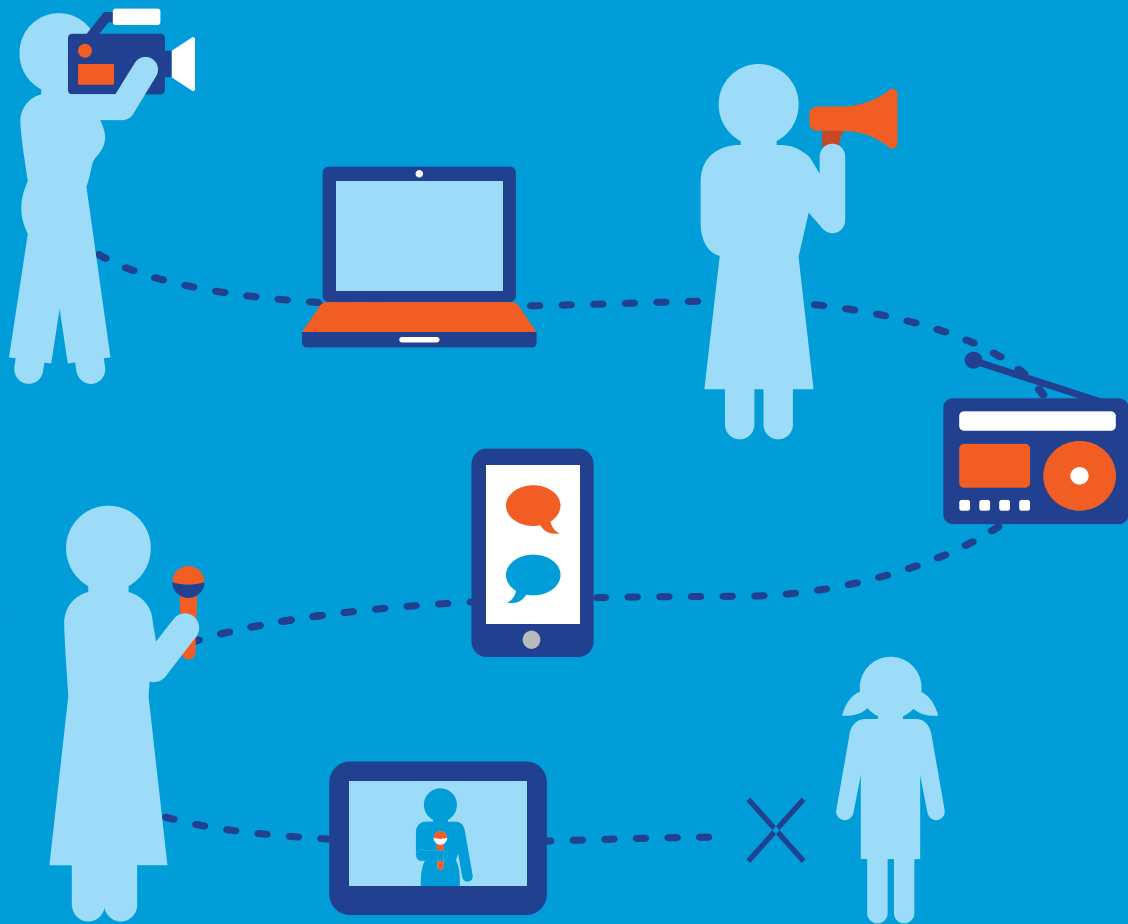


EVIDENCE REVIEW

MAPPING THE NEXUS BETWEEN MEDIA REPORTING OF VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS

The normalization of violence, and the perpetuation of harmful gender norms and stereotypes



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 3

ACRONYMS 5

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 6

1. INTRODUCTION 9

2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK 14

3. MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE OF VAWG NEWS REPORTING PRACTICES 17

State of play 17

Mapping the terrain of media reporting modalities 20

Sourcing practices 22

Newsroom dynamics and ‘newsworthiness’ 24

4. MAPPING THE TERRAIN OF TROPES AND STEREOTYPES ACROSS VAWG REPORTING 26

Victim tropes 27

Perpetrator tropes 34

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS 38

6. THE WAY FORWARD 49

Existing frameworks 40

Dynamics that enable gender- and age-sensitive reporting 42

ANNEXES 1: METHODOLOGY 44

ANNEXES 2: RESEARCH GRID 49

ANNEXES 3: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL 54

ANNEXES 4: INITIAL SCAN OF VAWG DATA 56

BIBLIOGRAPHY 57

ENDNOTES 63

ACRONYMS

COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GBV	Gender-based violence
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or sometimes questioning) and others
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAWG	Violence against women and girls

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SETTING THE SCENE

Since the onset of the coronavirus disease in 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, perhaps more so than ever before, online news and social media have become crucial trajectories of information. As people tried to make sense of their rapidly changing realities from inside homes and behind screens, emerging studies show that, in some countries, media coverage of COVID-19-related deaths has also been accompanied by increased news coverage of the ‘shadow pandemic’ of domestic and gender-based violence, which has disproportionately had a negative impact on women and girls. Emerging studies even suggest that this news coverage is related to increased rates of reporting by some victims/survivors.

At the same time, this public attention also brings to light a key tension around gender-based violence and visibility, particularly in relation to news media coverage: given the media’s recognized influence over how we interpret and respond to events, what matters is not only if violence is reported, but how it is reported.

For instance, in the case of media reporting on gender-based violence in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, have news outlets been portraying this violence as a consequence of the pandemic itself, and thus as ‘exceptional’, rather than as a long-standing dynamic exacerbated by the pandemic? Are stories about gender-based violence accompanied by relevant and accessible

information about services for women and children, many of whom are consuming news from inside homes where lockdown measures and service closures continue to restrict their access to spaces and people that might otherwise provide them with this information? Is coverage sensationalist or does it try to report the surge in gender-based violence in its broader context in order to generate deeper empathy and understanding?

The scholarship in response to the second and third questions is only starting to emerge, but these questions, and the concerns they foreground about the role of news media in relation to gender-based violence, have been important since long before the pandemic spread across the globe. Indeed, feminist scholars and women’s and children’s rights advocates have long understood the need for responsible reporting and, more specifically, for gender- and age-sensitive, victim-/survivor-centred and rights-based approaches to news media coverage of violence. This position is grounded in the recognition that reporting practices can have a direct bearing on victims/survivors, who may see insensitive and harmful coverage of gender-based violence and decide against reporting. Moreover, when news reports of gender-based violence fail to signpost survivors to relevant resources and services, this can put victims/survivors at further risk.



UN Women/Allison Joyce

OVERVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE REVIEW

The media — which encompasses newspapers, television, radio and social media, through which we are presented with or consume information — constitutes a key institutional site of power and sphere of influence over the gender socialization process. Recent scholarly efforts to better understand the processes and dynamics that contribute to the normalization of gender-based violence have shed light on the particular role of news media reporting in perpetuating discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, and bolstering the social permission structures that normalize this violence.

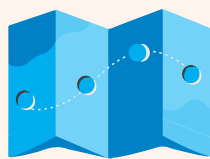
By the same token, evidence also suggests that media reporting has the potential to serve as a positive force, both by helping to illuminate, rather than obscure, the root causes of gender-based violence, by promoting positive social and gender norms, and, more practically, in risk mitigation through the provision of essential information to victims/survivors and those who may wish to support them. This positive potential is rooted in the understanding that the media plays a key role in shaping values and perspectives, including those related to gender, and that media reporting is not destined to always reflect dominant, harmful values and perspectives.

BOX 1

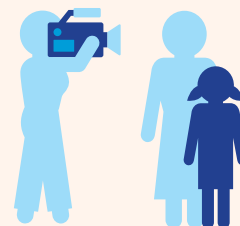
Drawing primarily upon scholarly literature published over the past 20 years, and supplemented by key informant interviews and a cross-regional analysis of news media reports of violence against girls in the past five years, this evidence review:



Provides an overview of the landscape of global trends in media reporting on gender-based violence, in terms of the practices and modalities that are most widely used.



Maps the existing evidence of the relationship between news media reporting of gender-based violence against girls and the normalization of violence, particularly through the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes.



Spotlights key existing frameworks and approaches that may help catalyse more gender- and age-sensitive reporting.

It finds broad consensus across the literature that mainstream news media outlets tend to make use of harmful tropes and stereotypes when reporting on cases of gender-based violence, and that this contributes to the normalization of violence and perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes.

The key modalities considered in the scholarly literature relate to the visual and textual features of news stories, and the sourcing practices used by journalists. Studies highlight a tendency for mainstream news reporting

to mirror and reinforce the dynamics that contribute to gender-based violence in the first place, such as victim blaming, decentering the responsibility of perpetrators, and deploying stigmatizing or sensationalizing language that draws upon harmful gender norms and stereotypes about women's and girls' 'appropriate roles'. Overall, the effect of these reporting modalities is to direct the public's attention towards the behaviour and actions of victims and to suggest that the transgression is in the violation of a gender norm, rather than in the exercise of violence.

Evidence from the scholarly literature also highlights that incidents of gender-based violence are largely reported as episodic events or independent incidents of crime, that such reports deploy language that blames the victim by suggesting that she violated established or expected gender norms and rules, and that the level of sensationalism or ‘shock value’ in the case determines its ‘newsworthiness’.

Evidence also suggests that reporters still largely neglect to include inputs from gender-based violence, women’s rights or child protection experts.

Subsequent sections dig deeper into the evidence of the nexus between news media reporting of violence against girls and the normalization of that violence. This involves analysing some of the more common tropes and stereotypes that circulate in relation to victims and perpetrators, and providing illustrative examples of how these shape interpretations of gender-based violence and its victims. These tropes and stereotypes are also shaped by vectors of intersectional discrimination across regional contexts, and evidence highlights that media reports play a crucial role in reinforcing hierarchies by

differentiating between ‘types’ of victims (where some victims matter, or matter more than others).

Significantly, from the age analysis perspective, evidence from media reports also indicates that there is often an ‘expiration date’ after which girl victims may not ‘count’ as children. Specifically, sexualization in news media coverage of cases of gender-based violence can function as a mechanism to portray adolescent girls as adult women, and thus to obscure not only the gender dimension but also age-based rights violations at play.

Notably, while this review identifies a burgeoning literature analysing the dynamics of media reporting on gender-based violence against women and how these relate to the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, there is a concerning gap in similar scholarly literature analysing these dynamics in relation to girls. Specifically, while there is a rich body of literature that includes gender and intersectional analyses of media reporting of gender-based violence, research that centres the age-related lens and analysis alongside the gender lens is relatively thin or nascent.

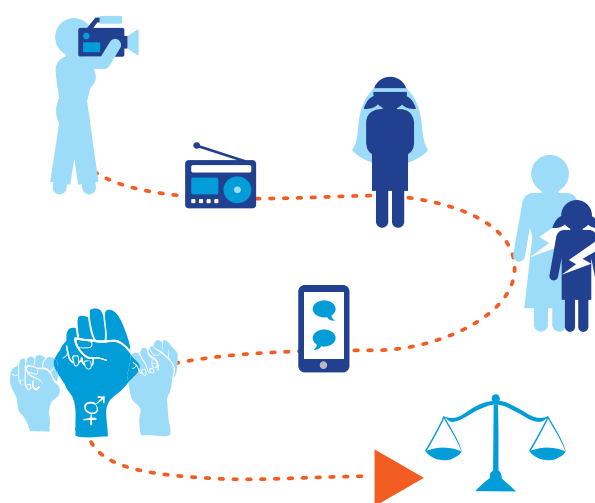
THE WAY FORWARD

The final section spotlights the range of existing frameworks and guidelines for promoting more gender- and age-sensitive as well as victim-/survivor-centred reporting. It notes that, while there is a relatively clear path forward in terms of what needs to be done to drive positive change, a pressing gap remains in how to incentivize and ensure uptake and implementation of these frameworks and strategies for more responsible reporting of GBV within and across media organizations and among media practitioners.

This section leverages insights from stakeholders, as well as the literature, to flag additional ‘enablers’ that may be key to unlocking the potential within these existing frameworks. These include dynamics that may have more or less impact at scale, including the values and commitments of individual journalists, networks of feminist journalists and gender editors, the presence of strong feminist and women’s movements that mobilize civil society in response to cases of violence and push for greater accountability from the state and media organizations, and advocacy and engagement with local news organizations and media practitioners by international organizations.

Reflecting on the evidence, the review concludes by suggesting that achieving the kinds of changes needed to enable more gender- and age-sensitive reporting will require a combination of formal and informal

mechanisms, strategies, and long-term efforts and investments. These need to acknowledge that, even though gender norms and stereotypes are ‘sticky’ and take time to change, the vast sphere of influence of news reporting, and of the media more broadly, means that it presents a tremendous opportunity and entry point for catalysing positive changes in how gender-based violence against girls is represented, and thus how we as a society interpret and respond to it.



1. INTRODUCTION

At the onset of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) global pandemic, women's and children's rights advocates sounded the alarm bells about the 'shadow pandemic' of increasing violence against women and girls (VAWG), which emerging data suggested was being exacerbated by well-intentioned public health policies to curb viral spread, such as lockdown or stay-at-home orders and closures of services deemed 'non-essential'.¹ In some countries, life-saving services such as shelters for victims of domestic violence were deemed 'non-essential'.² Relatedly, widespread school and office closures had catalysed an unprecedented shift towards online education and 'work from home' arrangements, and an associated (further) uptake of digital tools, applications and platforms by not only adults but also children and adolescents.³ Alongside the combination of restrictions on movement and more time spent online, reports of sexual exploitation and bullying of children and adolescents, in addition to cyberviolence against women, also increased.⁴

However, for individuals and families who found themselves on the 'connected' side of the digital divide, the internet was not only a potential source of violence and abuse. Perhaps more so than ever before, online news and social media became crucial sources of information, including information about domestic and other forms of violence.⁵ Emerging studies show that, in some countries, as people tried to make sense of their rapidly changing realities from inside homes and behind screens, media coverage of COVID-19-related deaths was being accompanied by increased public attention to, and news coverage of, the 'shadow pandemic'.⁶ Some studies even suggest that increased news coverage may have been related to increased rates of reporting by victims/survivors.⁷

Of course, as feminist scholars and activists have reminded us, the pandemic did not cause the surge in violence against women and children — widespread pre-existing gender inequalities and patriarchal power hierarchies are at the root of this violence and what enabled it to increase during a global health crisis.⁸ Still, emerging research shows that, in many contexts, the processes and policy measures that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic (such as lockdowns) exacerbated this violence.⁹ And indeed, advocacy and media coverage around the 'shadow pandemic' has cast much-needed light on the scope of violence taking place inside the home, which has disproportionately affected women and girls.¹⁰

At the same time, this public attention also brings to light a key tension around violence and visibility in relation to news media coverage: given the media's sphere of influence in how we interpret and respond to events,¹¹ what matters is not only whether violence is reported, but **how** it is reported.

For instance, in the case of media reporting on violence against women and girls in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, have news outlets been portraying this violence as a consequence of the pandemic itself, and thus as 'exceptional', rather than as a long-standing dynamic exacerbated by the pandemic? Are stories about violence accompanied by relevant and accessible information about services for women and children, many of whom are consuming news from inside homes where lockdown measures and service closures continue to restrict their access to spaces and people that might otherwise provide them with this information? Is coverage sensationalist or does it try to report the surge in violence against women and girls in its broader context to help generate deeper understanding?¹²

The research in response to the second and third questions is only starting to emerge.¹³ But these questions, and the concerns they foreground about the role of news media in relation to gendered forms of violence, have been important since long before the pandemic spread across the globe. Indeed, feminist

scholars and women's and children's rights advocates have long understood the need for responsible reporting and, more specifically, for gender- and age-sensitive, victim-/survivor-centred and rights-based approaches to news media coverage of violence.

