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Photo: Colleen Lowe Morna

# GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND THE MEDIA

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 ensure that people who are victims of violence receive effective care and support.

The media has a huge potential role to play in changing attitudes, perceptions and mindsets where GBV 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 Human Rights Day on 10 December to International Day of No Violence Against Women on 25 December.

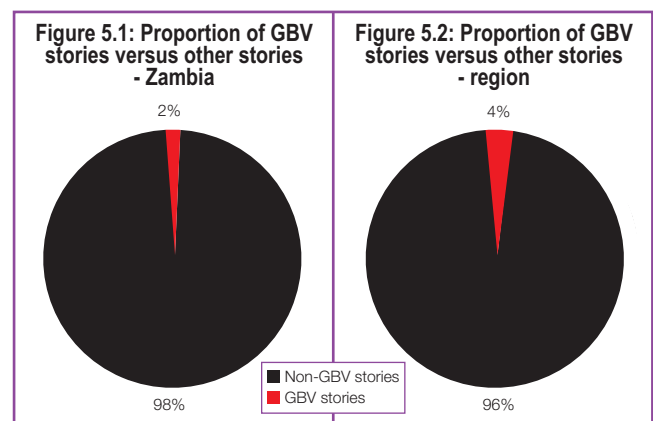
Coverage of gender violence has been monitored in the regional and global studies. GL has also worked with GEMSA chapters in conducting periodic monitoring of the Sixteen Days of Activism campaign. Key findings emerging from these studies are that:

- To the extent that gender issues are covered, GBV tends to get more coverage. In the GMBS, gender-specific issues constituted 2% of all coverage, with GBV constituting half of this total;

- Gender violence is often treated as relatively unimportant compared to other kinds of crime;
- Certain types of GBV receive 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 and names that could lead to secondary victimisation;
- Women are often portrayed as victims rather than survivors;
- Women are often portrayed as temptresses (i.e., “asking” for it to happen);
- Men are portrayed as being unable to control their sexual and violent urges;
- There is a tendency to exonerate perpetrators;
- There is a tendency to sensationalise such incidents; and
- Most GBV stories are written by men or court reporters.

This chapter examines the media's coverage of GBV compared to other topics. It also looks at the GBV subtopics: 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 gender-based violence by 2015. Figure 5.1 (Zambia) and figure 5.2 (region) show that GBV stories and stories that mention GBV constitute only 2% of all coverage in Zambia and 4% in regional media despite the high levels of GBV.

## Sub topics

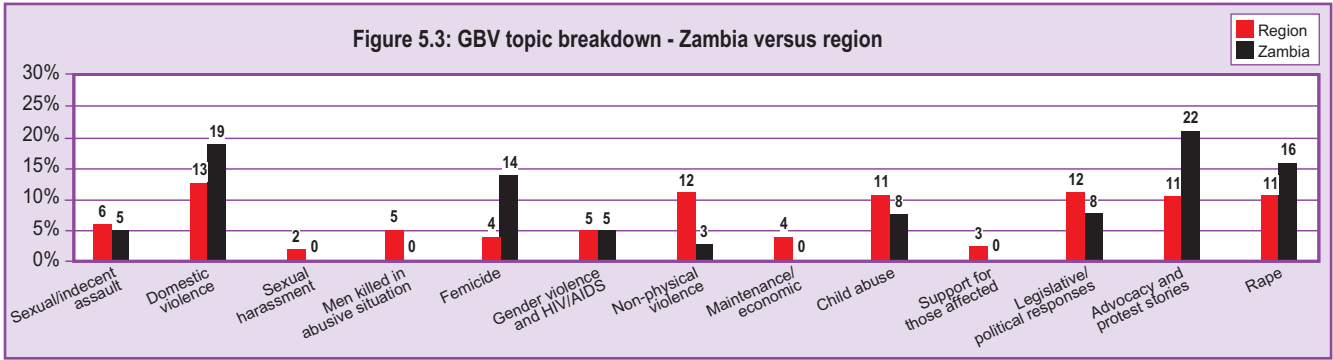


Figure 5.3 shows that in Zambia GBV stories that received the most coverage include advocacy and protest stories (22%), domestic violence (19%), rape (16%) and femicide (14%). These trends are similar

to the regional findings. During the monitoring period there were no stories on sexual harassment, men killed in abusive relationships, or support for those affected.

