women to break their silence with courage.

The story appears with a picture showing a strong and determined woman (survivor). It is the only feature on the page under the section entitled: Viewpoint and Analysis.

Conclusion

South Africa has among the highest levels of GBV across the world, yet GBV constituted only 3% of the total news coverage during the monitoring period. GBV is clearly not a priority in the media.

John Moerane from the Lethabong Legal Advice Centre had this to say at the consultative workshop: “The media has to speak to women on the ground and in rural areas to ask them about how gender violence affects them. They have very important stories to tell. The media ignores them and so no one, not even government, knows about their hardships.”

The media has a critical role to play to put GBV high up on the public agenda. In doing so, the media has to ensure that survivors of GBV speak for themselves and articulate their own stories and needs.