Bearing this context in mind, this evidence review has three overarching objectives. First, it seeks to **provide an overview of the landscape of global trends in media reporting on violence against women and girls**, in terms of the practices and modalities that are most widely used, and whether these reflect any notable shifts, while also attending to any regional variations in these trends. Second, it seeks to **map the existing evidence of the relationship between news media reporting of violence against girls and the normalization of that violence**, particularly through the perpetuation of harmful gender norms and stereotypes. Third, it seeks to **spotlight key existing frameworks and resources that have helped**

1.1 Background

The media — which encompasses newspapers, television, radio and social media, through which we are presented with or consume information — constitutes a key institutional site of power and sphere of influence. Therefore, efforts to better understand the processes and dynamics that contribute to the normalization of violence against women and girls and the perpetuation of harmful and discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes should direct analytical attention towards the role of news media reporting. Indeed, scholars note that it is not only whether or not but also **how** news media reports on violence against women and girls (the modalities and practices used) that has a bearing on how the public is influenced or 'trained' to interpret violence and its victims.¹⁴ Relatedly, women's and children's rights advocates and practitioners have emphasized that reporting practices can also have a direct bearing on victims/survivors, who may see insensitive and harmful coverage and decide against reporting violence. Moreover, when news reports of violence against women and girls fail to signpost survivors to relevant resources and services, this can put victims/survivors at further risk.¹⁵

By the same token, all of this suggests that media reporting has the potential to serve as a positive force,

catalyse more gender- and age-sensitive reporting (as two components of what can more broadly be called responsible, rights-based or victim-/survivor-centred reporting).

Importantly, this review centres its attention on both age dimensions and gender dimensions of media reporting on violence against girls. While research and advocacy efforts have focused on the dynamics of media reporting on violence against women and children, often the particular practices and modalities that might undercut responsible representation of violence against girls are unclear or are obscured by this broader focus. However, as the evidence presented below illustrates, to identify ways forward it is paramount to understand both the age dimensions of media reporting of violence against women and girls and the gender dimensions of violence against children.

both in helping to illuminate, rather than obscure, the root causes of violence against women and girls, promoting positive social and gender norms, and, more practically, in VAWG risk mitigation through the provision of essential information to victims/survivors and those who may wish to support them. This positive potential is rooted in the understanding that the media plays a key role in shaping values and perspectives, including those related to gender, and that media reporting is not destined to always reflect dominant, harmful values and perspectives.¹⁶

Existing scholarly and programmatic research suggests that the media enjoys a significant sphere of influence over the gender socialization process.¹⁷ **Gender socialization** refers to the relational processes by which individuals learn and internalize **gender norms**: the informal rules and shared beliefs that distinguish expected behaviour and roles on the basis of gender.¹⁸ While gender socialization is particularly influential during childhood and adolescence,¹⁹ the processes of gender socialization are ongoing throughout our lives as we interact with, and are exposed to, agents (e.g. peers) and institutions (e.g. places of work) of socialization that reinforce — or challenge — our previously learned and internalized views related to gender.

While related to norms, **gender stereotypes** are common tropes or generalizations about groups of people as gendered subjects.²⁰ For instance, a widespread gender norm is that women ‘should’ have primary responsibility for cooking, cleaning and caring for children, and this norm informs the stereotype (often used in marketing communications and advertising) that all women enjoy performing these tasks. Similarly, the widespread gender norm that boys ‘shouldn’t cry’ (especially in contrast to girls, for whom crying is acceptable) informs broader stereotypes that boys who do show vulnerability in this way are ‘sissies’ and therefore not ‘real boys’.²¹ Despite some important contextual variation in how these norms manifest, nearly universally, gender norms undergird and are upheld by social, economic and political systems that tend to discriminate against women, girls and gender non-conforming individuals, compared with men and boys.²² Crucially, gender norms are tied to processes that limit the realization of children’s rights, and, more specifically, are also inextricably linked to dynamics that drive violence against children, especially girls.²³

Recent efforts to map the nexus between violence against women and girls, gender norms and stereotypes, and the media have shed light on the

particular role of news media reporting in perpetuating discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, and bolstering the social permission structures that normalize violence.²⁴ Specifically, this emerging research shows how media reporting practices — such as the use of sensationalizing, sexualizing and passive language, or gory and insensitive imagery — rely not only on harmful gender norms, but also on other intersecting norms and stereotypes, which in turn contribute to revictimization while also obscuring the broader context of violence against women and girls.²⁵

Despite this emerging evidence, persistent gaps remain regarding the precise nature of the relationship between news media reporting practices related to violence against girls and the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes — and regarding how best to challenge these practices and catalyse positive change in perceptions, attitudes and norms. To be sure, while this review identified a burgeoning literature analysing the dynamics of media reporting on violence against women and how these relate to gender and intersecting norms and stereotypes, **there is a notable and concerning gap in similar literature analysing these dynamics in relation to girls.**

1.2 Mandate alignment

Importantly, scholars and advocates have pointed out that the media is in a unique position to challenge harmful gender norms and stereotypes, and thus to mitigate the normalization of violence against women and girls and foster gender equality.²⁶ Indeed, a recent global mapping of United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) programming underscores the need for programmatic interventions to address multiple agents and institutional sites of gender socialization in order to promote positive gender norms, including by leveraging opportunities for change through news media and social media platforms, in addition to marketing and advertising.²⁷

Significantly, the recognition that media can play a positive role in the gender socialization process, and, more specifically, that readers’/viewers’/consumers’ attention is open to influence, and thus can be ‘re-trained’, underlines the positive force for change that could be unlocked by gender- and age-sensitive and

victim-/survivor-centred reporting.²⁸ Notably, some evidence presented below suggests that more responsible approaches to media reporting of violence against women and girls are, in fact, possible.²⁹

When it comes to addressing the core questions and themes that arise in this evidence review, UNICEF has a unique interest and role to play. The UNICEF Gender Action Plan (GAP), 2022–2025, recognizes the right of every child to an equitable chance in life, and commits to giving them this chance by ensuring non-gender-discriminatory roles, expectations and practices. Inherent to this goal is the eradication of inequitable gender norms so that “every child, including adolescents, is protected from violence, exploitation, abuse, neglect and harmful practices.” Furthermore, preventing, mitigating and responding to gender-based violence (GBV) is also treated as an organization-wide priority in the 2022–2025 GAP and the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025.

Under the previous GAP (2018–2021), UNICEF drove considerable evidence generation and programmatic interventions at the nexus of gender norms and gender socialization, violence against girls and child protection, and the media.

UN Women has emphasized the importance of strategically engaging with the media in order to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Indeed, the UN Women Strategic Plan 2022–2025 highlights that efforts to end violence against women and girls require leveraging the media as a strategic entry point for challenging negative stereotypes and promoting positive social norms.³⁰

In centring both the age dimension and the gender dimension of media reporting on violence against girls, this evidence review bridges multiple research and programmatic areas central to UNICEF’s and UN Women’s mandate, and should serve as a key resource to (i) close gaps in our understanding of the

relationship between media reporting of violence against girls and the normalization of gender-based violence more broadly (including through the reproduction of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes); and (ii) provide actionable insights into promising approaches for catalysing more dignified, responsible and rights-based reporting (and more specifically, gender- and age-sensitive and survivor-centred practices).

Noting the important precursors to this work, in addition to aggregating the existing evidence through secondary data sources (and generating some new evidence through primary data sources), this review leverages work that UNICEF and UN Women have already carried out with key partners. The most recent pieces of this work are *Responsible Representation and Reporting of Violence against Women and Violence against Children: Guidelines for Media Professionals* and *The Big Conversation: Handbook to Address Violence against Women in and through the Media*.³¹

1.3 Scope of study/limitations

This evidence review draws primarily on a scoping review of relevant scholarly and ‘grey’ (or policy) literature in English, French and Spanish. These secondary data are complemented by primary data generated from key informant interviews and a case-based analysis of media reporting on violence against girls over the past five years in various regions around the world. On balance, this research is predominantly focused on mapping and analysing the existing literature and evidence that provide insights on the relationship between news media reporting and the normalization of violence against girls, particularly through the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes.

Another important caveat pertains to the specific forms of media, or news media, under consideration in this study. Recent efforts by scholars and children’s and women’s rights practitioners to attend to the role of social media in perpetuating harmful gender dynamics — including through online bullying and gender-based violence — have led to some understandable confusion/conflation in the analytical and advocacy discussion around the role of social media (as an interactive tool and platform

for gender socialization for children and adolescents, in particular) and the role of news media (as a reporting modality in addition to a platform for gender socialization for children, adolescents and adults).³² Certainly, the lines between the two are increasingly blurred, and recent scholarly literature shows how social media has influenced news media, specifically reporting of violence against women and girls.³³ For instance, most of the news outlets whose stories of violence against girls were analysed for this review have their own Facebook and Twitter accounts. Moreover, unlike a story printed in a hard copy of a newspaper, more often than not the online version of the same news story will invite readers/viewers/consumers to ‘comment’ (much like social media users can do on images or non-‘news’ stories). These examples illustrate the conceptual difficulties involved in trying to understand the differences between social media engagement and news media consumption.

However, while acknowledging the substantive overlaps between social media and news media reporting, and acknowledging the hugely influential role of social media and citizen journalism

in reporting, sharing and contributing to public discourse, including on issues related to violence against women and girls, the scope of this study is

limited to mainstream news media reporting of cases of violence against girls, such as reporting in national and local newspapers.³⁴

1.4 Outline of review

The review begins with an overview of the analytical framework that guides this evidence review. This section details the conceptual parameters informing the analysis of the relationship between news media reporting of violence against girls, on the one hand, and the normalization of that violence, particularly through the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, on the other. It then lays out the methodology, including a discussion of the balance of secondary and primary data consulted.

The review then dives into the main findings, starting with an overview of the ‘state of play’ of VAWG media reporting, drawing predominantly on the literature but also on primary data from interviews and case-based media reporting analysis to highlight key trends, particularly around reporting modalities and journalistic practices. The subsequent sections dig deeper into the evidence of the nexus between news media reporting of violence against girls and the normalization of that violence through harmful gender norms and stereotypes. It does this by analysing some of the more common tropes and stereotypes that circulate in relation to victims and

perpetrators, and providing illustrative examples of how these shape interpretations of violence and its victims.

The final section spotlights the range of existing frameworks and guidelines for promoting more gender- and age-sensitive and victim-/survivor-centred reporting. It notes that while there is a relatively clear path forward in terms of what needs to be done to drive positive change, a pressing gap remains in how to incentivize and ensure uptake and implementation of these frameworks and strategies for more responsible reporting of gender-based violence within and across media organizations and among media practitioners. Reflecting on the evidence from the literature, in addition to that from key stakeholders and the media reporting analysis, it concludes by suggesting that achieving the kinds of changes needed in reporting of violence against girls will require a combination of formal and informal mechanisms, strategies and long-term efforts and investments that acknowledge that gender norms are ‘sticky’ and take time to change.



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2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This evidence review is anchored in an analytical context that situates the media — understood to encompass a range of formats (newspapers, television, radio, social media) in which we are presented with or consume information — as a key platform of power and influence with respect to the ideas and perceptions that circulate in society, which can help reinforce (or challenge) the norms that contribute to gender discrimination.³⁵ From this perspective, ‘news media’ can be understood as (i) a **medium of representation** of the issues and events that are deemed important or ‘newsworthy’ in a given context and moment and, relatedly, as (ii) one of many **spheres of influence** over the ongoing processes of socialization — including gender socialization — that we are all variously subject to throughout our lives.³⁶

Media scholars from the social sciences, particularly those from the sociological and gender studies fields, highlight that news media does not merely describe external realities or events. Instead, they argue that, in its mainstream modalities,³⁷ news media simultaneously mirrors and helps shape dominant social values and beliefs, including, of course, those related to gender.³⁸ Practically speaking, this **analytical approach suggests that there is a distinction between what happens and what is presented, or rather represented, in news media accounts.**

For instance, a newspaper might report that a 16-year-old girl was killed by her ‘boyfriend’ (a 19-year-old man) after he discovered that she was ‘secretly exchanging texts’ with one of his friends. However, depending on the specific modalities and practices through which the story is represented, there are many different directions that this reporting might take, and these directions would influence the interpretation and conclusion reached by the reader or audience. These modalities and practices include the words used to describe the victim and the perpetrator, the type of photograph or visual included, if any, and the sources that are consulted or quoted to help ‘frame’ the story. The difference between what happens and what is represented is not only because one story cannot encompass ‘everything’; it is also

because **conscious and unconscious decisions are made by media practitioners about what to include, and how to include it.** Decisions on what to include and how to include it are simultaneously shaped by the written and unwritten rules that govern a given media organization or institution, and the individuals within it.³⁹

The space between what happens and what gets reported is where power dynamics operate, and this is precisely where this evidence review focuses its analytical attention. Specifically, to understand the role of news media reporting in normalizing violence against girls and perpetuating discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, this review focuses on the social, and to an extent on the political and economic, dynamics that explicitly and implicitly shape decision-making about whether or not and how these stories are reported. For instance, the criteria that shape what types of stories are written, and which get the most ‘clicks’ or readers, might be reflective of more explicit economic dynamics and calculations that shape editorial decision-making.⁴⁰ However, at the same time, embedded beliefs and often unconscious biases influence individual reporters’ own reporting practices (and, indeed, also influence editors’ decisions).⁴¹

Another way that gender and media studies literature conceptualizes the dynamic between media and social values and beliefs is through the language of ‘training’. The concept of ‘training’ suggests that news media functions as a mode of governance because it trains or directs readers’/viewers’/consumers’ gaze and attention.⁴² Where and through what specific modalities that attention is trained or directed is in large part an empirical question that hinges on context. Importantly, this approach does not assume that media reporting can ‘initiate’ an ideological stance on its own (e.g. that women are inferior to men, or that boys should not play with dolls or ‘girl toys’). Instead, it assumes that, alongside other forces of socialization, media reporting can help ‘reinforce’ (or indeed challenge) that stance.⁴³

Cumulatively, an important implication of these analytical perspectives is that **the relationship between news media reporting and social values and beliefs — such as those related to gender norms and stereotypes — is relational, rather than unidirectional.** Put differently, media representations, framings and modalities should be conceptualized both as driving audience perspectives and as being driven by those perspectives — perspectives that themselves are influenced by the social norms and beliefs that dominate in a given context.

Notably, much of the literature exploring the dynamics between media and social values and beliefs focuses specifically on the role of news media reporting on violence against women (less so girls) in normalizing violence by perpetuating discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes. How these processes of normalization unfold relates to the particular modalities and practices of the reporting. There is therefore a tendency across this literature to examine the words and any implicit textual codes used to refer to victims or perpetrators (e.g. the victim is referred to as a ‘teenage runaway’ or the perpetrator is referred to as a ‘shy individual’), the use of imagery or photographs, the perspectives and sources that are consulted or quoted, and whether stories are placed within any broader context or are treated as standalone ‘events’. Indeed, studies of media representations of gendered forms of violence, which, importantly, reflect a wide range of countries and contexts, highlight that there is a marked tendency for mainstream news reporting to mirror and reinforce the dynamics that contribute

to gender-based violence in the first place, such as **victim blaming, decentering** the responsibility of **perpetrators** or government (to prevent violence and protect victims/survivors) and deploying **stigmatizing** or sensationalizing language that draws upon harmful gender norms and stereotypes about the ‘appropriate roles’ of women and girls, related to ‘toxic’ forms of masculinity.⁴⁴

Another central feature of this literature is the emphasis on applying an intersectional lens. This approach emphasizes that news media reporting of violence against women and girls is shaped not only by discriminatory norms and stereotypes related to gender, but also by intersecting dimensions of race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, disability and class, among other axes of difference.⁴⁵ From this perspective, news media reports can also play a role in **reinforcing hierarchies between victims by differentiating between ‘types’ of victims** (e.g. a 7-year-old girl victim being represented as a more ‘innocent’ or ‘truer’ victim of violence than a 16-year-old girl victim, based on age). As this research shows, depending on the modalities and practices used, reporting practices have the power to assign stigma or value to victims, and these representations can shape public perceptions and responses to violence and its victims.⁴⁶

In summary, the central dynamic being tracked in this evidence review has two main components: (i) news media reporting of violence against girls; and (ii) the normalization and social acceptability of that violence, particularly through (iib) the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes. It is worth noting that it would be a simplification and distortion of the dynamic being studied to suggest that media reporting causes the social normalization of violence against girls and the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, or, alternatively, that gender norms, stereotypes and the social normalization of violence against girls causes the approaches to media reporting presented in this review. Instead, by drawing upon the scholarly literature and conceptual parameters outlined above, **the analysis presented in this evidence review proceeds from the starting point that this dynamic is best approached as a nexus, or a series of connections,** rather than as a relationship between two components in which one has primary or causal influence over the other.