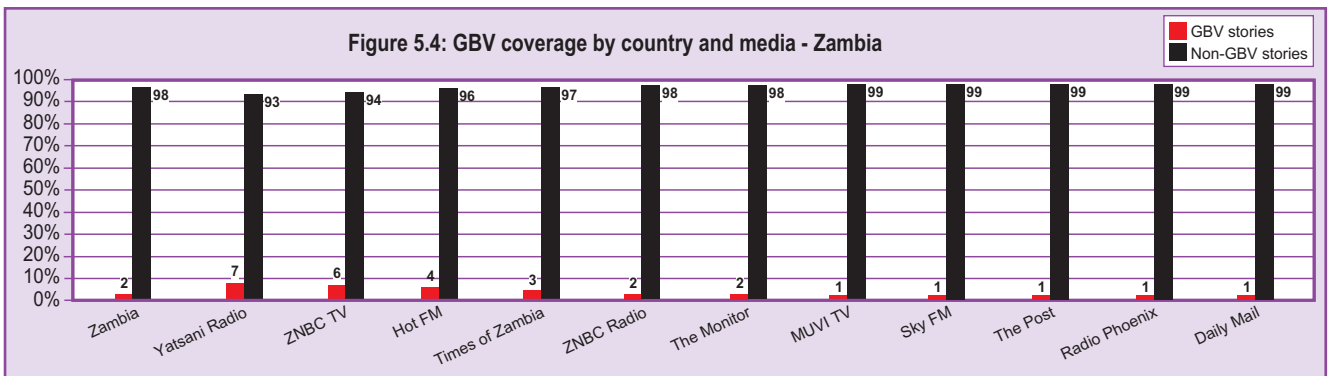


Figure 5.4 shows that GBV coverage varies from one media entity to another. *Yatsani* community radio at 7% has the highest proportion of coverage, followed by *ZNBC TV* (6%), *Hot FM* (4%) and the *Times of Zambia* (3%). *ZNBC Radio* and *The Monitor* are both at 2% while the rest of the media houses are at 1% each.

## Who speaks on GBV

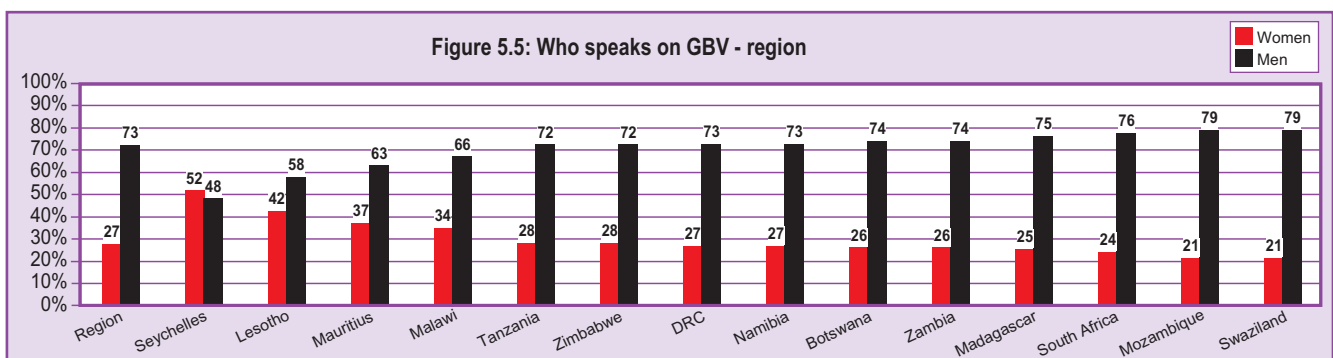


Figure 5.5 shows that men dominate as news sources in GBV stories in the region. The regional percentage of women sources is 27%, which is 3.8% higher than Zambia's average of 26%. Seychelles is the only country in the region with a higher proportion of women than male sources on GBV at 52% representation. Women's voices are least heard on this topic in Swaziland and Mozambique (21% and 22% respectively).

