

The Role of Media and Communication in Combating Violence Against Women: An Integrated Legal and Media Perspective

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Abstract:

Media is one of the most powerful tools that contribute to shaping social and cultural awareness. It plays a key role in highlighting women's issues and enhancing their status in society. With the evolution of traditional and digital media, women have gained an increasing presence in the media landscape, whether as content consumers or creators. However, this presence still faces many challenges, ranging from stereotypical portrayals of women in some media outlets to the underrepresentation of women in media decision-making positions.

Keywords: Strategy, Media, Communication, Coverage, Violence, Women

Introduction:

Violence against women is a complex social phenomenon that requires the combined efforts of various stakeholders, including the media and legal institutions. As a tool for disseminating information and influencing public opinion, the media can play a crucial role in shedding light on issues related to violence against women, raising awareness about its causes and consequences, and contributing to the transformation of stereotypes associated with it. On the other hand, laws and legislations establish the legal framework for combating this phenomenon and punishing perpetrators. Achieving effective results in reducing violence against women requires an integrated approach between the media and the legal system.

I. Women in the Media: Between Stereotypes and Reality

1.1 Representation of Women in Media

Despite progress in media coverage of women's issues, many media outlets still portray women in traditional and limited roles, such as housewives, secondary figures in public life, or mere decorative elements in advertisements. The focus is often placed on women's appearances rather than their intellectual and professional achievements, reinforcing gender stereotypes that perpetuate discrimination. Media is one of the key tools shaping social and cultural perceptions. While it sometimes reflects reality, it frequently reproduces stereotypes and influences how society perceives

gender roles. Despite the advancements in media in recent decades, women's representation remains constrained in terms of both quantity and quality.¹

1.2 Media Coverage of Women's Issues

Media coverage of women's issues constitutes a crucial dimension of contemporary public communication because it influences not only the visibility of women in society but also the ways in which gender-related concerns are understood, interpreted, and prioritized by audiences and decision-makers. The media play a powerful agenda-setting and framing role by determining which issues receive attention, how frequently they are discussed, which sources are given authority, and what explanations are offered for problems such as gender-based violence, discrimination, political underrepresentation, unequal employment opportunities, reproductive rights, and women's participation in public life. Consequently, the representation of women in news and other media content is not simply a matter of visibility; it also concerns the quality, context, language, and perspectives through which women's experiences are presented. Research on gender and media has demonstrated that women have historically been underrepresented in news production and coverage and are often more likely to appear in relation to personal, family, emotional, or victim-related narratives, while men tend to receive greater visibility as experts, political actors, institutional representatives, and authoritative sources. Media coverage of women's issues often relies on sensationalism and emotion rather than in-depth analysis. Topics such as violence against women or workplace equality are frequently addressed in a seasonal or superficial manner, rather than focusing on structural solutions to these problems. Media should strive to present a more balanced portrayal of women, highlighting their successes across various fields rather than restricting them to traditional roles.²

• Empowering Women in the Media Sector

Women's presence in leadership positions within media organizations should be strengthened to ensure fair representation of their issues.³

• Establishing Responsible Media Policies

Media outlets must adhere to professional and ethical standards that prevent gender bias and contribute to fair and balanced content.

1.3 Media as a Tool for Women's Empowerment

A. Enhancing Women's Participation in Media

To achieve balanced media coverage, it is essential to enhance women's participation as program hosts, journalists, directors, and decision-makers in media institutions. Empowering women in this field helps provide more diverse and inclusive perspectives on social and political issues.⁴