2.1 Methodology

This study was designed to include two core data sources.⁴⁷ First, and primarily, a review of existing scholarly (academic or peer-reviewed) and ‘grey’ (policy) literature was conducted. Second, in order to supplement the literature review, primary data were generated through interviews with 13 key informants (hereinafter ‘stakeholders’) and a case-based analysis of news media reporting across a range of country and regional contexts (see Annex I for additional details of the interviewed stakeholders). The case study approach was used to ensure that geographical variation in contextual patterns and trends with respect to media reporting practices was captured. Notably, complementing the secondary data with these primary data also helped bridge the often long temporal gaps between peer-reviewed research publications and the current state of affairs. Overall, 150 secondary sources of evidence in English, French and Spanish were reviewed, inclusive of peer-reviewed and grey literature and key publications from UNICEF, UN Women and other United Nations agencies.

This study also took a collaborative approach. An Internal Reference Group was set up in the inception

stage. This group included experts from academia, from gender, child protection and development programming fields, and from the media/journalism field. The collective expertise of this group was leveraged at two critical stages. First, two Internal Reference Group presentations were conducted to gather feedback on the scope of the study, the analytical framework and the study design, prior to embarking on data collection, analysis and writing. The analysis and draft review were shared with the group, with two rounds of feedback taking place prior to finalization. Importantly, extensive buy-in was sought from UNICEF and UN Women staff, including by hosting joint brainstorming sessions and receiving technical input on case study selection and identification of feminist journalists. An extended methodological description is provided in Annex I.

The subsequent sections present the main findings of the evidence review, beginning with a discussion of the landscape of reporting of violence against women and girls.



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3. MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE OF VAWG NEWS REPORTING PRACTICES

This section presents the overall landscape of news media reporting of violence against women and girls, including an overview of dynamics and trends identified in the literature as contributing to the normalization of violence and the perpetuation of harmful gender norms and stereotypes. It starts by taking stock of the high-level ‘state of play’ in terms of the scope and features of VAWG reporting. Next, it outlines the modalities (e.g. textual and visual practices) and sourcing practices that scholars and others have drawn attention to in their own analyses of VAWG reporting. Finally, it turns to the newsroom dynamics that are shaping trends, including touching upon the concept of ‘newsworthiness’, the role of journalists and media outlets more broadly, and the influence of social media on more traditional news reporting.

Before diving into the findings, it is worth highlighting a few notable features of the existing evidence base on VAWG and media reporting. First, the bulk of the scholarly literature that met the inclusion criteria for this review comes from (or reflects upon dynamics in) Africa, Australia, Latin America, North America, South Asia and the United Kingdom. It is important to once again flag that the review was limited to three languages (English, French and Spanish). Second, with respect to thematic focus, there is an extensive literature analysing how media representations help to perpetuate discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes. In terms of the forms

of violence against women and girls covered, evidence skews towards domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual violence and femi(ni)cide.⁴⁸ Finally, and perhaps most significantly given the scope and intended audience of this review, **notable gaps were identified in scholarly research on the dynamics of news media reporting in cases of violence against girls, as opposed to violence against women.** In other words, while there is a rich body of literature that includes gender and intersectional analyses of media reporting of violence against women, scholarly literature with an age-related lens and focusing on age-related analysis is relatively thin or nascent.⁴⁹

3.1 State of play

Violence against women and girls has been garnering increased visibility and media coverage in recent years.⁵⁰ In discussions, stakeholders tended to attribute heightened interest in, or awareness of, violence against women and girls to media coverage

of ‘high-impact’ cases that capture the collective social consciousness even beyond the national or regional borders of a particular case. There was also broad consensus among interlocutors that critical junctures such as the #MeToo movement or the

#NiUnaMenos movement in Latin America, and the simultaneous expansion in access to social media, have been instrumental in mobilizing public discourse on the matter.

However, given news media's potential power to be a positive force by challenging harmful norms and stereotypes, illuminating the role of unequal power relations and thus mitigating the normalization of violence against women and girls and serving as an educational and informational resource for victims/survivors and those who may wish to support them, the current state of play suggests that a lot of work remains. For starters, stakeholders emphasized that news reporting on issues of violence against girls forms only a small part of the overall crime coverage across their regions. Primary data also suggest that most media outlets have an established 'crime beat' under which issues of violence against women and girls are reported. As interlocutors explained, whether or not such cases are followed and reported is, to a large extent, dependent on the motivations of individual journalists who are interested in social justice issues, unless aspects of the story align with, or make a case for, other nationally relevant stories and issues.

In addition, evidence from the scholarly literature highlights that incidents are largely reported as episodic events or independent incidents of crime; this 'exceptional' framing obscures how systemic, persistent gender inequalities enable violence against women and girls. For instance, scholars have shown that cases of intimate partner violence are often represented as murders in news reports, neglecting any reference to the antecedents of the case and thereby failing to frame it as a form of domestic violence, let alone gender-based violence.⁵¹

Scholars also note the tendency for these news stories to be framed as atypical or bizarre occurrences, again obscuring the systemic nature of violence against women and girls and consequently helping to normalize such violence.⁵² Alternatively, research also shows that news reports can help **normalize violence against women and girls by framing cases as commonplace occurrences**, for instance by echoing mundane and decontextualized courtroom proceedings on the case, or by suggesting that violence is an everyday occurrence in poor neighbourhoods, the latter of which relies on racialized and classed

stereotypes that associate violence only with particular groups of people (especially particular types of men).⁵³

Scholars also point out that reporting tends to be superficial. Specifically, stories lack in-depth analysis and fail to make linkages with the underlying drivers of violence against women and girls, such as structural inequalities and the patriarchal power relations that tend to accord privilege to men and boys as opposed to women and girls.⁵⁴ Relatedly, this superficial approach means that reporters rarely seek input from women's rights or child protection experts, and this oversight helps explain the general lack of information for victims/survivors seeking support in reporting, or recommendations for addressing violence against women and girls more generally.⁵⁵ Still, there is evidence of more promising practices. For instance, research highlights Australia's leading tabloid *Herald Sun* as an example of how news stories can serve as positive forces for change and commit to championing political action on violence against women. The *Herald Sun*'s 'Take a Stand' campaign catalysed important changes in the sourcing and framing practices around violence against women, situating it as a social problem, specifically by "[including] background information on its prevalence to contextualize particular stories, provid[ing] information on support services, and includ[ing] the views of social workers, experts and sector representatives."⁵⁶

Another noteworthy but unfortunate aspect of episodic framing is that **news reports are largely bereft of any intersectional analyses**, despite broad acknowledgement across scholarly and practitioner communities that intersectional discrimination is intrinsically linked to the drivers of, and shapes views of, violence against women and girls. For instance, in the Indian context, the omission of caste, religion and class from reporting means that news audiences are not informed about the centrality of these sociocultural dynamics to violence against women and girls.⁵⁷ While news media stories of violence against women and girls tend not to include explicit discussions of how race, ethnicity, age, class distinctions, sexual orientation or (dis)ability status intersect with gender, scholarly literature and primary data are brimming with evidence that these stories are consistently associated with gendered stereotypes related to these intersectionalities.⁵⁸ In the United States, Latina and black women victims are significantly

more likely than those of other ethnic/racial groups to be described in news stories as residents of poor neighbourhoods and from unstable or unsafe environments, which functions to normalize their victimization by focusing on their socioeconomic conditions rather than their gender, and to foster negative stereotypes about Latino and black men as well as their families and broader communities.⁵⁹ Similar dynamics related to how references to race and ethnicity, sexualization codes, and an emphasis on the low social status of victims' families, function to delegitimize victims have been identified in Brazilian, Guatemalan, Mexican and South African contexts.⁶⁰

Intersectionalities are also crucial from the perspective of which cases (and thus victims) garner media attention, which has noted implications from a normalization and access to justice lens. Indeed, some scholarly research has established a direct correlation between the amount of media coverage received by a case and the impetus of the police to solve the case.⁶¹ Evidence from Canada shows that a lack of coverage of the murders of indigenous women negatively shapes police and community response, and vice versa.⁶² Furthermore, **media coverage of same-sex intimate partner violence and violence against LGBTQ+ communities remains sparse**; where such coverage exists, scholars note that it is predominantly situated in heteronormative frameworks, and bereft of critical analyses of the homophobic contexts in which they exist.⁶³ In another example of how intersectional discrimination shapes reporting, stakeholders flagged that cases of violence against women and girls with disabilities tend to be framed as 'human interest' stories, and not as GBV stories. According to interlocutors, this approach not only fails to centre gender, but it also positions disabled victims as objects of sympathy, rather than as subjects with rights.

A closer look at how intersectional dynamics are obscured: Unnao rape case (17-year-old), India

On 4 June 2017, Kuldip Sengar, a prominent local political leader in Unnao, India, raped a 17-year-old Dalit (lower-caste) girl. While police complaints were filed by the victim and her family, the case was covered by mainstream national media only about a year later, when the perpetrator was named. News reports repeatedly elevated the perpetrator, addressing him as a member of the political party in power. This emphasis politicized the story and obscured crucial intersectional dynamics, particularly that the victim was a Dalit girl, and that caste and gender power differentials were central to her and her family's victimization by a powerful, upper-caste perpetrator. In sharp contrast to the perpetrator, most stories referred to the victim as 'the girl' and not the victim, thereby implicitly delegitimizing her testimony. One prominent newspaper, in its headline for the story, placed the blame on the victim for trying to self-immolate at a chief minister's residence out of frustration at the response from the authorities and continued victimization by the perpetrator. Other news stories also implied that the victim had a role in her own victimization, highlighting that she willingly went to the perpetrator's residence to ask for a job. One report used a blurred image of a woman's face (not a girl's): in the image, a policeman stands prominently in the background. This image sat alongside the headline "Woman accuses BJP MLA of rape, tries to immolate self near Adityanath's house," thus framing the victim both as an adult (which she was not) and as the 'wrongdoer'. The same report included direct quotations from the perpetrator, which suggested that he was being wrongfully framed. The police officer handling the case was also quoted, and this information was presented as the 'bare facts' of the case.

BOX 1

Bright spots: flagging positive practices

One of the analysed media reports demonstrated key features of a **survivor-centred approach**: it **included several direct quotations from the victim/survivor** and refrained from referencing the perpetrators' political position in a positive light that would confer status (it instead **referred to him as the 'rape accused'**). Furthermore, the visual accompanying the report shows the perpetrator

being led away by the police, thus **centring the behaviour of the responsible individual, rather than that of the victim/survivor**. This particular story also provides important contextual details of the case, including the continued intimidation and victimization of the family, and the administrative lapses (due to the political influence of the accused) in dealing with the case.⁶⁴

Another trend noted in the literature is that 'dramatic' cases or those with '**shock value**' — often for reasons beyond the act of violence itself — are more likely to be picked up by mainstream news outlets.⁶⁵ For instance, cases involving celebrities or political or other influential individuals, or cases in which the violence is especially gruesome, are more likely to be reported in mainstream news.⁶⁶ In other words, this evidence suggests that the level of **sensationalism, gore and horror in the story determines its newsworthiness**. This dynamic was also observed in the primary media analysis, in which news stories describe acts of violence against girls in great detail in order to 'hook' readers (see 'A closer look at the "ideal" victim trope: the case of Zainab Ansari (7-year-old), Pakistan' and 'A closer look at the "irresponsible and sexualized victim" trope: the case of Lucía Pérez (16-year-old), Argentina'). Scholarly evidence also highlights these dynamics. For example, research shows that, after the gruesome details of a child's rape were widely published in news articles in India,

the victim's name became the most searched term on pornographic websites.⁶⁷ Furthermore, evidence from the United States suggests that there tends not to be as much coverage of sexual crimes that are less graphic because these cases are considered less 'newsworthy'.⁶⁸ Such sensationalist approaches are incredibly detrimental and a far cry from the victim-/survivor-centred approaches called for by women's and children's rights practitioners advocating more gender- and age-sensitive reporting.⁶⁹

Another important trend flagged by stakeholders in India and South Africa is the failure to provide follow-up coverage on any judicial processes or final verdicts from cases that are actually initially reported on.⁷⁰ While it is true that these judicial processes (when they happen at all) tend to extend for long periods, certainly longer than the average news cycle, journalists attributed this gap in longitudinal coverage to waning public interest, and thus waning editorial willingness to invest resources in the story.

3.2 Mapping the terrain of media reporting modalities

How harmful gender tropes and stereotypes are instantiated in news media coverage of violence against women and girls, and how these contribute to the normalization of violence, is a question of the modalities of representation and reporting. The key modalities considered in the scholarly literature broadly relate to the visual and textual or discursive features of news stories, in addition to the particular sourcing practices used by journalists.

Visuals that accompany news stories are key to the overall messages delivered to audiences.⁷¹ Therefore, one prominent feature of the literature on GBV reporting is concern regarding the use of sensationalizing visuals or images that compromise the privacy of victims/survivors and their families.

Existing evidence suggests that — at least in some regions — VAWG stories continue to be accompanied by graphic photographs of victims' beaten bodies

or faces. This use of graphic and suggestive photographs of the cadavers of victims (even if blurred or covered) perpetuates deeply sexist and objectifying ideas that women and girls are merely bodies for audience consumption.⁷² Scholars also warn that these images are consumed and internalized by audiences that include individuals from the very institutions that may be responsible for responding to violence against women and girls and enabling access to justice for victims/survivors, such as police officers and judges.⁷³

The use of insensitive stock imagery is another area of concern for scholars and advocates. Stakeholders pointed to the widespread use of images of women with their heads down in shame, noting that this perpetuates gender stereotypes that victims are passive and lack agency, and that victimhood is shameful. Relatedly, stakeholders also flagged the use of pictures of broken dolls to suggest sexual violence against girls, which they referred to as a reporting mechanism that seeks to ‘hook’ audiences by relying on sensationalism, rather than empathy. Research on media coverage of femi[ni]cide in Chile points to a similar dynamic in relation to the use of photographs of grieving family members, suggesting that these images “contribute to their construction as stories of passion and soap opera action, using suffering as a sensitization strategy.”⁷⁴

The publication of images revealing a person’s identity is another core area of concern for scholars and practitioners, as these can compromise the safety and privacy of victims and their families. On a more promising front, there is evidence suggesting growing adherence to the principle of not including such photographs of victims,⁷⁵ especially minors; however, there is also evidence of transgressions in this regard, especially in cases of violence against girls.⁷⁶ For example, research on reporting modalities used in coverage of violence against Yazidi women and girls by the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in Yemen shows that journalists have published photographs of victims/survivors, images of identifiable clothing and images of other personally identifying physical characteristics, such as tattoos.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, studies from the Republic of Moldova and Romania show that media reports have included personal photographs lifted from victims’ social media accounts; this practice has led to readers/audiences drawing

judgements about victims’ lifestyles and relationships, and has contributed to victim blaming.⁷⁸

There is also widespread evidence in the literature that ‘semantics’ — or the explicit and implicit textual, narrative and discursive features of reporting — play a key role in the normalization of violence against women and girls, and the perpetuation of harmful gender norms and stereotypes. Indeed, international research on portrayals of violence against women in news media shows that “story angles, story structures and lexical features (such as how the people were represented and the word choices used to describe them) contributed to discursively minimizing the harms of rape and domestic violence.”⁷⁹ Specifically, the literature points to a series of linked textual or narrative devices that tend to be used across VAWG reporting, including passive voice, which obscures the role of the perpetrator; language, including sexualizing language, that implicitly or explicitly blames the victim by suggesting that she violated established or expected gender norms and rules; language that places doubt on the victim’s testimony; and errors by omission, or the failure to include crucial information and context.