## Who speaks on what?

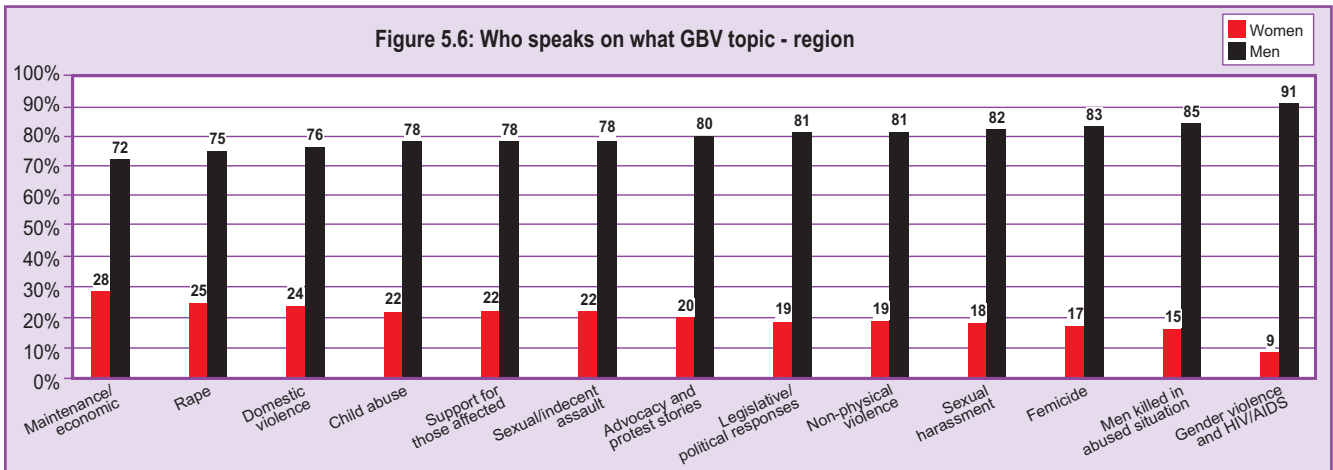


Figure 5.6 shows that male sources dominate across all GBV subtopics in the region. Women are better represented as sources on maintenance and economic issues (28%), followed by rape (25%). Women speak less on GBV and HIV/AIDS - this despite of the fact that they constitute a high proportion of victims/survivors.

In the region police and experts dominated as news sources.

## Reporters - GBV topic

## Function of GBV source

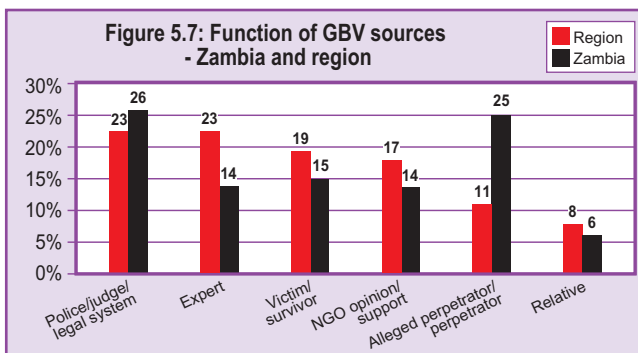


Figure 5.7 shows that the voices of the police and judicial system (26%) and alleged perpetrators (25%) dominate in Zambia. Victims/survivors speak less frequently at 15% and relatives the least at 6%.