B. New Media and Women's Empowerment

With the advent of digital media and social networks, women now have greater opportunities to express their opinions and participate in public debates. Digital platforms have allowed women to bypass traditional constraints and directly engage with audiences, enabling them to highlight their issues freely and participate in awareness campaigns and advocacy efforts. New media have become a significant instrument for advancing women's empowerment by transforming their access to information, knowledge, communication networks, economic opportunities, and spaces for public participation. Unlike traditional media, which often position women primarily as subjects or audiences of communication, digital platforms enable them to become active producers of content, opinion, and social narratives, allowing them to articulate their experiences, challenge gender

stereotypes, build professional and social networks, and participate more visibly in political, cultural, and community debates. Social networking sites, digital communities, blogs, podcasts, and online campaigns can facilitate collective mobilization and strengthen women's ability to draw public attention to issues such as gender discrimination, violence against women, unequal opportunities, and workplace rights. In this sense, digital communication contributes to the creation of what Castells (2012) describes as networked forms of collective action, in which individuals can connect, exchange experiences, construct shared identities, and mobilize around common causes beyond traditional institutional boundaries. New media also contribute to women's educational and economic empowerment by providing access to online learning, professional training, entrepreneurship, digital commerce, remote employment, and global professional networks, thereby creating opportunities that may be difficult to access through conventional structures. However, digital empowerment should not be understood simply as having access to technological devices or internet connectivity, since meaningful participation also requires digital literacy, critical information skills, privacy awareness, and the ability to navigate digital environments safely. The persistence of the gender digital divide demonstrates that inequalities in access, technological skills, quality of connectivity, and socioeconomic resources can limit women's ability to benefit equally from digital opportunities.

C. Challenges Facing Women in Media

Despite progress, women in the media industry continue to face significant challenges, including:⁵

- Underrepresentation in leadership roles within media organizations, where editorial and administrative decisions are still predominantly controlled by men.
- Wage disparities and limited promotion opportunities, as women often earn less than their male counterparts for the same work.
- Cultural and societal challenges that restrict women's freedom to work in media, especially in conservative societies.

II. Violence Against Women: Between Media and Law

2.1 The Legal Framework for Combating Violence Against Women

The legal framework for combating violence against women represents a fundamental mechanism for protecting women's rights, preventing gender-based violence, holding perpetrators accountable, and establishing institutional responsibilities for protecting victims and supporting their recovery. At the international level, the recognition of violence against women as a violation of human rights has progressively transformed the issue from a private or family matter into a public, legal, and societal concern requiring state intervention. International instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women have contributed to establishing important principles concerning equality, non-discrimination, protection, prevention, and state responsibility. The legal response has subsequently expanded beyond the criminalization of individual acts to include preventive measures, victim protection, access to justice, institutional support, awareness programs, and policies addressing the structural factors that facilitate violence. Effective legislation must therefore recognize different manifestations of violence, including physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence, as well as emerging forms facilitated by digital technologies, while ensuring that victims have accessible mechanisms for reporting abuse and obtaining legal, psychological, medical, and social assistance. From a media and communication perspective, the legal framework is

particularly significant because legislation also establishes responsibilities and boundaries concerning the representation of victims, protection of privacy, dissemination of sensitive information, and public communication about cases of violence

Many countries and international organizations have implemented laws and agreements to protect women from violence, such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and national legislations criminalizing physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence. However, the effectiveness of these laws largely depends on enforcement mechanisms and public awareness.⁶

2.2 Media as a Tool for Raising Awareness About Violence Against Women

Media play an important role in raising public awareness of violence against women by bringing the issue into public debate and challenging social attitudes that may normalize or conceal violence. Through news reports, awareness campaigns, documentaries, and digital platforms, media can inform women about their rights and available support mechanisms while encouraging communities to reject discriminatory practices. Responsible media coverage can also highlight the social and legal consequences of violence and promote prevention. However, such coverage should respect victims' privacy and dignity and avoid sensationalism or victim-blaming.

Media plays a pivotal role in educating the public about the dangers of violence against women by producing awareness content that promotes human rights and gender equality. Additionally, media coverage helps expose hidden cases of violence, prompting authorities to take legal action against perpetrators.⁷

III. Media Strategies for Addressing Violence Against Women

3.1 Responsible Media Coverage of Violence Cases

It is crucial for media outlets to cover violence against women in a professional and objective manner, avoiding sensationalism or any indirect justification of violence. Media coverage should focus on the legal and human rights aspects of the issue while providing survivors with a platform to share their experiences in a way that respects their privacy and dignity.