Scholars note that reporting is overwhelmingly composed in a passive tone, which de-emphasizes or conceals perpetrators. Research from the United Kingdom, for example, highlights that there is no conventional expression for the ‘rape perpetrator’, as there is for the ‘rape victim’, which is often used in the context of both the rape and the raped.⁸⁰ Research from South Africa shows that, often, perpetrators are not mentioned in the headlines, and that reporting tries to mobilize understanding or empathy towards perpetrators by using language that attributes their actions to the influence of alcohol, drugs, passion, stress or anger, all of which are framed as not under their control.⁸¹ Similarly, evidence from Ghana suggests that headlines actively contribute to perpetrator invisibility or exoneration (e.g. “Two women raped on Saturday” or “Feeling peeved for being jilted by his fiancé, a man decided to post naked pictures of his former lover on Facebook”).⁸²

Scholars also note a tendency for the language of blame to be applied to victims, rather than perpetrators. For instance, research on coverage of intimate partner and domestic violence in Turkey shows how headlines emphasize the victims’ ‘failure’ to fulfil her socially designated gender role (e.g. “Shot His Wife

Who Did Not Come to Bed”).⁸³ Meanwhile, evidence from Canada shows that a consistent ‘template’ or ‘script’ is applied to indigenous women; the script focuses on the victims’ ‘poor life choices’ and thus delivers the message that these women are to blame for their fates.⁸⁴ Parallel research, also from Canada, suggests that indigenous women are labelled as both ‘hopeless’ and ‘helpless’, implying both a lack of agency and culpability in the violence committed against them.⁸⁵

Another textual mechanism that is used in VAWG reporting to place the blame on victims is sexualizing language. For example, research from India highlights how perpetrators can be represented as ‘passive victims’ who were ‘forced’ to commit rape because of the victims’ power of seduction.⁸⁶ Similarly, research from Pakistan highlights the use of patriarchal and objectifying language that focuses on the victims’ physical appearance from the perspective of the perpetrator (e.g. ‘the girl looked good’).⁸⁷ This dynamic has also been noted in media coverage of ISIS violence against Yazidi women in Yemen, where journalists adopted the same coercive terminology used by ISIS, referring to victims as ‘slaves’, ‘sex slaves’ or even ‘brides’, in their reports, while failing to provide any contextual information about the power dynamics between perpetrators and victims.⁸⁸ Research from Pakistan highlights that the choice of words used to portray violence against women and girls may unwittingly reinforce gender stereotypes and unequal gender power relations. For instance, the Pakistani word *zabardasti* (translation: forced) may be used to refer to sexual violence, but it also represents a level of power denoting supremacy of the perpetrator and the helplessness of the victim.⁸⁹

3.3 Sourcing practices

The literature also sheds light on concerns related to the sourcing practices that accompany reporting, and, more specifically, the overreliance on law enforcement personnel and courtroom sources.⁹⁴ This dynamic was also notable in several of the media reporting case studies analysed in this review (see, for example, ‘A closer look at the ‘irresponsible and sexualized victim’ trope: the case of Lucía Pérez (16-year-old), Argentina’). This one-sided sourcing

Scholars have also noted the widespread use of language that casts doubt on victims’ testimony, which they suggest can implicitly or explicitly mobilize judgement against them. For instance, research from Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and South Africa illustrates how the use of ‘alleged’ when referring to violence inadvertently detracts from the victim’s testimony and diminishes their experiences of victimization.⁹⁰ Similarly, references to a victim’s/survivor’s personal history, behaviours or activities, clothing or whereabouts at the time of the event further undermine their testimony by implying they played a role in their own victimization.⁹¹

All of these aforementioned dynamics are tied to the idea that women and girls who are perceived as having violated expected gender norms, roles or behaviours somehow invited the violence against them (e.g. by being too sexually ‘forward’ or by being in the ‘wrong place’ or in places where ‘good women and girls don’t go or belong’).⁹² Significantly, **the effect of this language is to focus the public’s attention on the behaviour and actions of victims and to suggest that the transgression is in the violation of the norm, rather than in the exercise of violence.**

Errors by omission in the narrative of VAWG reporting are also flagged in the literature. These include failures to cite relevant VAWG statistics, to provide quotations from women’s rights or child protection experts, and to provide information or calls to action. Cumulatively, these oversights are demonstrative of the broader neglect or breach of established and emerging guidelines on responsible, rights-based, gender- and age-sensitive and victim-/survivor-centred reporting.⁹³

tends to simplify messages and may lend a sensationalist tone to the reporting.⁹⁵ Furthermore, research shows that quotations from the police or courtroom sources (e.g. the defendants’ lawyers) are often published without corresponding opinions or quotations from survivors, gender researchers, child protection advocates or service providers. This undermines the potential for news reports to provide essential information for other victims/survivors

(and their families), and to provide the general public with crucial context that can help generate empathy and understanding. Evidence from Colombia and Ghana suggests that news media reports on cases of violence against women and girls can lean on quotations from perpetrators themselves or individuals with some passing relationship to the victim (such as a neighbour), and that these approaches can serve to minimize the violence, blame the victim and/or contradict the victim's testimony.⁹⁶

More recently, scholars have examined how **social media has positively reshaped sourcing practices** in some news media, but note that it has been slower in reaching 'old media' such as newspapers (whether online or hard-copy versions).⁹⁷ At the same time, stakeholders from India pointed out that the decline of on-the-ground reporting, especially on VAWG cases and issues, has meant that reporters are increasingly leveraging information sourced from social media. To be sure, leveraging social media will not necessarily lead to more responsible reporting of violence against women and children, and as of yet there is not substantive scholarly evidence that social media will lead to more responsible reporting, but stakeholders broadly shared the view that social media may be having a positive influence with respect to sourcing practices, the distribution/sharing of cases and mobilizing/rallying public support (for victims and their families).

The advent of 'citizen journalism' suggests that there is some cause for optimism: one stakeholder explained that because "social media is home to everybody" it provides a platform where people can share videographic or photographic evidence of events (performing a watchdog function, in a sense), and that this holds the potential to secure some public attention for victims who may otherwise fall low in the hierarchy of news priorities. For instance, stakeholders from Nigeria credited social media for the civil society response to the case of Ochanya Elizabeth Ogbanje, which they said helped to elevate concerns about the handling of the case, specifically with respect to the privilege accorded to the perpetrator (see 'A closer look at the positive role of journalists and social media: the case of Ochanya Elizabeth Ogbanje (13 years old)').

However, stakeholders from India expressed scepticism of the role of social media in positively influencing VAWG reporting. They explained that

because digital media outlets rely extensively on social media for disseminating news stories, the 'push to perform on social media' and keep up with Twitter trends may in fact compromise the quality of the story rather than incentivize more thoughtful reporting (there are also real concerns about the lack of regulation of the types of photographs and videos that may circulate through 'citizen journalism').⁹⁸

A closer look at the positive role of journalists and social media: the case of Ochanya Elizabeth Ogbanje (13 years old), Nigeria⁹⁹

For years, Ochanya Elizabeth Ogbanje's uncle and cousin raped and sexually abused her. She eventually died on 17 October 2018 of a vaginal fistula caused by the abuse. Although the incident took place in a rural part of Nigeria otherwise infrequently covered by news outlets, this case was considered so dire that it generated national coverage at the time and even years later when it went to trial. Notably, when reflecting on the case, stakeholders opined that reporting practices in Nigeria were generally improving to focus more on survivor protection and rights. However, some coverage did describe the rape and sexual assault as 'alleged' even after the hospital clearly established signs of sexual violence. Articles also tended to sensationalize the story by providing graphic details of the violence, although visual imagery, when included, was a smiling portrait of Ochanya. Importantly, stories also disproportionately described her uncle as a university professor and her cousin as a student, rather than simply stating they were the two perpetrators. Some coverage also focused on the role of her aunt, suggesting she was complicit in the crime, and stories that followed the court proceedings blamed her for the violence experienced by her niece at the hands of her husband and son.

However, stakeholders highlighted that journalism concerning this case was responsible for mobilizing public outcry. While there may have been obvious transgressions in gender- and age-sensitive and survivor-centred reporting, efforts from feminist journalists brought together women's rights and child protection advocates, and helped to mobilize the general public to rally in support of the elimination of violence against women and girls in Nigeria. Social media was used extensively by journalists, as well as gender equality and child protection advocates, to ask important questions of authorities and

create pressure to bring the perpetrators to justice. **Some coverage did display gender-sensitive practices too:** the popular outlet Vanguard News interviewed several feminist organizations about the impact of

the case and the structural inequalities undergirding it. Moreover, several articles covered the court proceedings, one of which focused on the family's continued fight for justice two years later.

3.4 Newsroom dynamics and 'newsworthiness'

In discussions with stakeholders, particularly with journalists and those working in communications related to children's rights, the topic of newsroom dynamics was raised as a key driver of whether or not (and how) VAWG reporting takes place. First, they emphasized the point (reflected in the literature) that stories are covered for their capacity to draw audience attention, or at least to be represented in ways that draw audience attention. Second, they noted that the majority of news media outlets lack a dedicated 'beat' for VAWG reporting, and thus the catalyst for covering these stories — let alone for doing so in ways that are sensitive to issues of gender and age — **relies predominantly on the personal dedication of individual journalists.** Journalists from various regions made references to 'fatigue' within newsrooms and to the associated reluctance to report on violence against women and girls because the sheer volume of cases across their regions was seen to diminish their 'newsworthiness'. According to one stakeholder from India, violence against women and girls is so "internalized and normalized, that it's treated as a non-subject to report on" and that unless there is something 'striking' about the case (which is often predicated on the sensationalism of the violence) it will likely go under the media radar.

Relatedly, stakeholders suggested that the **nature of VAWG reporting is shaped by the political leaning of the news outlet** itself. For example, stakeholders from India shared that the political leanings of a media outlet will have a bearing on the angle of reporting, and noted that right-wing-leaning outlets are more likely to blame victims. Similarly, stakeholders from Nigeria, the Asia and Pacific region and South Africa shared that tabloids may be more likely than more traditional newspapers to sensationalize stories.

Journalists also reflected on the 'backlash' they and their colleagues have faced when they have pursued more responsible gender- and age-sensitive reporting. Specifically, media stakeholders from Argentina, India, Nigeria and South Africa explained that

feminist journalists and those who adopt a rights-based perspective are in many respects putting themselves at risk, precisely because their reporting is challenging (or even just calling out) harmful gender norms and stereotypes that enable violence against women and girls in their particular contexts. Stakeholders also suggested that female journalists receive 'backlash' that is disproportionately worse than that received by their male colleagues, a point that is largely corroborated in recent multiregional research on the subject.¹⁰⁰ For instance, feminist journalists in India reported being threatened with legal cases and with violence (including sexual violence), and excessive social media 'trolling'. Similarly, in Argentina, stakeholders suggested that violence against feminist journalists is used as a mechanism to silence and terrorize them, and thus to stymie their efforts in changing the landscape of VAWG reporting.

With respect to 'newsworthiness', stakeholders explained that editors and senior journalists have important decision-making power regarding whether they think a story 'has legs'. Unfortunately, the subject itself being important was not, in their view, sufficient, and this is where the tensions around violence against women and girls and visibility come to the fore. Specifically, as scholars have also noted, too often what galvanizes public attention is the type of coverage that leans directly into the kinds of sensationalizing and irresponsible reporting modalities outlined above.¹⁰¹ In this sense, the popular media adage of 'if it bleeds, it leads' is an apt reflection of the dynamics that continue to drive much of the decision-making around VAWG reporting.¹⁰²

This tension was played out in the reporting of the horrific 2012 Nirbhaya rape and murder case in New Delhi. The case made global headlines, propelled landmark legislative changes in rape laws in India, and is attributed by stakeholders as having sparked public discussion on violence against women and girls. On the one hand, the coverage of the case was so widespread that it helped to catalyse some

positive legislative changes and public awareness; on the other hand, much of the coverage relied on sensationalist details of the sexual violence perpetrated against the victim. Furthermore, as scholars note, news coverage of violence against women and girls “that emphasize[s] sensational, unexpected and highly emotional events” is not necessarily catalysing attention because the public is being sensitized to the importance of gender equality and gender justice, but because of the shock value generated by the event.¹⁰³

‘Newsworthiness’ is also shaped by the social status or identity profile of victims.¹⁰⁴ Research shows that cases involving an ‘ideal’ victim type (e.g. a young/younger child who is not yet a teenager, or a white and middle-/upper-class woman or girl) are more likely to be picked up by news outlets, often for their shock value.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, research from the North American context highlights how stories that involve black or Latina women and girls are reported on insofar as the story can be framed against the backdrop of gender and racial stereotypes around the deviance, sexual promiscuity and poverty of women and girls from these groups.¹⁰⁶

Stakeholders also emphasized that website searches (by prospective readers/audiences) play an important role in determining the kinds of stories media outlets focus on. For instance, if audiences search the Thomson Reuters Foundation news website for

stories on climate change, this can drive the kind of reporting the outlet will invest in. Stakeholders involved in journalism also explained that many media houses have streamlined their gender focus through separate magazines/newspaper editions/websites (for instance, *The Lily* publication of *The Washington Post*, and the iDiva website of *The Times of India*), and that market research on ‘what millennial women want to read’ has driven the thematic focus of stories towards topics of fashion, lifestyle and well-being, with violence against women and girls, which is considered ‘hard’ news, not necessarily featuring in these publications.

Stories involving celebrities are also noted to be more newsworthy. The literature suggests that journalists tend to be more cautious when mentioning celebrity perpetrators, often adding the hedging term ‘alleged’ before their names are mentioned. On the other hand, the celebrity status of victims may be used to sensationalize the story (for instance, by using graphic and provocative images of the celebrity victims).¹⁰⁷ Similar dynamics related to the ‘newsworthiness’ of violence against women and girls and related reporting practices apply in cases in which a politician or public figure is implicated (see ‘A closer look at how intersectional dynamics are obscured: Unnao rape case (17-year-old), India’).



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4. MAPPING THE TERRAIN OF TROPES AND STEREOTYPES ACROSS VAWG REPORTING

There is broad consensus across the literature that mainstream news media outlets tend to make use of harmful tropes and stereotypes when reporting on cases of violence against women and girls, and that this contributes to the normalization of violence and the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms. As discussed above, these tropes and stereotypes are also shaped by vectors of intersectional discrimination across regional contexts (although these of course vary).

Overall, the evidence suggests that the positioning of women and girls in news stories about gender-based violence remains riddled with codes and connotations that serve to dehumanize and revictimize them. While some reporting practices have improved in many regions of the world, portrayals of victims/survivors also tend to reproduce hierarchies of ‘types’ of victims, and obscure the structural drivers of violence.¹⁰⁸ Evidence also suggests that there is a tendency for the behaviour (and thus responsibility) of perpetrators to be de-emphasized.

The following sections provide a deep dive into common tropes used in VAWG reporting. The first section outlines a typology of ‘victim tropes’, including common portrayals of victims and their families or ‘social circles’¹⁰⁹ that circulate in news media reports. The subsequent section outlines these tropes in relation to perpetrators. This section provides an overarching description of the trope and the key messages it delivers in relation to gender and violence, including whether the age dimension is visible or obscured, the reporting modalities and practices through which the

messages are conveyed, and its role in the broader normalization of violence against women and girls, including through the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes.

These trope typologies are not meant to be exhaustive, particularly given the nuances of how they might manifest across particular regional and national contexts and within particular media outlets. Instead, they are meant to be illustrative of broader trends that emerged from the scholarly literature and that were also reflected in the case-based media analysis. In illuminating the dynamics of what is wrong in VAWG reporting, the following sections also seek to provide practitioners across the gender, child protection and media/communication fields with clear entry points for advocating for responsible and rights-based reporting of violence against girls that avoids these harmful tropes, namely more gender- and age-sensitive, in addition to survivor-centred, reporting.

4.1 Victim tropes

News media reporting practices often reflect and reproduce hierarchical approaches to victims and survivors. The scholarly literature sheds light on two broad conceptual categories that women and girls are situated in across VAWG reporting. These have been designated as (i) 'ideal' victims; and (ii) 'non-ideal' victims. According to this framing, whereas the former are represented as 'true' or 'innocent' victims of violence, the latter are not.