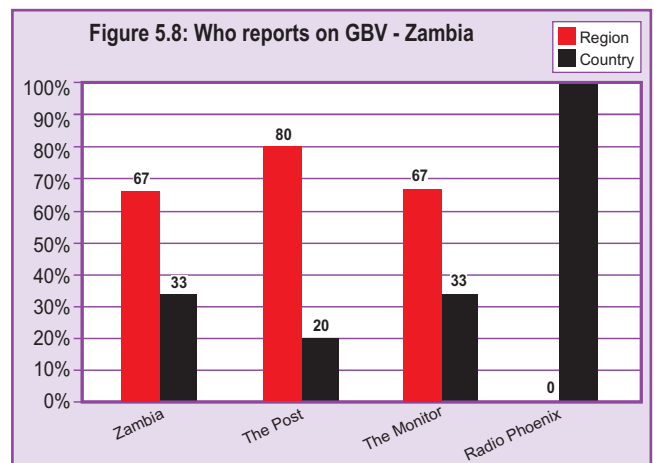


Figure 5.8 shows that in Zambia women (67%) report more on GBV than men (33%). However, there are variations across media from *The Post* with the proportion of women reporters on GBV at 80%, to Radio Phoenix with 100% men reporting on GBV.

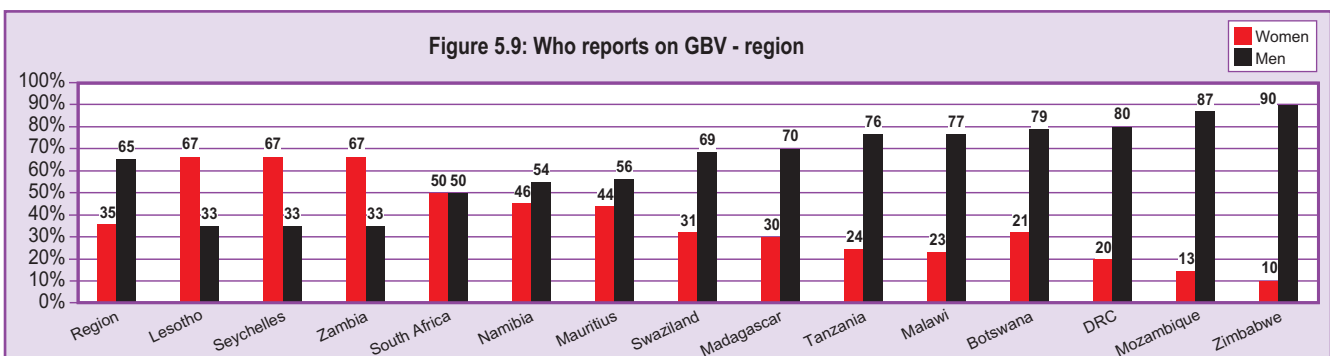


Figure 5.9 shows that men make up 65% of all reporters on GBV in the region. In Zambia the proportion of women reporters (67%) is higher than that of men. Lesotho and Seychelles are the other countries with the highest percentage of women reporters on GBV at 67% each. They are followed by South Africa, which has the same

number of women and men reporters. Men dominate in the other SADC countries with Zimbabwe recording the highest proportion at 90%, followed by Mozambique at 87% and the DRC at 80%. These figures are consistent with the low proportion of women reporters overall in these countries.

## How gender-based violence is covered

### Women as victims

The qualitative monitoring yielded examples of GBV coverage that portrayed women as victims, for example, the story "Angela Nyirenda sobs as she watches son being 'abducted'", the *Times of Zambia* (27 October 2009). The story is about a celebrity female musician whose child is taken away by his father in the midst of a custody battle. The father of the child sued the mother, Angela, for custody of the boy, but the local court dismissed the case on grounds that the case be heard in Lusaka and not Copperbelt. The father takes the boy away by force, leaving the mother crying at the court. In the entire story the mother apparently does not say anything. The story portrays the mother of the child as a helpless victim, desperate and with no solution to the problem. This helpless victim portrayal is reinforced by the image of the woman sobbing as her son was snatched. The photographer missed the real drama of the father snatching the child who was crying and trying to jump from a moving vehicle and chose to focus on the woman, thereby stereotyping her as an undeserving mother.

