



GL board member Patricia Made (left) emphasises a point during the GMPS consultative workshop in Harare on 19 August 2010.

Photo: Thabani Mpfu

COVER AGE OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

The prevalence of gender-based violence 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 to ensure that people who experience violence receive effective care and support.

The media is more often than not part of the problem rather than of the solution when it comes to coverage of gender violence. 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 which 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 originates from the courts, which have 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 temptresses (asking 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.
- Most gender violence stories are written by men court reporters.

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

Figure 5.1: Proportion of stories on GBV - Zimbabwe

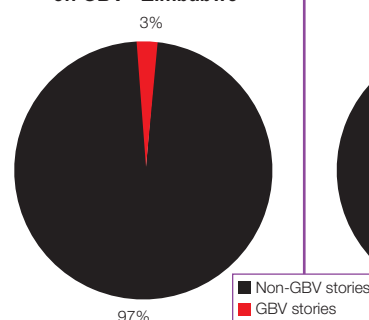
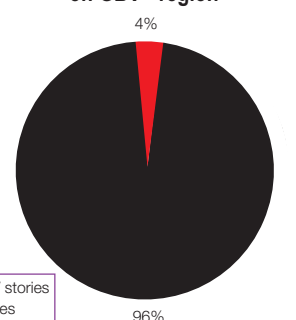


Figure 5.2: Proportion of stories on GBV - region



The SADC protocol on Gender and Development calls for SADC member states to halve the prevailing levels of gender-based violence by 2015. Figure 5.1 (Zimbabwe) and figure 5.2 (region) show that GBV stories and stories that mention GBV constitute only 3% of total coverage in Zimbabwe, slightly lower than the regional average of 4%. This is despite the high levels of GBV in the country and region.

Sub topics

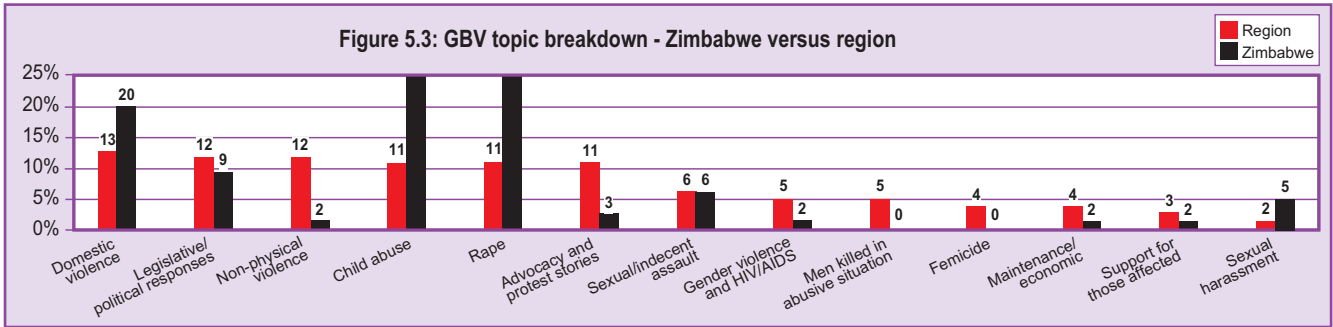


Figure 5.3 shows that child abuse (25%), rape (25%) and domestic violence (20%) received the highest proportions of coverage of GBV. The regional coverage of these topics is significantly lower than in Zimbabwe. For example, domestic violence constitute 13% of stories, followed by legislative/political response at 12%. There was no coverage in Zimbabwe of femicide and men killed in abusive relationships.

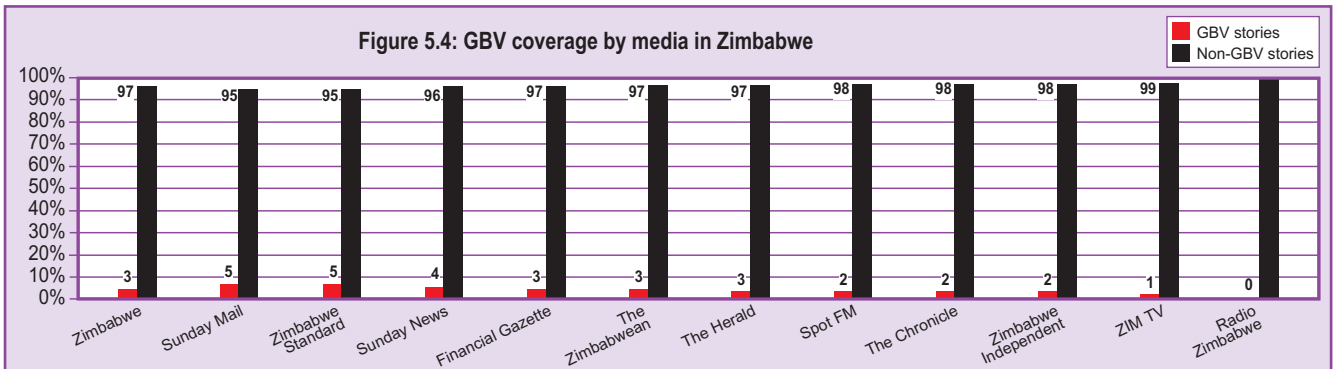


Figure 5.4 shows that GBV receives more coverage from the weekly newspapers *Sunday Mail* (5%), *Zimbabwe Standard* (5%) and *Sunday News* (4%). There were reports of GBV on Radio Zimbabwe, while ZTV had the lowest level of coverage at 1%.