'Ideal' victims

Cases involving 'ideal' victims, or those deemed 'newsworthy', tend to receive quantitatively more attention and qualitatively more dignified coverage than cases involving victims who are considered socially less valuable or 'worthy'.¹¹⁰ Conceptually, the 'ideal' victim is not only considered a more 'newsworthy' victim than the 'non-ideal' victim; she is also, unlike the latter, portrayed as a 'true' victim of violence. This 'ideal' victim is likely to be represented as conforming to gender stereotypes around femininity and gender norms relating to how women and girls 'should' behave and where they 'should' be. Unsurprisingly, the dynamics that circulate around 'ideal' victimhood are saturated with intersectional forms of discrimination, with 'ideal' being equated to whiteness, middle or upper socioeconomic class and/or association with dominant religions, politics or castes.¹¹¹ For instance, scholars note a widespread tendency for these factors to shape the visibility and 'newsworthiness' of victims. In addition, white, heterosexual victims are often depicted in news stories as 'the girl next door'. The emphasis on the 'purity' and 'innocence' of the victim often does not apply to victims with a different social status and background (who are either missing from VAWG reporting or represented through 'non-ideal' victim tropes, as discussed below).¹¹²

Violence against girls is often deemed more 'newsworthy' than violence against women, and the literature suggests that the younger a victim is, the 'purer' or more 'innocent' and 'blameless' she will be represented in reporting.¹¹³ Some scholars suggest that this 'blameless' framing is due to an emphasis on the 'non-sexual' nature of young child victims (which reveals a concerning portrayal of victims who are framed as sexual/sexualized). According

to stakeholders, because the protection of children is seen as a collective societal responsibility, news reports of violence against younger girls tend to be more emotive for news audiences and mobilize greater public outcry.

Significantly from the age analysis perspective, the evidence indicates that this framing does not always apply to 'older' child victims, or in other words adolescent girls, who can be represented implicitly or explicitly as adult women. When looking at the landscape of media reporting of violence against girls, there is often an 'expiration date' after which victims no longer 'count' as girls/children, and this cut-off point does not always correspond to the internationally (or in country contexts, nationally) recognized legal definition of a child (see also 'A closer look at the 'irresponsible and sexualized victim' trope: the case of Lucía Pérez (16-year-old), Argentina').

How it is portrayed

As with each trope analysed below, the 'ideal' victim trope is portrayed through a range of reporting modalities and practices related to textual and spatial codes, visual imagery and sourcing practices. The language used for reporting on these 'newsworthy' cases will straightforwardly refer to the victim as a 'victim'. Other common narrative devices include referring to the victim as 'the girl next door', 'innocent', 'the everyday woman' and 'loved by her family and community'.¹¹⁴ Spatial codes also matter in how this trope is portrayed: for instance, the setting of the crime may be described as a 'safe environment' breached by a violent predator, adding to the shock value of the story while signalling that violence against women and girls is unexpected in neighbourhoods deemed 'safe'.¹¹⁵ Visual imagery may include a photograph of the living victim, often smiling. Stories related to these cases are also more likely to appear on the front page of a newspaper and to be lengthy, or to be divided into several articles in the same edition. Therefore, they tend to involve deeper reporting practices, such as travelling to the site of the crime, interviewing several sources and investigating the context of the crime. While many sources may be quoted in these cases, the tendency is to highlight testimony from the victim/survivor or her family, usually with a view to communicating both the tragedy of the crime and the victim's good social

standing. The literature also points to a dichotomous trend: overall, reporting may be sympathetic to the victims, and may refrain from identifying, blaming or revictimizing them, but stories are often sensationalized with graphic descriptions of the violence.¹¹⁶

A closer look at the 'ideal' victim trope: the case of Zainab Ansari (7-year-old), Pakistan

On 4 January 2018, Imran Ali abducted 7-year-old Zainab Ansari from her neighbourhood in Kasur, Pakistan. Her body was found 4–5 days after her abduction. An autopsy confirmed that she had been raped and murdered. This case was widely covered by the Pakistani press, at both the national level and the regional level. All the stories analysed suggest that Zainab was **framed through the lens of the 'ideal' victim** — an innocent child who belonged to a pious family — through both textual references

and visual references. A smiling photograph and her name were widely published, and some news reports also carried photographs of her funeral. Any mention of the suspect/perpetrator was missing from the reports with the exception of one story, which included a sketch of the suspect; however, no reference was made to the perpetrator in the text of this story. Most stories represented the case as a tragic, outrageous incident, the 'height of savagery', and provided several vivid details about the act of violence, including details from the autopsy report. Sensationalist headlines were also used, emphasizing the violence exercised against Zainab. Notably, one story quoted the Minister for Law and Justice who suggested that the child's safety was primarily her parents' responsibility, thereby implicitly blaming her parents.

BOX 2

Bright spots: flagging positive practices

One news report in particular illustrates aspects of age-sensitive reporting, in that it situates the case in the wider context of rampant violence against children in Pakistan, and speaks to the public anger and lack of government accountability in responding to the scope of the problem. Rather than chronicle the gory details of the crime, this

story quotes a human rights activist focused on holding public institutions accountable for the lack of child safety in Pakistan and the South Asia region more broadly. Importantly, despite some notable age sensitivity, the reporting of this case was largely gender-blind.¹¹⁷

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

The ostensibly more 'newsworthy' cases involving 'ideal' victims often receive high levels of local, national and even international coverage. This dynamic generating 'public attention' can enable a stronger response from authorities and thus increase the likelihood that perpetrators are held accountable.¹¹⁸ While such coverage can also catalyse (or indeed be catalysed by) social movements and institutional reforms, these 'newsworthy' cases tend to be framed as standalone events, which obscures both (i) the ubiquity of gender-based violence; and (ii) the role of widespread gender inequalities, as well as

age-related dynamics, in enabling violence against girls in the first place.

The fact that only certain cases are deemed 'worthy' of coverage also suggests to the reader which cases (and thus victims) merit their attention and which do not, thus perpetuating harmful gender and intersecting hierarchies.¹¹⁹ In addition, coverage of 'ideal' victims can exacerbate harmful traditional gender norms around femininity (in which women and girls are viewed as 'weak') and the idea that 'well-behaved women and girls' do not deserve to experience violence, but women and girls who do not behave according to the strictures of gender- and age-related roles may have done something to warrant it.¹²⁰

‘Non-ideal’ victims

In contrast to ‘ideal’ victims, ‘non-ideal’ victims are framed as less deserving or undeserving of public sympathy, grief or outrage. Furthermore, ‘non-ideal’ victims tend to be dehumanized in news stories through a series of interrelated tropes and stereotypes that focus on the victims’ alleged deviance from the gender norms and roles that shape social expectations about where women and girls ‘should’ or should not be in a given context (e.g. location), and what they should or should not be doing (e.g. activities or behaviours). By moving attention towards the victim through a lens of suspicion rather than victimization, reporting dynamics related to ‘non-ideal’ victims shift blame onto the women and girls themselves (or their families).

The unfaithful lover or bad girlfriend

Within this trope, news media portrays the victim or survivor through the lens of her ‘romantic’ relationship with the perpetrator. The reporting will often imply that the woman or girl provoked the perpetrator to commit violence against her, for example by failing to fulfil her role as a ‘good girlfriend’ or by being an ‘unfaithful wife’. Most concerningly, **adolescent girls can be portrayed as engaging in consensual relationships with older men**, obscuring the fact that children cannot provide consent in these contexts.

How it is portrayed

Words and textual codes often dismiss the violence by representing it in relation to the ‘romantic’ or ‘consensual’ relationship between the victim and the perpetrator. Some examples include the ‘blinded fiancée’ (where the victim is reduced to her victimized identity) or the ‘Juliet’ (romanticizing the violence as an ‘honour crime’).¹²¹ In some coverage, the media may publish the woman’s intimate conversations or diary entries, to portray her as either lascivious or insecure.¹²² Visual imagery may include a photograph of the victim and the perpetrator together (suggesting past romance or happiness), or perhaps a photograph of the woman or girl that may sexualize her, to convey that she was a ‘promiscuous lover’. Sources may include the perpetrator, and the story may sympathize with the ‘jealous lover’ or ‘wronged boyfriend’.¹²³ The story is likely to focus on dramatic details of the relationship between the victim and

the perpetrator, including any fights, but these are not necessarily framed as being a history of domestic or gender-based violence.

Through this trope, victims are often sexualized through coverage that focuses on their clothing or suggests ‘romantic’ or ‘intimate’ relationships; these sexualizing frames of representation are particularly troubling when they are deployed in media reporting on violence against girls because they suggest that the child in question was not, in fact, a child. In cases in which news coverage focuses on the **location where the violence was committed**, the victim might be coded as ‘irresponsible’ through textual hints that it was inappropriate for her to be there.¹²⁴

A closer look at the ‘bad girlfriend’ trope: the case of Danesha Cooper (14 years old), Jamaica

On 8 May 2021, a 21-year-old man stabbed 14-year-old Danesha Cooper in Jamaica.¹²⁵ She died from her injuries two days later. Stories in the Jamaica Gleaner and the Jamaica Star (two of the most widely circulated newspapers in the country) framed the connection between the victim and the perpetrator as ‘romantic’ and ‘intimate’, and implied that the perpetrator began stalking and ultimately killed Danesha because she broke off their ‘relationship’. Despite the Star’s headline, which is explicit in identifying the perpetrator as an adult, and the victim as a child (“Twenty-year-old man charged for killing 14-year old girl”), it goes on to refer to Danesha’s “intimate relationship” with the man. The headline and the main story in the Gleaner also suggest that the child was involved in a consensual relationship with the 21-year-old man who killed her (“Lover slays 14-year-old”). Although Danesha’s mother, who is described as “consumed by grief,” is quoted and denies the relationship, the story in the Gleaner also includes quotations from the perpetrator’s father, who describes him as “a good boy”, who is humble and have manners to me . . . [and who he] taught . . . many skills so he can be a man” (emphasis added). Another trope that implicitly emerges in some coverage of this case relates to the ‘bad parents/irresponsible mother’ (see below), not only because Danesha’s mother is questioned about the relationship (which she denies existed), but because she is quoted under a headline that explicitly suggests that this was a romantic relationship, thus undercutting her testimony. Another story also implied that her parents put her at risk and thus were partially responsible for her death.

In one of the more promising news stories, a children's rights advocate was engaged and provided a quotation, and details of available support services and Jamaican sexual offences law were provided; however, the quotation from the advocate places a significant part of the onus for preventing and stopping intimate relationships between children and adults on parents: "Parents do have a responsibility, in fact the primary responsibility of all parents is to ensure that they're bringing up their children properly and to ensure that they are exposing their children to situations that would lead them to make good decisions and also to guide them. That's [their] full-time job and commitment." While the inclusion of a children's rights advocate in this story is positive, it is also worth noting that this particular quotation could be interpreted as suggesting that Danesha (the victim) made a 'poor decision' and that Danesha's mother (as the primary caregiver) failed to do her job properly.¹²⁶ The latter suggestion risks perpetuating harmful gender norms and stereotypes related to women's primary roles, and obscures the fact that the perpetrator holds ultimate responsibility for the act of violence, and that the state is also responsible for preventing violence and protecting victims.¹²⁷

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

The trope of the 'unfaithful lover' or 'bad girlfriend' provides at least an implicit rationalizing structure for violence against women and girls. Furthermore, significantly, in cases of violence against girls, by referencing romantic or consensual relationships (even when the perpetrator is an adult man), this trope conceals the additional layers of criminal violence being exercised against children.

The irresponsible and sexualized victim

The 'irresponsible victim' is represented through a lens that suggests she was promiscuous and that she deviated from 'appropriate' gender norms and expectations related to where women/girls should be and with whom, what activities they can participate in and how they should dress. Because she is represented as having violated these norms, the implication is that she placed herself at risk (and thus is at least partially to blame for any violence she experiences).¹²⁸ This trope often reflects and encourages the sexual objectification of the victim.¹²⁹

How it is portrayed

As with other 'non-ideal' victim tropes, reporting tends to focus on the role that the victim's behaviours or actions played in her own victimization.¹³⁰ In terms of language, the words that circulate in the context of this trope include 'alleged', which casts doubt on the victim's testimony, and victims may also be depicted as 'weak' or 'non-compliant'.¹³¹ Reporting will often refer to the behaviour and appearance of the woman or girl, implicitly suggesting that those factors are relevant for understanding why gender-based violence occurs.¹³² Victims can also be portrayed as 'troublemakers', 'seductresses' or 'troubled',¹³³ while stories are accompanied by revealing photographs of the victim.¹³⁴ In contrast, and to support the trope of the 'irresponsible' victim, perpetrators can be represented as 'passive victims' who were 'seduced' by the woman or girl.¹³⁵ In terms of spatial codes, the story may focus on the location of the crime, and research shows how VAWG reporting can train readers' attention to focus on the idea that the violence occurred in a place where victims should not have been or where they should have expected aggressive male behaviour (such as a bar or club).¹³⁶ In research from India, stereotypes around 'modernization' or 'westernization' may be cited in reporting as the cause of the violence, implying that victims stepped out of line by participating in pub culture, for example.¹³⁷ Sourcing practices often rely on quotations from neighbours or other vague acquaintances who opine on the victim's behaviour.¹³⁸

A closer look at the 'irresponsible and sexualized victim' trope: the case of Lucía Pérez (16-year-old), Argentina

Three men were charged with the rape and femi[ni]cide of 16-year-old Lucía Pérez, which took place on 8 October 2016 in the city of Mar del Plata, Argentina. The most circulated national newspaper in the country (Clarín) ran several stories about her death, as did many other widely read local and national newspapers. While some of these stories acknowledged that Lucía was, in fact, a child, they also consistently used textual descriptions of the sexual and other violence exercised against Lucía, and made multiple references to Lucía's ostensible sexual history and drug use. In other words, these stories largely centred on the victim's alleged behaviours and actions. Furthermore, while some coverage acknowledged

the ages of the alleged perpetrators (23 and 41), in many instances that same coverage referred to the 23-year-old as a “young man” with whom Lucía (an adolescent girl) had a ‘romantic connection’.

