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Impact of Comprehensive Media Representation on Offences against Women

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: *In the light of gender stereotype and gender sensitive content, the purpose of this paper is to review the impact of comprehensive media representation on offences against women, along with the escalated media consumptions on criminal cases involving women. The paper also addresses the biased approach of media in these cases resulting in women exploiting this trend to frame men.*

Approach: *The paper uses case studies and statistical data to analyse the transition brought through such accelerated media representation.*

Findings: *The paper concentrates on the different approaches of media on cases of crime against women and the resonating effect of it on decisions made by the court. It also discusses the lack of adequate media follow up and its impact.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Media reporting is an important indicator through which to measure progress towards shifting social and cultural norms that reinforce or challenge the place of violence against women in our society. How the mainstream news media report violence against women is significant if levels of violence are to be reduced and ultimately eliminated.

It is true that we live in the 21st century, but even to this date, social malice and malpractices are still very much prevalent which are reminiscent of the past. One of such social atrocities is Violence Against Women (VAW). It is an accepted fact that this is a malevolent that world we live in, and despite liberalisation and modernisation of woman in the West and urban locales within our country, women at large still face social brutality, torture, limited opportunities in the public sphere, etc.

Mass media play a crucial role in shaping the general awareness of the society about violence considering the way in which they represent violence in their reports, language and narrative, and the audience they reach. One of the goals of this research is to analyse media contents and examine whether the media are aware of that fact and whether the topics of gender-based violence are properly treated and attended to in their coverage.

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II. DO THE VISUAL MEDIA HAVE ANY RELATION WITH THE CRIMES BEING PERPETRATED ON WOMEN TODAY?

In this paper it is explained how the images of women are being projected as pitiable, tortured beings tormented by malevolent atrocities by the visual media, in a country like India where women are traditionally given high esteem and worshipped as archetype deities. Rape, murder, dowry deaths, female infanticide... it's an endless list. It must be said that most of the violence and crimes perpetrated on women goes unreported in India, like elsewhere around the world. Such crimes, which do make it to the news bulletin, depict just a fraction of the reality and are extremely small in numbers compared to crimes perpetrated on men.

III. GENDERED PORTRAYALS OF VIOLENCE IN POPULAR MEDIA

News media, especially, is thought to play a critical role in shaping public opinion. The way the news is framed including how individuals and events are portrayed can influence personal, political, policy and social justice responses. While there is increasing emphasis on the potential for media to play a role in the prevention of violence against women, past research suggests the content of news reports frequently misrepresents the issue. For instance, while there are several ways to embed and promote understanding of the social constructions of male perpetrated violence within news coverage (e.g., by acknowledging underlying societal and gender-based factors), research has found that few media reports do so. A body of research work shows that instead, there is a tendency for media reports of violence against women to use event-based reporting or 'episodic' framing. News coverage that focuses on discrete incidents or events located at specific places and times (episodic framing) tends to elicit individualistic rather than societal attributions of responsibility, thus obscuring from its audience the notion that violence against women is a systemic social problem.

IV. TOTAL CASES REGISTERED UNDER CRIME AGAINST WOMEN (2019)

Media has a huge hand in this exponential increase in crime reports all over India especially in rural areas, as media is the fourth pillar of democracy which communicates, understands the emotion and sentiments of common people which is reflected in their reporting and also augments in informing the different provisions available to them in cases of violence against women.

Despite growing interest in analysing media portrayals of violence against women, much of the research to date has exclusively focused on news coverage of high-profile stories or retrospectively selected new stories about one type of violence only, most often homicide or

rapes.

V. CASE STUDY

The gang-rape in Delhi on December 16, 2012 provides a model for the spread of information across the globe through the media. The timeline pertaining to this case shows that in a short period of time, information is able to reach across the globe through major media sources. This case is a quintessential development of social movements pertaining to violence against women. However it is apparent that the media representations are variable, resulting in many different variations of the real story. Even though online media facilitates a rapid spread of information, there are real risks of inaccurate initial reporting that are often perpetuated by subsequent reports. Ultimately, the rapid spread of information by the media may be variable, yet it acts as a powerful tool in the formation of social movements around acts of violence against women such as this case.

VI. INFLUENCE OF MEDIA ON WHAT PEOPLE PERCEIVE AS CRIME

The media plays a key role in agenda setting in relation to crime and deviance. Agenda setting refers to the media's influence over the issues that people think about. The mass media clearly can't report every single criminal or deviant act that occurs, and media personnel are necessarily very selective in the incidents that they choose either to report or ignore. Naturally people are only able to discuss and form opinions about the crime and deviance that they have been informed about, provided by the agenda setting media. This results in people's perceptions of crime and deviance in society being influenced by what media personnel choose to include or leave out of their newspapers, television programmes, films or websites. Media representation overwhelmingly therefore influences what people believe about crime regardless of whether these impressions are true or not.

VII. BIASED APPROACH OF MEDIA

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) remains one of the most persistent barriers to gender equality and sustainable development. Estimates indicate that 1 in 3 women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence during their lifetime. It is a plague which is systematic and global, yet persistent in its invisibility and biased representation in media across societies. Current extent of such reporting far from accurately reflect the prevalence and magnitude of this global but largely silent phenomenon. In addition, knowledge and capacity gaps among media professionals on how to approach the topic in an ethical and informed manner risk resulting in insensitive, misguided or even misleading reporting.

The media are our windows towards the world. Gender-based violence englobes difficult and often context specific and norm driven questions of power, rights and obligations. Media can impact on the achievement of gender equality, since they have the power and capacity to inspire change in norms, attitudes and behaviours by determining whose voices are heard, why, when and in what way.

Charges of media bias draw their strength from the widespread assumption that the media should be unbiased or objective, particularly in their treatment of politics and public issues. To be sure, there are coexisting traditions, such as “watchdog” journalism, enterprise or investigative reporting, interpretive journalism, literary journalism, advocacy journalism, and most recently, civic journalism. Since the early twentieth century,

Bias is frequently conceptualised negatively, as the absence of one or more of these conditions. The term is variously used to refer to distortions of reality, favouritism or one-sidedness in presenting controversies, and closed-minded or partisan attitudes. In the process, it has been treated both as an independent variable in explaining the character of news coverage and a dependent variable to be explained by the news production process

Ethical journalism is inseparable from fact-based and gender-transformative reporting;

- Through improved reporting, media has the power to illuminate the extent as well as the individual and collective implications of VAWG for humanity;
- Media can help stop violence against women and girls by breaking the silence and regularly reporting about it;
- Media can shape public opinion and change the perception of these crimes in favour of a human-rights based awareness.

VIII. CONCLUSION

There is growing international interest in the portrayal of violence against women in the news and information media and the impact that reporting may have on community understanding, attitudes and behaviours. To date, most research attention has focused on how media messages about violence against women and their children are framed in the news. This body of work provides strong evidence about predominant patterns in the way stories are presented; namely that media offer their audiences overly-simplistic, inadequate and distorted representations of the extent and nature of the problem.

There is an unhealthy trend that journalists are urged to embrace multi-media reporting. Journalists increasingly use platforms, such as Twitter, to break news quickly before writing up

full articles. While the research to date suggests the demand for shorter, bite sized pieces of information is less compatible with responsible and sensitive coverage of violence against women, there is an urgent need to better understand online news production, reporting and audience contribution.