3.2 Producing Awareness and Educational Content

Producing awareness and educational content is an essential communication strategy for addressing violence against women and promoting a culture based on equality, respect, and social responsibility. Media organizations can develop informative programs, documentaries, digital campaigns, videos, podcasts, and interactive content that explain the different forms of violence, challenge harmful stereotypes, and provide women with information about their rights and available support services. Effective content should rely on accurate and accessible information while using clear, respectful, and non-stigmatizing language that avoids blaming victims or normalizing abusive behavior. Digital platforms also allow awareness messages to reach diverse audiences, particularly young people, through engaging and interactive formats. Therefore, well-designed educational content can contribute not only to increasing knowledge but also to changing attitudes, encouraging early intervention, and strengthening collective efforts to prevent violence against women. Addressing violence against women requires media strategies that focus on producing awareness programs, documentaries, and analytical articles that explore the causes and consequences of violence, as well as the laws and policies designed to combat it.⁸

3.3 Collaboration Between Media and Legal Institutions

To ensure an effective impact, there must be close collaboration between the media, law enforcement institutions, and human rights organizations. This collaboration should aim to provide accurate information about victims' rights and the legal protections available to them.⁹

IV. Challenges Facing Media in Addressing Violence Against Women

Despite ongoing efforts, several challenges hinder the media's role in combating violence against women, including:¹⁰

4.1 Professional Challenges in Media Coverage

• Superficial and Seasonal Coverage

Superficial and seasonal media coverage of violence against women occurs when the issue receives attention mainly during specific incidents, international awareness days, or periods of heightened public interest, without sustained examination of its underlying social, cultural, legal, and institutional dimensions. Such coverage often focuses on individual cases, dramatic details, or emotional narratives while giving limited attention to prevention, victims' rights, available support services, and the structural causes of violence. Although temporary media attention can increase public awareness, its short-term nature may reduce the issue to a recurring news event rather than treating it as a continuous social problem requiring long-term intervention. More effective coverage should therefore move beyond episodic reporting toward consistent, contextualized, and evidence-based journalism that maintains public attention and contributes to meaningful changes in attitudes, policies, and institutional responses. Violence against women is often addressed only during events related to women's rights or when horrific incidents occur, rather than receiving sustained attention.

• Use of Gender-Insensitive Language

Some media reports use justifying or neutral language when covering violent crimes, which can normalize the issue. For example, emphasizing emotional or social justifications for the perpetrator rather than focusing on societal and legal responsibilities.¹¹

• Lack of Training for Journalists

Many journalists lack proper training on how to cover violence against women professionally and sensitively, sometimes leading to misleading reports that reinforce stereotypes about victims. The lack of specialized training for journalists represents a significant challenge to the professional coverage of violence against women, particularly because such cases require ethical sensitivity, legal awareness, and careful handling of victims' experiences. Journalists who are not adequately trained may unintentionally reproduce stereotypes, use inappropriate terminology, expose victims' identities, or focus on sensational details rather than the structural causes of violence. Insufficient knowledge of gender-sensitive reporting can also lead to victim-blaming narratives and inaccurate interpretations of legal and social issues. Continuous professional training should therefore equip journalists with knowledge of gender equality, human rights, relevant legislation, ethical standards, trauma-sensitive interviewing, and responsible digital reporting. Strengthening these competencies can contribute to more accurate, balanced, and socially responsible media coverage and help the media play a constructive role in preventing violence against women.

4.2 Social and Cultural Challenges

• Influence of Traditions and Customs

Cultural and traditional norms significantly affect how the media addresses violence against women, as some outlets avoid in-depth discussions to avoid societal backlash.