For feminists and women’s and children’s rights advocates, including those working in news media spaces, Lucía’s case was uniquely ‘high impact’, not only because of the horrific forms of violence committed against her, but because of the ways in which much of news media covered the case (e.g. publishing details from the autopsy report) and the high-profile trial that followed it (e.g. quoting statements from

the defence team, and publishing texts from Lucía’s phone, which the defence suggested showed she was ‘in control’, often with older men, and therefore not a ‘true’ victim). These interlocutors spotlighted, in particular, the ways in which much of news media coverage explicitly suggested that, as an adolescent girl, Lucía was capable of ‘consenting’ to sex with adult men; indeed, none of the consulted news articles stated that the age of consent in Argentina is 18 years.¹³⁹

Notably, both the nature of much of news media’s coverage of the rape and femi[ni]cide and the trial

BOX 3

Bright spots: flagging positive practices

that followed¹⁴⁰ catalysed an enormous response from feminist and women’s movements in the country and region, which leveraged social media and mobilized in the streets. Reflecting on the impact of Lucía’s case, stakeholders pointed out that feminist journalists in Argentina have become key protagonists in the fight for justice for victims of gender-based violence, and that the country now boasts the highest number of ‘Editoras de Género’ (gender editors) in South America. According to

women’s and children’s rights stakeholders in Argentina, **this suggests that there is an important positive relationship between women’s movement mobilizations (online and offline) and improvements in the newsroom dynamics that can catalyse more gender- and age-sensitive reporting of gender-based violence.**

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

This trope is centred around victim blaming, suggesting either directly or indirectly that the victim provoked the violence. This is a form of revictimization, and some literature suggests it can make other victims more reluctant to report violence.¹⁴¹

Furthermore, the often explicit and sexualized details included in reporting can exacerbate gendered forms of objectification. While much of the scholarly literature centres on the use of sexualizing tropes that centre on victims’ ‘inappropriate’ dress or behaviours in relation to women victims, it is important to underscore how **sexualization in news media coverage can function as a mechanism to portray girls as adult women, and thus to obscure not only the gender dimension, but also age-based rights violations at play.**

The oppressed victim

The trope of the ‘oppressed victim’ tends to depict victims as submissive and helpless. The trope is particularly salient in western media reporting on violence against women and girls in the Middle East/ Arab states in particular, and the Global South more generally.¹⁴²

How it is portrayed

Victims/survivors represented through this trope are generally not interviewed or asked to share their stories in media reports about them: instead, they tend to serve as a silent backdrop to a story focusing on the ‘villain’ or perpetrator.¹⁴³ Descriptions of the victims’ ‘helplessness’ are widespread, as are generalized references to a religion’s ‘culture of violence’.¹⁴⁴

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

Scholars note a widespread tendency for this trope to lean into xenophobic representations of victims as oppressed ‘others’ without any autonomy or agency. They also note that reporting tends to attribute their victimization to their religion and culture, an approach that has the effect of reproducing the myth that patriarchal and gender-based violence takes place only in non-western contexts.¹⁴⁵

The disposable victim

The trope of the ‘disposable’ woman or girl victim circulates in news media reporting where the implicit or explicit message is that the victim lacked social worth (e.g. due to her gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, ability, class, caste, location or religion). **Scholars point to a tension in how reporting unfolds with respect to such victims/survivors.** At times, victims are rendered relatively invisible in reporting (e.g. a perfunctory reference to a femi[ni]cide, with the victim remaining nameless and no context to the violence being provided).¹⁴⁶ At other times, the reporting is incredibly detailed, but in an exploitative manner that effectively reproduces the violence.¹⁴⁷ For example, although migrant women disproportionately face gendered forms of violence,¹⁴⁸ that violence is infrequently covered by media sources.¹⁴⁹ Analysis of coverage of cases of violence against indigenous women shows that victims are largely ignored and are largely portrayed as invisible ‘others’.¹⁵⁰ However, when these victims do emerge in media reporting, they are represented as ‘unworthy’ of empathy because of a combination of intersecting factors that determine women’s and girls’ perceived (lack of) social worth in a given context.¹⁵¹ Indeed, even though the victim herself might be ignored or obscured in the coverage, the violence itself might be reported on in a highly descriptive manner.¹⁵² For example, evidence suggests that news coverage of violence against LGBTQ+ individuals may explicitly describe sexual violence to sensationalize the story.¹⁵³

How it is portrayed

Studies from South Africa suggest that news stories about victims that are represented as ‘disposable’ are often not reported in a prominent section of the newspaper (e.g. the front page).¹⁵⁴ However, studies

of similar dynamics in Latin America suggest that such stories do often make the front page, but in ways that sensationalize the violence itself, rather than focus on the victims.¹⁵⁵ While this representation can be highly graphic and centred on the victim’s body (particularly in cases of femi[ni]cide), there is relatively little or no text dedicated to details of her life or to interviewing family members who might be able to provide a fuller picture of the victim’s humanity.

The victim’s ‘otherness’ may also be a focus of the story. For example, research from Canada shows that media reporting of violence against indigenous women tends to focus on victims’ indigenous (and thus ‘other’) identity and occupation (or assumed occupation) in the sex industry. However, this reporting consistently fails to contextualize how racism and poverty have shaped their experiences with violence.¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, evidence from cases of sexual violence against indigenous girls in Colombia suggests that media reporting may erase or obscure a victim’s indigenous identity, and instead refer only to violence against children. This approach obscures the gender and ethnic dimensions of the violence.¹⁵⁷

In terms of spatial codes, the setting where the violence occurred is often implicitly referenced as the justification for the crime (e.g. the victim lived in, or went to, an unsafe area/neighbourhood, where violence is bound to happen).¹⁵⁸ These representations are also tied to other stereotypes that cast particular neighbourhoods and groups of men and boys as ‘more violent’. These stories may suggest and emphasize particular social problems in the area, such as gang violence or family abuse, but do not include further nuance on how systemic factors (such as the availability of public services, infrastructure and quality of education) can exacerbate crime in underserved areas.¹⁵⁹

Coverage also tends to be perfunctory or ‘one-off’. Unlike cases involving victims who are considered socially valuable or, relatedly, cases that are considered ‘high impact’, there is generally no follow-up reporting about the victim’s (or their family’s) pathway to justice (although there are exceptions, for example when the cases of ‘disposable victims’ become ‘high-impact’ cases; see, for example, ‘A closer look at the ‘irresponsible and sexualized victim’ trope: the case of Lucía Pérez (16-year-old), Argentina’).

A closer look at the ‘disposable victim’ trope: the case of Janika Mallo (14 years old), South Africa

On 2 September 2019, two perpetrators raped and killed 14-year-old Janika Mallo. Although some criteria of the ‘ideal’ victim trope were met — Janika was not represented as engaging in any behaviours considered ‘deviant’ according to gender- or age-related norms — the case received comparatively little coverage. A few national (e.g. News24) and international publications (e.g. the United Kingdom’s Daily Mail) posted a single story on the case, but the local tabloid, The Sun, was the only one to follow the case and report multiple angles of it. Notably, in-country stakeholders (feminist journalists and individuals from the UNICEF country office) were not familiar with the case, since its coverage did not spark national attention or outrage. Stakeholders suggested this was because the case occurred in the Cape Flats, a poor peripheral neighbourhood in Cape Town, and thus the violence was probably deemed too unimportant, ‘normal’ or ‘everyday’ to garner vast coverage. The Sun, which did cover the case, pursued an extremely exploitative and sensationalist approach, describing in grotesque detail how the victim’s body was mutilated. One of the published photographs was of the cadaver covered by a sheet, with the victim’s family standing around looking at the body, or at the camera, in a distraught manner. Some coverage did include interviews with the victim’s family members, who reflected on the terrible nature of the crime. The story was depicted as a tragedy, but coverage failed to highlight the underlying factors that led to this violence. According to stakeholders, the overall lack of coverage, or, where there was coverage, its perfunctory and sensationalist nature, reflects that cases of violence against girls from poor and rural areas are often not considered newsworthy, and thus such victims are ‘disposable’ in South Africa.¹⁶⁰

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

The trope of the ‘disposable victim’ leads to a profound dehumanization of victims and victims/survivors; moreover, it can exacerbate stereotypes of particular communities or groups that are viewed as ‘inherently’ prone to perpetrate or to experience gender-based violence. These victims are often ignored, disbelieved or obscured from media narratives, and

thus they (or their families) are prevented from sharing their experiences.¹⁶¹

Notably, more recent literature suggests that there is a relationship between the circulation of this trope in VAWG reporting and a victim’s (or their family’s) access to justice. Specifically, emerging evidence suggests that this type of media coverage may not only reflect widespread attitudes and beliefs that certain ‘types’ of victims ‘don’t matter’, but may also provide a broader basis for ‘permission’ for authorities to neglect certain cases and follow-up investigations.¹⁶²

The bad parents or irresponsible mother

Another trope that emerges in the literature on how ‘non-ideal’ victims are portrayed relates to the representation of the victims’ parents. Through this trope, beyond blaming the victim herself, blame is extended or entirely attributed to ‘bad’ or ‘absent’ parents, especially mothers.¹⁶³ In cases of violence against girls, media coverage may explicitly or implicitly suggest that the mother is to blame for the violence against her child (see ‘A closer look at the ‘bad girlfriend’ trope: the case of Danesha Cooper (14 years old), Jamaica’). While this blame can extend to both parents, coverage generally does not single out the father, and is much more likely to focus on the mother’s perceived failings. Research from the United Kingdom, for example, illustrates that in cases of filicide the mother is often blamed even when the father is the perpetrator.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, in cases in which domestic or family violence extends to children in the household, women are coded as ‘bad wives’ or ‘bad mothers’, suggesting that they are at least in part to blame for the violence against them and their children. For instance, research from the Turkish context highlights how news reports allude to women having ‘provoked their partners’ to commit violence against them and their children, either by leaving them or by being generally ‘disobedient to their families’.¹⁶⁵

How it is portrayed

Research from Latin America shows that women, particularly those from socioeconomically and otherwise marginalized backgrounds and communities, tend to be represented as failing in their duties as mothers when their daughters are victims of gender-based violence, and especially in cases of femi[ni]cide.¹⁶⁶ A common tactic is for reporting to focus on the absence of the mother from the household when the

incident occurred, or her lack of knowledge of the whereabouts of her child. Stakeholders also honed in on a dynamic whereby online media reporting that leans into this trope can prompt readers to blame the mother in cases of violence against girls. This observation is reflected both in scholarly literature¹⁶⁷ and in the case-based analysis conducted for this review, which show that readers' comments in response to reporting of violence against girls call the mother's parenting or general morality and character into question (see Annex 1, for a screenshot of online comments posted in response to a media report on the case of Danesha Cooper).

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

This trope serves to obscure the structural causes leading to violence against girls, while perpetuating discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes that position women as solely or primarily responsible for their children, and that consider their character to be determined by their ability to fulfil their maternal roles in accordance with the strictures of societal expectations. Notably, this trope also situates responsibility for the prevention of violence against girls on the shoulders of women/mothers, rather than emphasizing the actions of perpetrators (let alone the responsibility of the state).

4.2 Perpetrator tropes

Evidence from the literature also sheds light on the tropes and stereotypes that circulate in portrayals of perpetrators of violence against women and girls. These 'perpetrator tropes' perpetuate harmful norms related to men, boys and 'toxic masculinities'.¹⁷⁰ Broadly speaking, representations of perpetrators can be forgiving or rationalizing of their actions, may underplay or invisibilize the perpetrator's role in the violence or may exceptionalize their behaviour as 'aberrant'.

The 'mad hubby' or 'jilted lover'

A common portrayal of the perpetrator, particularly in cases of domestic or intimate partner violence, is that of the man driven to violence by his partner's

The victim of 'everyday' violence

This is less a trope and more a category of victim that is infrequently covered by media outlets. Scholars point out that victims of forms of violence considered 'highly visible' (e.g. sexual or other forms of physical violence) are considered more 'newsworthy'. Even if the victims themselves are not considered 'newsworthy', the violence will often still be reported on because of its sensational value.¹⁶⁸ In contrast, there is relatively little coverage of other forms of gender-based violence, including emotional, psychological and economic violence, despite the widespread nature of these.¹⁶⁹

How it is portrayed

Because the violence is considered more mundane and thus less newsworthy, victims of 'everyday' violence are largely ignored or obscured in media reporting. The stories that do exist will not be on the front page of a newspaper nor be prominently featured on a news website.

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

The relative lack of coverage of violence that is less graphic or sensational obscures the widespread and varied manifestations of violence against women and girls, and perpetuates the view that only the most visible forms of sexual and physical violence 'count' as violence.

provocations. While the coverage may ultimately condemn the perpetrator for his violence, this framing portrays him through his relationship with the victim, and suggests that the latter somehow caused the violence (e.g. through her actions). This trope often accompanies the framing of the victim as an unfaithful partner. In other words, **this trope directs the attention of the reader to the 'wrong' that may have been committed against the perpetrator by the victim.**

How it is portrayed

Textually, media reports that leverage this trope may frame violence as a 'crime of passion'.¹⁷¹ The story will centre on the interactions between the victim

and the perpetrator, and may include information that suggests the former ‘wronged’ the latter (e.g. text messages exchanged between the victim and another man).¹⁷² There may be more space dedicated to describing the perpetrator’s life and profession than to those of the victim.¹⁷³ In cases in which the perpetrator is a celebrity, the violence will often be qualified as ‘alleged’.

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

This trope relies heavily on victim blaming. By implying that the victim provoked the perpetrator to commit violence, this trope perpetuates the view that violence is a ‘normal’ or justified response in cases in which a woman leaves her partner or refuses to engage in a relationship.¹⁷⁴ Notably, this trope also circulates in reporting in which victims are children, portraying adult perpetrators as the ‘lovers’ or ‘romantic partners’, and thus suggesting that such dynamics (even where further violence does not take place) can ever be consensual.

The invisible perpetrator

Another reporting trend that is noted throughout the regions covered in this review relates to how perpetrators are invisibilized in news media coverage, by reporting either entirely neglecting to mention a perpetrator or making only passing reference to one, thus obscuring the person responsible for the violence.¹⁷⁵ Instead, the focus tends to be placed on the victim’s behaviour.

How it is portrayed

In this reporting trend, little or no text is devoted to the perpetrator. Moreover, the language in these articles is often passive, focusing on the victim and her whereabouts (e.g. ‘Girl raped in park’).

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

By centring the story on the victim’s behaviours or actions, this portrayal obscures the responsible individual and can enable interpretations of violence that blame the victim, fuelling the idea that violence against women and girls is a problem belonging to women and girls.¹⁷⁶

The ‘good man’ or ‘good boy’

This trope provides a defence of the perpetrator based on merit or other qualities, such as professional achievements or perceived good standing in a family or society (‘he was a responsible family man’). This representation suggests that the violence was an aberration in an otherwise respectable life.¹⁷⁷ When perpetrators are public figures, their names may be mentioned with greater frequency, while coverage will implicitly call the claims of violence into question, flagging the perpetrator’s positive social reputation or past actions as evidence in their favour.¹⁷⁸

How it is portrayed

If a story involves a public figure or celebrity, it may appear prominently in the media, for example on the front page of newspapers. Textual references to the perpetrator may include ‘respected individual’, ‘family man’, ‘successful businessman’, ‘ambitious’ or ‘shy young man’.¹⁷⁹ Visual imagery may include a photograph of the perpetrator that casts him in a positive light, such as a graduation or family photograph. In contrast, the article is unlikely to include the same types of visual imagery or descriptions of the victim’s accomplishments and character. The story may shift the focus from the victim to the perpetrator without casting blame, so that the accused man emerges as the ‘real victim’.¹⁸⁰

A closer look at the ‘good man’ trope: the case of Julie (13-year-old), France

A group of men repeatedly sexually assaulted Julie for two years starting in 2008 when she was 13 years old, and ending in 2010 when she pressed charges. The case, however, came to be widely covered by both French newspapers and prominent English language newspapers in the United Kingdom in 2021, when it came for hearing at France’s highest court of appeal. A patchwork of both promising journalistic practices and poor journalistic practices can be seen in media reporting on this case. On the one hand, the perpetrators are continually referred to by their occupation (i.e. as firefighters), bringing the ‘nobility’ and trustworthiness of the occupation to the forefront and bolstering the profile of the perpetrators. On the other hand, references are made to Julie’s poor mental and physical health, as well as drug use, thereby casting doubt on her testimony. Some

reports also implied that a relationship between “a 20-year-old soldier” and the 13-year-old child, Julie, was consensual by referring to the rape as “sexual relations” or more sensationally as a “sex party,” without highlighting that she was a child during this abuse. In recounting the facts of the case, one report

states that “The firefighters brigade . . . made some 130 visits to her home between 2008 and 2010 to help her with her seizures” (emphasis added) without stating that it was during this period, and by these same firefighters, that Julie reported she was repeatedly violated.¹⁸¹

BOX 4

Bright spots: flagging positive practices

Several examples of survivor-centred reporting are also noted in coverage of this case. The identity of the victim is well protected by the use of a pseudonym, and by not using any identifying photographs/imagery. Reports showcase the survivor as an empowered individual who decided to speak up: one headline reads “You thought that you killed me, but now it’s your turn to shake.” Reports specifically call out the harm done by the perpetrators (“these men destroyed this child”), and references are made to the victim’s mental health, associating its deterioration with the multiple assaults. Furthermore, the case is called an ‘emblematic case’, and media reports quote the feminist movement’s critique of the court’s

ruling that there was no rape in the case as being illustrative of ‘patriarchal justice’. There is also notable engagement from both a child protection lens and a survivor-centred lens. French law is critiqued for its problematic view of age of consent, and the report emphasizes that addressing sexual violence against children requires age-responsive legal systems. Julie’s advocate is extensively quoted on how the ruling shows total impunity, given the fact that there could not be consent in this case because she was a minor and because she was on heavy medication. Opinions from feminist organizations, child protection experts, psychiatrists and lawyers specializing in sexual violence are also included.¹⁸²

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

This trope tends to cast doubt on the victim’s testimony by using the perpetrator’s reputation as a defence, reinforcing “the idea that such cases should be handled with caution and that rape survivors’ stories should be met with disbelief.”¹⁸³ When the perpetrator is a celebrity or powerful figure, this practice may sway readers or institutions in favour of the perpetrator, particularly when media outlets fear legal repercussions.¹⁸⁴ This trope also reflects the culture of impunity that does not hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

Perpetrator ‘not in his right mind’

This trope relies on an often sympathetic defence of the perpetrator for not being in his right mind while under the influence of drugs, alcohol or something else. Thus, the trope mobilizes empathy for the perpetrator and may excuse the perpetrator’s violence

as a ‘one-off’ or aberration that does not typically represent him.¹⁸⁵ If the perpetrator has a long history of substance abuse, outlets may ‘other’ the culprit to portray him as a social deviant from society. Another approach is to imply that the **perpetrator had an ‘isolated pathological condition’ that caused him to commit a ‘crime of passion’**. This code is often seen in the propagation of rape myths, whereby sexual violence is represented as a ‘normal male response’ to an opportunity, thereby obscuring the perpetrator’s agency and directing attention and even blame towards the victim/survivor.¹⁸⁶

How it is portrayed

Empathy for perpetrators can be shown using language that describes them to be under the influence of something (alcohol, drugs, passion, stress, anger, etc.), which led them to ‘lose control’ when committing the violence.¹⁸⁷ References to ‘mental illness’ or a variation of ‘he just snapped’ are commonplace.¹⁸⁸ For cases of filicide, mental illness or insanity are often deployed to explain or justify the crime.¹⁸⁹

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

Where VAWG reporting grounds defences of the perpetrator's actions in poor mental health or substance abuse, the crime may be articulated as 'evil' but the perpetrator is absolved of the responsibility.¹⁹⁰ As with other tropes, this portrayal excuses the perpetrator of their violence while disguising the systemic inequalities that enable violence against women and girls in the first place. The mental illness/distress frame both 'individualizes' the source of violence against women and girls, and deflects from the patriarchal norms and gendered power imbalances that socialize men and boys to believe that the use of violence is a reasonable response to distress.¹⁹¹

The 'monster'

The depiction of the perpetrator as a 'monster' serves to exceptionalize and differentiate them from the rest of society, driving interpretations that violence against women and girls is perpetrated or caused by a few 'bad apples' or 'monstrous men'.¹⁹² These depictions often hinge upon racist or classist portrayals of particular men as 'inherently violent' and prone to criminal behaviour.