### Women speaking out

An example of a gender-aware story of women speaking out is the article "Police opens docket against Chief Simamba" in the *Times of Zambia* (19 October 2009). The story is about a woman who was allegedly tied to a tree and caned several times on her buttocks by a traditional leader for buying charcoal in the village. She was left tied on a tree while holding her baby for four hours. The alleged assault took place while the woman was trying to earn a living through buying charcoal from rural areas for resale in urban areas. The woman was assaulted despite the fact that she had a valid permit from the forestry department. This story is a first-hand account of a woman who is assaulted by a traditional leader. The narrative allows the reader insight into the daily life of the woman. It is a story common to many women who labour under difficult conditions and are subject and/or vulnerable to abuse, but do not have the opportunity or are silenced by the media. This story presents the woman as courageous and helps to encourage others to speak out. She takes charge of the matter, reports it, and ensures the police open a docket. This shows the action of a woman who will defend her rights, regardless of the status of the attacker. It has transformative value in that it can spur other women who face such brutality to act and defend their rights.

## POLICE OPEN DOCKET AGAINST CHIEF SIMAMBA

POLICE in Siavonga have opened a docket against Chief Simamba of Siavonga District on allegations that he assaulted a 34-year-old woman.

Sources at Siavonga police station confirmed to ZANIS in an interview that they had recorded a statement from the woman who is alleged to have been physically assaulted by the traditional leader.

The victim, a resident of Kanyebele township on Friday filed in an official complaint against the chief at the police station.

She said in an interview she decided to report the matter to the police because the traditional leader had inflicted so much pain on her body.

She narrated that on Thursday last week, Chief Simamba ordered his retainers to apprehend her when she went to buy charcoal from villagers in the chiefdom.

"I was arrested by the chief's retainers last week on Thursday after I was found buying charcoal from some villagers in the chiefdom," she said. The victim said upon being handcuffed and dragged to the chief's palace by the retainers, she was ordered to have her hands tied around a tree.

She said after tying her hands, the chief pulled out a sjambok which he used to cane her on the buttocks.

"I was canned several times on the buttocks by

narrated the woman.

After being canned, the chief allegedly ordered that she was left in the scorching sun with her child on her back and was left to stay there from 14:00 to 18:00 hours.

She said the chief could not compromise despite explaining to him that she had bought a permit from the department of forestry authorising her to buy charcoal.

"I tried to reason with the chief telling him that I had bought a permit from the forestry department worth K108,000 but he could not listen and he went ahead canning me," she said.

The victim confirmed that she was not the first one to receive such kind of treatment from the traditional leader saying several people that were dealing in charcoal business had suffered at the hands of the chief.

And a medical report signed from Siavonga District Hospital which was availed to ZANIS indicated that the woman had suffered swollen buttocks and a painful left arm.

Police have indicated that investigations into the matter are currently going on and that the chief is likely to appear in court soon.

But when contacted on phone over the allegation, Chief Simamba promised



### MUTATI Construction firms told to form consortium

By Times Reporter THE Government has asked local construction companies to form a consortium and bid for the construction of the Lusaka East Multi-Facility Economic Zone (MFEZ) whose works is estimated at US\$500 million.

Commerce, Trade and Industry Minister, Felix Mutati said the Government's view was that local companies take interest and challenge to compete for big projects to better themselves.

Mr Mutati said in an

## Conclusions

During the consultative workshop participants noted that the low proportion of coverage of GBV is not a true reflection of the level of GBV in Zambia. Journalists argued that the challenges were on resources to gather news in the communities where most of these issues happen. Due to lack of resources, journalists say they are forced to rely on court documents or information from the police.

Madube Pasi-Siyanya, a freelancer and GEMSA Zambia chairperson, observed: "One of the reasons why stories in the media are boring is that

journalists prefer officials and sources in authority even on issues happening in communities. The stories have gaps, (and) missing information because the affected people will not have been sourced."

Participants expressed doubt on Zambia's ability to halve GBV by 2015 as set in the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development. However, Christine Kalamwina, director of social, legal and governance in the Cabinet office: gender in development division, said the government will support the measures, strategies and practical ways of curbing GBV.