Who speaks on GBV?

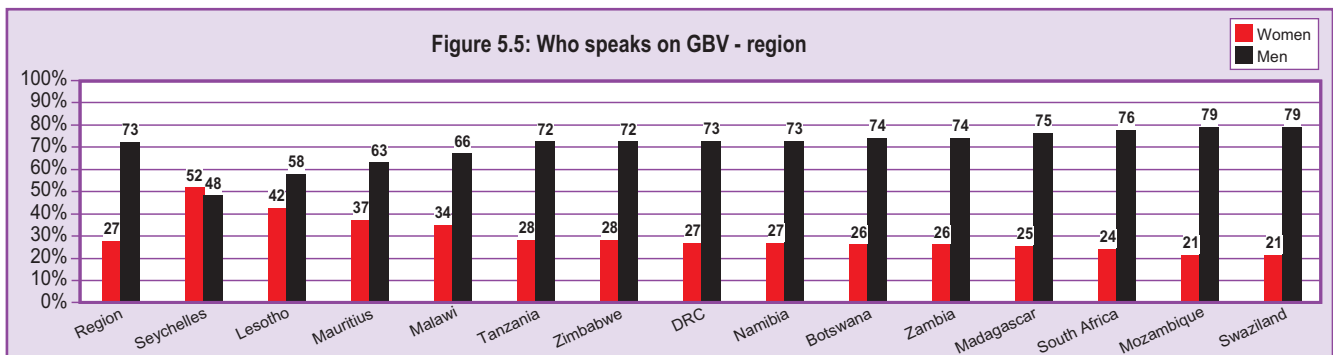


Figure 5.5 illustrates that men dominate as news sources in gender-based violence stories in the region. The regional percentage of women sources is 27%, which is 1% lower than Zimbabwe's average of 28%. Generally, women speak less frequently on GBV than men across the region, with the exception of Seychelles reporting 52% of stories as sourced from women. Women's voices on GBV are less heard in Swaziland and Mozambique.

Who speaks on what?

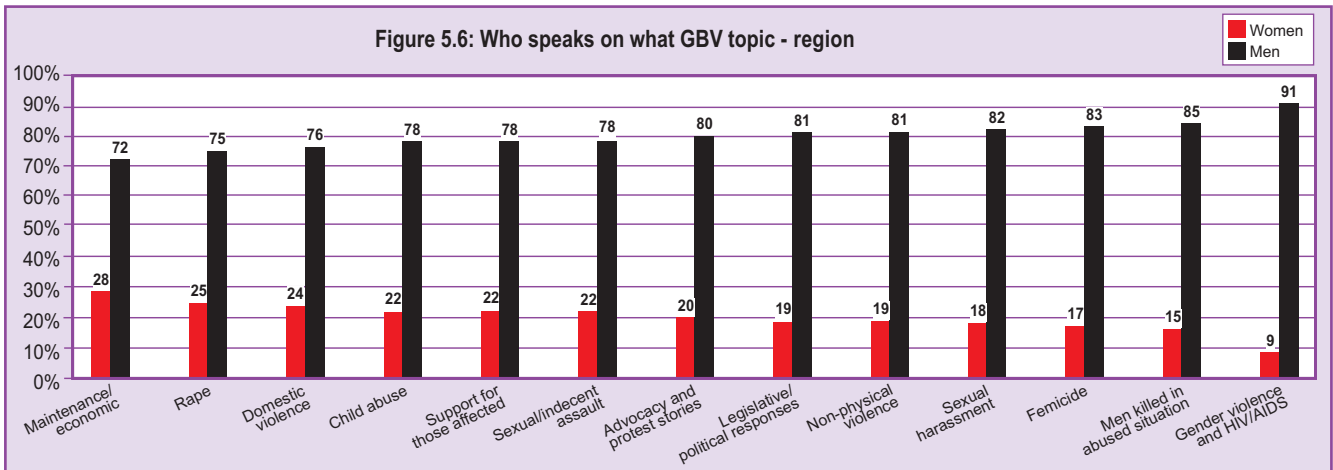


Figure 5.6 shows that men sources dominate across all sub-topics in the region. Women are better represented as sources on maintenance/economic issues (28%), rape (25%), domestic violence (24%) child abuse (22%) and support for those affected (22%). This is despite the fact that they constitute a high proportion of victims/survivors.

victims/survivors (22%) and relatives (16%). In the region, experts (23%) and NGOs (17%) are also major sources of GBV stories.

Who reports on GBV?