- **Victim Blaming**

Many female survivors of violence face social stigma, which is reflected in media coverage that sometimes blames the victim or questions her credibility.¹²

- **Low Public Awareness**

A significant portion of society still perceives violence against women as a "private matter" rather than a human rights issue, limiting the media's ability to drive societal change.

4.3 Legal and Political Challenges

- **Lack of Clear Media Regulations**

In some countries, there are no clear laws requiring media outlets to cover violence against women responsibly, allowing discriminatory discourse to persist.¹³

- **Pressure from Influential Entities**

Some media institutions face political or economic pressures that discourage them from shedding light on violence against women, particularly when influential figures are involved. Pressure from influential entities can significantly affect the independence and quality of media coverage of violence against women. Political actors, media owners, advertisers, institutional authorities, or other powerful stakeholders may attempt, directly or indirectly, to influence editorial decisions, restrict sensitive investigations, or determine which cases receive public attention. Such pressures can result in selective coverage, self-censorship, minimization of certain incidents, or avoidance of topics that may conflict with institutional or economic interests. This situation can weaken the media's ability to act as an independent platform for exposing violence and defending victims' rights. Maintaining editorial autonomy, strengthening professional ethical standards, and establishing clear institutional safeguards against external interference are therefore essential for ensuring credible, balanced, and socially responsible reporting on violence against women.

4.4 Towards a More Effective Media Approach in Addressing Violence Against Women

- **Sustained Coverage of the Issue**

Media should maintain consistent coverage of violence against women rather than only reporting on individual cases or specific occasions.¹⁴

- **Adopting a Professional, Gender-Sensitive Narrative**

Adopting a professional, gender-sensitive narrative requires media professionals to address violence against women through accurate, balanced, and ethically responsible reporting that recognizes the social and structural dimensions of the issue. Journalists should avoid language that blames victims, reinforces gender stereotypes, or presents violence as a private or isolated incident, while giving appropriate attention to the rights, dignity, and privacy of victims. Such reporting should rely on verified information, diverse and credible sources, and contextual analysis that explains the causes and consequences of violence rather than focusing solely on dramatic details. A gender-sensitive approach also encourages the use of respectful terminology and avoids sensational headlines, unnecessary descriptions, and representations that may further harm survivors. By adopting these professional standards, media can contribute to challenging discriminatory attitudes, strengthening public understanding, and promoting a culture of equality and respect.

Media must use precise and responsible language when discussing violence issues, avoiding any discourse that justifies violence or blames victims.

- **Training Journalists on Violence Against Women**

Professional training should be provided to journalists to ensure respectful coverage that raises public awareness and protects victims.¹⁵

- **Advocating for Fair Media Policies**

Civil society organizations and media outlets must push for clear regulations that require professional and fair coverage of violence against women.¹⁶

Conclusion

Media remains a crucial tool in combating violence against women, but it still faces significant challenges that impact its effectiveness in addressing this issue. To be part of the solution, media must enhance professionalism in coverage, raise public awareness, and adopt responsible policies that reflect the severity of violence against women as a human rights issue that requires sustainable and fundamental solutions. Violence against women remains a complex social and legal issue that requires sustained efforts from institutions, civil society, and the media. In this context, media and communication play a crucial role in shaping public awareness, challenging stereotypes, disseminating legal knowledge, and promoting a culture of equality and respect. However, the effectiveness of media intervention depends on professional and gender-sensitive reporting, continuous journalistic training, editorial independence, and the avoidance of sensationalism and superficial coverage. The digital environment has further expanded the possibilities for awareness and advocacy, while simultaneously creating new challenges related to misinformation, online harassment, and ethical responsibility. Therefore, an effective media approach to combating violence against women should combine accurate information, responsible communication, legal awareness, and sustained public engagement. Ultimately, when media institutions adopt professional, ethical, and gender-sensitive practices, they can move beyond merely reporting cases of violence to becoming an active force in prevention, social change, women's empowerment, and the promotion of a society that rejects all forms of violence and discrimination.

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