How it is portrayed

Textual codes may refer to a 'deviant individual', 'serial killer', 'criminal' or 'terrorist'.¹⁹³ The framing of the story centres around the horror of the violence, and 'shock value' tactics are deployed to sensationalize the story.¹⁹⁴ Where perpetrators are represented as racially 'other', reporting may also depict them as 'sexually insatiable', 'barbaric' or 'animalistic'.¹⁹⁵

How this all relates to the normalization of violence against women and girls

Representing perpetrators as 'monsters' obscures the root causes of violence against women and girls, and perpetuates the myth that such violence is merely episodic, exceptional, perpetrated by 'strangers' or constrained to certain 'deviant' populations and communities.¹⁹⁶ This can serve to construct violence against women and girls as a 'them' problem that only certain communities face, when in reality patriarchal structures are embedded in all cultures and societies, even if they manifest in somewhat distinct ways.¹⁹⁷



Photo: UNICEF/UN195858/Giuseppe Imperato

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The evidence from this review of primarily scholarly literature published over the past 20 years, which was supplemented by stakeholder interviews and a cross-regional analysis of news media reports of violence against girls in the past five years, has shed light on several key findings concerning the landscape of media reporting of gender-based violence, and specifically the relationship between (i) common reporting modalities and journalistic practices and (ii) the normalization of violence through the perpetuation of harmful gender norms and stereotypes. The following section summarizes findings in relation to the core research questions that motivated this study.

5.1 Key findings about the landscape of VAWG reporting

The literature highlighted a series of reporting modalities and journalistic practices that help to shape representations and interpretations of violence against women and girls, including visual and textual devices, and sourcing practices. In addition, cross-regional evidence suggested that mainstream news reporting tends to mirror and reinforce the dynamics that contribute to violence against women and girls in the first place, such as victim blaming, decentering the responsibility of perpetrators and deploying stigmatizing or sensationalizing language that draws upon harmful gender norms and stereotypes about women's and girls' 'appropriate roles'. The evidence signalled that the effect of these reporting modalities is to direct the public's attention towards the behaviour and actions of victims and to suggest that

the transgression is in the violation of a gender norm, rather than in the exercise of violence.

The literature also highlighted that incidents of violence against women and girls are generally reported as episodic events or independent incidents of crime, that such reports deploy language that blames the victim by suggesting that she violated established or expected gender norms and rules, and that the level of sensationalism or 'shock value' in the case determines its 'newsworthiness'. Stakeholders also noted that reporters still largely neglect to include inputs from violence against women and girls, women's rights or child protection experts, a concern that was corroborated by the literature.

5.2 Key findings about the relationship between VAWG media reporting and the perpetuation of harmful gender norms and stereotypes

This review also found broad consensus across the literature that mainstream news media outlets tend to make use of harmful tropes and stereotypes when reporting on cases of violence against women and girls, and that this contributes to the normalization of violence and the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes. Specifically, this

review notes common tropes and stereotypes that circulate in relation to victims and perpetrators, and provides illustrative examples of how these function to shape interpretations of violence and its victims. The evidence also emphasized that these tropes and stereotypes are also shaped by vectors of intersectional discrimination across regional contexts, and

that the media's use of these tropes serves to reinforce hierarchies by differentiating between 'types' of victims (where some victims matter, or matter more than others, because they are represented as more 'innocent' or 'truer' victims).

Significantly, from the age analysis perspective, evidence from the case-based media analysis also indicated that there is often an 'expiration date' after which girl victims may not 'count' as children. Specifically, sexualization and a focus on victim behaviour in news media coverage of cases of gender-based violence can function as a mechanism to portray adolescent girls as adult women, and thus to obscure not only the gender dimension but also the age-based rights violations at play.

Notably, while this review identified a burgeoning literature analysing the dynamics of media reporting on violence against women and how these relate to the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes, **a concerning gap was found in similar scholarly literature analysing these dynamics in**

relation to girls. Specifically, while there is a rich body of literature that includes gender and intersectional analyses of media reporting of violence against women, research that centres the age-related lens and analysis alongside the gender lens remains relatively thin or nascent, suggesting a clear need for further in-depth study.

In addition to spotlighting key existing frameworks and resources for gender- and age-sensitive reporting, the following, final, chapter brings together insights from this evidence review regarding the factors that have enabled — or could enable — more promising practices and approaches. These insights have been aggregated into '10 essential recommendations' geared towards media practitioners, media agencies and organizations, and international organizations dedicated to upholding girls' rights (see the separate advocacy document 10 Essentials for Gender- and Age-Sensitive Media Reporting of Violence against Girls).



UN Women/Ryan Brown

6. THE WAY FORWARD

From a gender equality and women's and children's rights perspective, the urgency of transforming the harmful reporting practices around violence against women and girls evidenced in this review is clear. Fortunately, there is no need to reinvent the wheel: international and regional guidelines and instruments, and national and subnational initiatives that can help drive positive change, are plentiful. However, while there is a relatively clear path forward in terms of what needs to be done, a pressing gap remains in how to incentivize and ensure uptake and implementation of these frameworks and strategies for more gender- and age-sensitive reporting within and across media organizations and among media practitioners. Indeed, the evidence that emerges from both existing scholarly research and novel analysis of reporting of violence against girls over the past five years suggests that the uptake of and adherence to these guidelines and frameworks remains limited. Still, despite the current state of play, there are some promising examples of more responsible reporting practices and trends (at least in certain regional contexts), suggesting that the way forward is in continued advocacy and engagement with advocates to promote the uptake and implementation of guidelines for responsible media representations that are sensitive to gender and age dimensions alongside substantive commitment from media outlets (including media leadership and practitioners). Research to better understand the precise nature of the social, political and economic constraints (and enablers) in particular contexts is also required.

A closer look at promising practices in gender- and age-sensitive reporting: the case of a 10-year-old anonymous victim, Fiji

In January 2021, a 20-year-old man was accused and charged with two counts of rape of a 10-year-old girl at an evacuation centre, where the victim and her family had taken shelter in the aftermath of Cyclone Yasa. Several of Fiji's most widely read newspapers reported on the crime, and the modalities and practices displayed by these reports **are exemplary of what gender- and age-sensitive representation and**

reporting of violence against girls can look like in practice. First, the victim's privacy was maintained throughout; even though one article refers to the perpetrator as the victim's uncle, his name is not revealed, thus ensuring that the victim's identity remains anonymous (in case they shared a surname). Second, where reports make reference to the repeated sexual assaults, these are not sensationalized, and instead focus squarely on the criminal actions of the perpetrator. Finally, the reports dedicate space to providing the reader with the broader context of violence against girls and unequal power relations based not only on gender, but also on other factors. For example, one report in the Fiji Times included an interview with the leading women's crisis centre coordinator in the country, in which she connects this case to broader and widespread dynamics in Fiji: she said "the incidence of attacks, abuse, sexual harassment and violence on young girls, children, women, people with disabilities and the LGBTI community doubled during and after a natural disaster." Rather than directing readers' attention to sensationalist details, or drawing upon tropes conveying that this perpetrator (or this incident) was in some way exceptional/uniquely monstrous, these types of contextual details can train readers' attention in more productive directions, helping them build an understanding of the dynamics that might be driving cases such as these. While the reporting that emerged in the aftermath of this case should be commended, it is also worth considering whether similar modalities of representation would have followed if the victim was an 'older' girl, particularly if a relationship between the victim and perpetrator had been (wrongly) framed as consensual or romantic. In other contexts (such as Argentina and Jamaica), this review noted how the sexualization of adolescent girls can function as a mechanism for victims not to be represented as *children*.¹⁹⁸

Existing frameworks

A range of established international and regional human rights frameworks outline state obligations in relation to promoting more gender-sensitive and

rights-based approaches to media, including through strengthening the regulatory environment that governs media activities.¹⁹⁹

More recently, several international organizations and media/journalist associations have produced detailed guidelines and recommendations geared towards improving reporting on violence against women and children, including by challenging the perpetuation of harmful gender norms and

stereotypes. These guidelines outline a range of strategic entry points for catalysing change within media organizations, and considerations for journalists and media practitioners, which can be leveraged to promote more dignified, responsible, ethical and rights-based VAWG reporting. Some of these guidelines include codes of conduct,²⁰⁰ or specific indicators for more gender- and age-sensitive and survivor-centred reporting.²⁰¹

BOX 5

Relevant guidelines and standards

- CARE, Gender Sensitization Manual on Media Reporting on Gender-Based Violence (2017)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Reporting on Violence against Women and Girls: A Handbook for Journalists (2019)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Federation of Journalists, Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media (2012)
- United Nations Global Protection Cluster, Media Guidelines for Reporting on Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Contexts (2014)
- UNICEF, UN Women and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Responsible Representation and Reporting of Violence against Women and Violence against Children (2020)
- UN Women, The Big Conversation: Handbook to Address Violence against Women in and through the Media (2019)
- UN Women, Guidelines for Gender and Conflict-Sensitive Reporting (2019)

Industry stakeholders lamented that, while there is a general awareness about the existence of these instruments and guidelines (through press associations and editorial and journalism bodies, and as a result of advocacy by international organizations), the actual framing of VAWG reporting remains driven by the ‘sellability’ of the story (which often hinges on the problematic modalities and tropes evidenced in this review), as well as the capacities and motivations of individual journalists.

Providing training to support journalists and media practitioners in developing greater understanding of the importance of applying a gender lens to their reporting and providing instruction on how to make use of existing resources is another strategy highlighted in advocacy materials.²⁰² However, a persistent gap remains in relation to the power of training approaches to catalyse systemic change at

scale. Specifically, a lack of enforcement and feedback mechanisms to address implementation gaps remains,²⁰³ and these gaps, as industry stakeholders explained, are tied to gaps in political will among decision-makers within media organizations. In particular, stakeholders explained that training in gender- and age-sensitive reporting is largely unstructured and ad hoc across the regions included in this review, a point also reflected in research and advocacy materials.²⁰⁴ Still, some case-based evidence points to the potential positive impact of such training. For example, a recent Australian study examines the influence of providing incentives for media practitioners to attend training in improving VAWG news reporting practices. Findings suggest an overall improvement in the percentage of articles that include social context, avoid victim blaming, source quotations from domestic violence experts and provide help-seeking information for survivors,

and that more broadly avoid reporting modalities that perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes.²⁰⁵ Regarding the longer term, one idea to address gaps in political will among decision-makers within media organizations that emerged in stakeholder discussions was to ensure that specific VAWG resources are embedded within newsrooms (e.g. through the provision of grants to student journalists, or through the introduction of women journalists and feminist journalists dedicated to covering gender-based violence).

Dynamics that enable gender- and age-sensitive reporting

In addition to the more formal institutional mechanisms and approaches, another category of ‘enablers’ emerged from the scholarly and grey literature and from stakeholders. These relate to a combination of formal/informal strategies, pursued from within/occurring outside media organizations, and at the individual/community level, which have shown signs of catalysing, or in some cases have already catalysed, positive changes in reporting of violence against girls. The dynamics outlined below serve as entry points for the separate advocacy document 10 Essentials for Gender- and Age-Sensitive Media Reporting of Violence against Girls.

Individual journalists who value and champion social justice, gender equality and human rights, and feminist journalist/gender editor networks, are important catalysts in determining how a VAWG story is researched, sourced and framed. Examples from Argentina, India and Nigeria show that feminist editors and journalists, in particular, are critical in the journey that a violence against girls case takes. They often ensure that cases are situated within their broader sociocultural and political contexts and try to rally survivor-centred public opinion. For instance, regarding the rape and murder case of 13-year-old Ochanya Elizabeth Ogbanje (see ‘A closer look at the positive role of journalists and social media: the case of Ochanya Elizabeth Ogbanje (13 years old), Nigeria’), stakeholders from Nigeria shared that the partnership between journalists, gender equality experts and child protection advocates was vital in bringing visibility to the case and holding the perpetrators responsible. Notably, relying on the onus of individual journalists is not a scalable solution that will enable the systemic changes required, and this

is why collectives of women journalists and feminist journalists are also considered so important. Indeed, given that news production is a product of gender-unequal environments and dynamics, it is no surprise that journalistic values of what is ‘newsworthy’ and how stories should be framed also reflect those dynamics.²⁰⁶ Feminist journalists from Argentina, India and Nigeria, who form a small section of the media profession, explained that they have been galvanizing civil society support and propelling the discourse on gender equality and gender justice through their journalist networks and VAWG reporting. One concern they noted is that discussions regarding gender- and age-sensitive and rights-based reporting are held in echo chambers. They consider it crucial that standards and guidelines regarding VAWG reporting percolate across all sections of the media and that journalists whose primary focus is not gender are incentivized to cover VAWG stories using more responsible, do-no-harm and ethical reporting lenses.

Relatedly, evidence from the literature and from primary data also suggests that **the presence of a strong feminist movement or women’s movement within civil society can have a positive impact** on in-country VAWG reporting. For instance, in Fiji, strong civil society organizations working on gender equality have been instrumental in holding the government accountable and in promoting a ‘watchdog’ status for news media. Reportedly, the coordinator of the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre has made herself available to the media for expert opinions and information as and when required, which has greatly enhanced the scope and quality of reporting of VAWG cases (see, for example, ‘A closer look at promising practices in gender- and age-sensitive reporting: the case of a 10-year-old anonymous victim, Fiji’). Similarly, in Argentina, the grassroots feminist movement #NiUnaMenos is credited with mobilizing public awareness around violence against women and girls and demanding accountability and improved reporting among media outlets. Feminist journalists and gender editors in the country say that the movement (of which they consider themselves a part) has bolstered their efforts within media organizations to improve GBV reporting practices.

Stakeholders also flagged the power of ‘high-impact’ cases, noting that these can propel decisive shifts in the gender justice and VAWG discourse in general, and in reporting dynamics in particular. For instance,

the deeply sexist and age-insensitive media coverage of the femi[ni]cide of Lucía Pérez in Argentina shone a spotlight on bad journalistic practices and encouraged critical conversations around how these should be addressed. Similarly, the 2012 Nirbhaya rape and murder case in India was instrumental in awakening public consciousness about sexual violence against girls, catalysing legislative amendments, and in reinforcing the crucial role of responsible journalism in creating positive social change.