Function of GBV sources

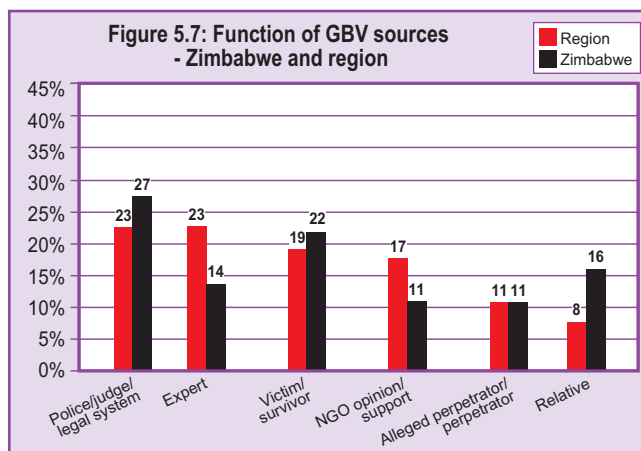


Figure 5.7 shows that the major sources of GBV stories in Zimbabwe originate from the police and/or judges and the legal system (27%),

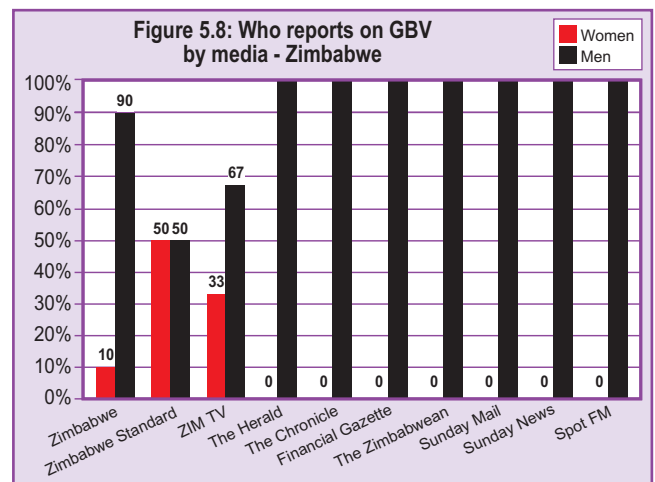
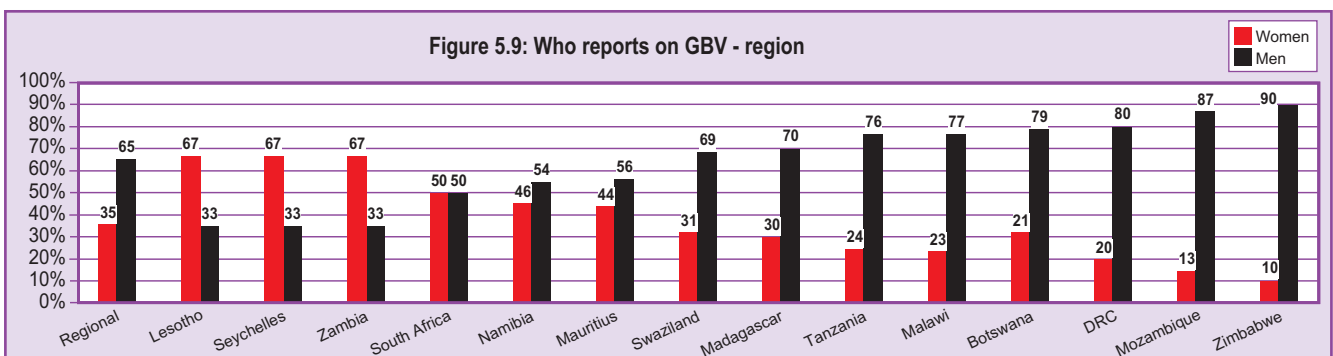


Figure 5.8 shows an unexpected finding that women do not report on GBV, except for *The Zimbabwe Standard*, with equal proportion of women and men and ZTV with 33% of women. This could be understood in the context of the fact that there are relatively few women journalists in the Zimbabwean newsrooms.



in the story. This has the effect of reinforcing the man's innocence and solicits for sympathy for him.

The story appears at the bottom of the front page of the "Leisure" pullout section. Its prominent placement among leisure and entertainment stories trivialises the issue of domestic violence.

Conclusions

The Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Gender and Women's Affairs, Silvia Utete-Masango, told participants during the consultative meeting that gender-based violence cases in Zimbabwe were on the increase, but that the media chose to ignore such stories. She noted that in most cases coverage of gender-based violence is sensationalised to boost sales of newspapers. She welcomed the formation of the ZMC and urged the regulatory authority to put in place codes of ethics for the media to improve the quality of stories.

Editors and journalists noted that due to lack of resources, coverage of gender-based violence was incident based. They also over-rely on court documents as they do not have resources to gather news from communities. However, others argued



Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Gender and Women's Affairs, Silvia Utete-Masango.
Photo: Gender Links

that lack of resources was not the main problem, because reporters cover political and sport stories across the country. They cited "desktop" journalism as the main problem.

Although Zimbabwe was the second country to ratify the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, participants noted that it ranked among the worst performers and they expressed doubt about whether the country would be able to meet the target of halving GBV by 2015.