Notably, stakeholders also pointed out the value of international organizations' advocacy efforts around the promotion and implementation of responsible journalistic practices, including through direct engagement with the media. For instance, in Nigeria, United Nations agencies have engaged with the media regarding the provision of sensitization and training to those working in the media, which stakeholders suggest has led to notable improvements. Specifically, United Nations agencies have been working on harnessing the reach and power of social media and influencers in promoting gender equality and child protection. These international entities were seen as instrumental in helping to elevate media coverage of the rape and murder of Ochanya Elizabeth Ogbanje.

So how might the evidence and insights described above be channelled into action? As stakeholders interviewed for this review noted, from an actionability

perspective, it is helpful to gear recommendations towards specific actors, industries and organizations. Luckily, there are concrete actions that media practitioners (e.g. journalists and editors), leadership, agencies and organizations, and international human rights agencies can pursue across the short, medium and long terms to help catalyse more gender- and age-sensitive reporting of violence against girls. These are laid out in the accompanying advocacy document 10 Essentials for Gender- and Age-Sensitive Media Reporting on Violence against Girls.

Overall, the evidence suggests that achieving the kinds of change needed to enable more gender- and age-sensitive reporting of violence against girls will require a combination of formal and informal mechanisms, strategies and long-term efforts and investments. It will also require demonstrations of real political will and commitment from the various agents of potential change within the media industry. Indeed, even though gender norms and stereotypes are 'sticky' and take time to change, there is broad consensus that the media enjoys a vast sphere of influence in shaping our values and perceptions. In the light of this, news reporting constitutes a key entry point — as of yet not fully tapped — for catalysing positive changes in how violence against girls is represented, and thus how we as a society interpret and respond to it.



UN Women/Christopher Herwig

ANNEX 1: METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study was designed to include two core components. First, and primarily, a review of existing scholarly (peer-reviewed) and “grey” (policy) literature was conducted. Second, in order to supplement the literature review, primary data was generated through key informant interviews (KIIs) and a case-based analysis of news media reporting across a range of country and regional contexts. The case study approach was used to ensure that geographic variation in contextual patterns and trends with respect to media reporting practices was captured. Notably, complementing the secondary data with this primary data also helped bridge the temporal gaps between peer-reviewed research publications and the current state of affairs, and lastly, to generate action-oriented findings and recommendations.

Secondary Data from peer-reviewed and grey literature forms the bulk of this evidence review (approximately three-fourths of overall data analyzed). We used the Scoping Study methodology for the literature review, which aims to “map rapidly the key concepts underpinning a research area and the main sources and types of evidence available... especially where an area is complex or has not been reviewed comprehensively before” (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005). This methodology was deemed particularly useful given the widespread, and highly context specific nature of the key subjects of this study, including but not limited to media representation, gender socialization, norms, and stereotypes, and gender based violence. Furthermore, scoping reviews are highly fit for purpose when researchers are seeking to map a field (or multiple fields) of evidence that are scattered and/or fairly nascent and thus “where conventional searches of academic databases are less likely to be fruitful” (see also (Holeman, Cookson, & Pagliari, 2016).

Relevant literature was identified and sourced through iterative internet searches (using Google Scholar and Google search engines), while the temporality of literature was capped at works published from 2000-onwards. In order to ensure that we captured a range of regional evidence, literature in English, Spanish, and French languages was included in the review. As noted above, both peer-reviewed

and grey literature was consulted. “Grey literature” includes sources such as reports from civil society organizations, institutional publications, blogs, and policy papers. While grey literature is “not considered a scholarly form of publication... [it] is often produced by experts in the field” and thus, is highly relevant to this research (Pappas & Williams, 2011). Key publications from UNICEF and other UN agencies were also reviewed. Overall, we reviewed 150 sources of evidence. The full bibliography of consulted sources that fit the inclusion criteria is available in Annex V.

Primary Data comprises roughly one-fourth of the overall data analyzed, and was generated through KIIs and a case-based analysis of news media reporting (Media Report Analysis).

- Key Informant Interviews (KIIs): Journalists reporting on GBV and related issues, and UN communication specialists were identified as key stakeholders in order to understand how news media reporting on GBV in a particular region reinforces (or challenges) discriminatory gender norms and the normalization of GBV against girls. The country specific cases (below) were used to dive deeper into the landscape and trends of journalism in this regard. Journalists were identified and contacted in consultation and with support from UNICEF country office colleagues in the countries where cases were selected (see Table 1). Similarly, UNICEF (and in some cases UN Women) communication specialists were also interviewed. In addition, we also interviewed a veteran Editor with several years of international journalism experience to get macro level insights into the political and economic dynamics of media outlets. Annex III includes a list of questions that were used to guide the KIIs, both in English and Spanish.
- Stakeholders represented the following affiliations:
 - UNICEF, South Africa (communications)
 - Journalist, South Africa
 - UN Women, Fiji (communications)
 - Journalist, Jamaica
 - UNICEF, Nigeria
 - Journalists, Nigeria

- Journalists, India
- UNICEF, Argentina
- Journalists, Argentina
- Editor, Thomas Reuters Foundation

Given that the data collection period stretched closer to end-of-the year (2021), access to stakeholders was understandably arduous. However, we conducted 13 interviews across all of the countries covered by the selected cases, which fell within the desired range of 2-3 interviews per case. All interviews were conducted virtually, and in the language of the interviewees' preference (English and Spanish).

- Media Report Analysis: A small, purposeful selection of 8 cases of violence against girls that were widely reported in mainstream or popular media across UNICEF's regions, was made in consultation with the UNICEF Engagement Management Team, Internal Reference Group, and relevant UNICEF regional and country offices. Key criteria for case selection were:
- Time frame: cases of violence against girls in the past 5 years

- Type of GBV: case studies align to regional priorities established under the Spotlight Initiative. An initial scan of regional data on the most prevalent forms of violence against women and girls also aligned with the regional priorities under the Spotlight Initiative.
- Intersectional lens: cases that reflected dynamics around intersectionality, and specifically, intersectionalities of social identities of victims/survivors (such as ethnicity, race, class, caste, religion, sexuality, etc. along with gender, were prioritized.
- Geographies: This study began with the intention of including all regions where UNICEF has programmatic work. However, due to scheduling difficulties and some constraints related to regional priorities, this could not be achieved. Particularly, we were unable to identify relevant cases from the Middle East and North Africa, and the Europe and Central Asia regions. However, through inputs from the Internal Reference Group, a pertinent case from France was identified and included in the study.

Table 1: Media Report Analysis, case study selection

Region, Country	Type of GBV*	Selected Case
East Asia and the Pacific**: Fiji	Sexual and Gender-based violence (SGBV); Domestic violence/ Intimate Partner violence	Evacuation centre rape case, 10 year-old victim
South Asia: India and Pakistan	SGBV	Unnao rape case, 17 year-old victim Zainab Ansari rape and murder case, 7 year-old victim
Eastern and Southern Africa: South Africa	SGBV; Harmful practices; sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)	Janika Mallo rape and murder case, 14 year-old victim
Western and Central Africa: Nigeria	SGBV; Harmful practices; SRHR	Ochanya Elizabeth Ogbanje rape and murder case, 13 year-old victim
Europe: France	– not defined under Spotlight Initiative –	Julie (name changed) rape case, 13 year-old victim
Latin America and the Caribbean: Argentina and Jamaica	Femi[ni]cide and Family violence	Lucia Perez femi[ni]cide case, 16 year-old victim
		Daneshia Cooper murder case, 14 year-old victim

* As per Spotlight Initiative regional priority areas.

** In keeping with the intersectional lens criteria for case study inclusion, efforts were made to identify cases of violence against trans and gender non-conforming children and adolescents, especially from the East Asia and Pacific region. Despite working with colleagues to address this gap, we were unsuccessful due to a notable lack of publicly available information on a relevant case, so another high-impact case, as suggested by the Pacific region Spotlight Initiative team, was selected.

News media reports about the selected cases were analyzed with two key threads: a) media framing analysis and b) extent of compliance with existing guidelines or recognition of unequal gender and intersecting power relations. Drawing from scholarship at the intersection of news media framing of GBV and the reproduction of gender and intersecting norms and stereotypes (see for e.g., Fuentes 2020a, 2020b; Torres, 2014; Razack, 2000), media framing analysis covers two overarching components:

- Discourse analysis: focuses on the textual, tonal, and discursive elements of reporting GBV. Discourse analysis attends to the explicit terms or more implicit codes that are used to describe the victim or perpetrator. It also looks for any references to the spatiality of the violence (e.g., where did the violence occur, or where was the victim found?), and considers whether stories use passive or sexualizing language, or make sensationalist references to overkill/gore, for example. Table 2 provides an illustrative snapshot of the discourse analysis conducted.

Table 2: Illustrative snapshot of media report discourse analysis

Discourse Analysis	
Parameter	Case 1
What (is any) terms are used to describe the victim?	Problematic headline sets the tone for the story which attempts to paint the victim as the wrongdoer and the accused as an innocent victim of conspiracy. The report starts by referring to the victim as “the 18 year old girl” and continues to refer to her as “the girl”.
What (is any) terms are used to describe the perpetrator, or alleged perpetrator?	Repeated reference that the perpetrator is a local political leader. This repeated emphasis politicized the story, and takes away from other important aspects-like the victim was a dalit girl, and how terribly the family was (Illustrative) when she reported the rape. The perpetrator’s political position is mentioned only a couple of times. He is also called “the rape accused”
What (is any) reference to spatiality of this violence? Where did it take place? Where was the body found?	Reference that the incident occurred at the MLA’s residence and the girl had gone there asking for employment. She is later “recovered from a village”
Passive language or code words	Direct quotes from perpetrators are included in the report-these suggest that he is being framed- “fake allegations”. But no direct quote from the victim/family are included. The Police Officer handling the case is quoted at the very end, where she speaks of the facts of the case. Several direct quotes from the victim are included.
Sexualizing language, or code words	None
Gory language, or language referencing overkill, or language sensationalizing the incident.	Similarly, this report also repeatedly refers to the perpetrator as “BJP MLA” - both as an honorific title, and to politically sensationalize the issue
Reference to substances, dress/cloths, sexual activity of the victim	None
Regional or country - context specific codes or clues	None

Visual analysis: focuses on the photographs or other imagery that may be used to accompany a written news media report. Visual analysis considers whether a story includes photos of the victim and, if so, what kinds of photos (e.g., a smiling facial photo of the

victim prior to victimization; a suggestive image of a cadaver, perhaps partially covered; or of the victim or their family looking distraught?). Table 3 provides an illustrative snapshot of the visual analysis conducted.

Table 3: Illustrative snapshot of media report visual analysis

Visual Analysis	
Parameter	Case 1
Any photos or visuals used?	An image of a women with the face blurred out is used - with a policeman standing prominently in the background. The story suggests the victim is a “wrongdoer” by emphasizing her self-immolation attempt at the CM’s residence, which was failed (illustrative) security personnel. Visual of the accused being let by the police
Is it of the body or (living) facial image of the victim?	An image of the women with the face blurred out is used
Any other suggestive imagery?	None

Media framing analysis leverages both a broader gender analysis, as well as considerations related to how gender and other norms, as well as GBV, manifest in a particular context. For instance, references to substance use, the clothing worn by a victim, or suggestions pertaining to sexual activity are widely acknowledged as contributing to the dehumanization of GBV victims everywhere; whereas context specific references might be the use of ‘marera’ to refer to a victim of femi[ni]cide in Central America, which would suggest to the audiences that the victim was involved with/linked to gang members (see Fuentes 2020a). As an example of the dynamic between story framing and interpretation by the readers, see Figure 1. We note that framing of the story implied blame on the mother of the victim, and readers comments show that indeed, and inadvertently the blame was shifted from the perpetrator to the mother of the victim, “mother was cool with it”, and perpetuated gender biases like “women lack accountability.”

Figure 1: Snapshot showing the media reporting - audience interpretation dynamic and its linkage with the perpetuation of discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes.



News media reports were also analyzed from a guidance compliance lens. Specifically, we looked to existing frameworks (e.g., UNICEF & UN Women, 2020) relevant to responsible and rights-based– and specifically gender and age-sensitive, as well as victim/survivor centered– reporting, to establish these parameters and examined whether there was any indication that these had been followed (intentionally

or not). Additionally, we considered whether stories demonstrated any awareness or recognition of unequal gender and intersecting power relations, particularly as these related to the violence being reported. Table 4 provides an illustrative snapshot of the guideline compliance/ recognition of unequal gender and intersecting power relations analysis conducted.

Table 4: Illustrative snapshot of media report analysis for guideline compliance and recognition of unequal gender and intersecting power relations

Guideline Compliance Analysis / Awareness or Recognition of unequal gender and intersecting power relations	
Parameter	Case 1
Any evidence that existing frameworks on media reporting of GBV against girls or women have been followed?	None
Any evidence of a rights-based lens, survivor-centered approach, or recognition of unequal gender power relations that enable this violence?	The last report demonstrates survivor (illustrative) by the inclusion of several direct quotes from the victim, The story also details the background of the incident, continued intimidation and victimization of the family, and the lapses (due to the political influence of the accused) in dealing with the case

Given that the focus of this study was on mainstream print news media, reports were sourced from the digital archives of major outlets in the countries where case studies were selected. We selected 3-5 stories for each case, and took care to identify the most widely-read or circulated publications in a given context.

Collaborative approach: An Internal Reference Group was set up in the inception stage of this evidence review. This group included experts from academia, GBV and development programming, and media/journalism fields. We leveraged the collective expertise of this group at two critical stages

of this evidence review. We conducted two Internal Reference Group presentations in order to get expert feedback on the scope of study, analytical framework and study design (including methodological tools), prior to embarking on data collection, analysis, and writing. The analysis and draft review were shared with the group for two rounds of feedback prior to finalization. Importantly, we sought extensive buy-in from UNICEF regional and country office colleagues through the process of case study and stakeholder selection. This was done to account for the highly contextual nature of how GBV and gender norms and stereotypes manifest across contexts, as well as the distinctive media landscape

ANNEX 2:

RESEARCH GRID

Overarching research questions	Revised sub-questions	Probe areas	Codes	Means of verification	Data sources	Tools
What are the global trends in media reporting of violence against girls and GBV?	What has been the landscape of media reporting on GBV/VAWG in different regions? (either in terms of modalities/ mediums, or patterns in how GBV/ VAG is covered) What, if anything, has shifted in the last 5 years? How might these changes relate to other events, processes, or 'shocks'?	How has popular media in the country/region reported on GBV/ VAWG? (in terms of gender-responsiveness[revictimization, sexualization, passive framing of perpetrator, sympathy with aggressor, negative stereotyping, visual/graphical depiction, etc.] , 'do-no-harm', ethical considerations etc.) Are there different/ clear factions that report differently? What are these differences?	Biases in reporting Responsible reporting	Literature review Primary data	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications) Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Literature review log Semi-structured questionnaire
		Has anything shifted in this trend in the last 5 years? Did *case*, or other events (#Metoo/other local/global events/movements) have a bearing on this shift? How?	Shift in trends	Primary data	Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Semi-structured questionnaire
		How do different media channels (print, broadcast, digital news) differ in the way they cover news of GBV/VAWG? - by format of reporting (gender-responsiveness, ethical considerations, do no harm) - by coverage (kinds of cases that may get attention- do intersectionalities influence whether a case may be covered and how?) - by geography (provincial/state/ local media vs. national level outlets) - others (for instance, What is the role of digital news and social media on reporting of GBV/VAWG? - distribution of coverage - reach- by age?	Media outlet differences	Literature review Primary data	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications) Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Literature review log Semi-structured questionnaire
		What is the role of digital news and social media on reporting of GBV/VAWG? - distribution of coverage - reach- by age?	Digital and social media	Primary data	Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Semi-structured questionnaire
		What are the key criterion/priority aspects for writing/developing a news story on an incidence of GBV/VAWG? Does it (and how) differ from other instances of crime?	Story criteria	Primary data	Journalists	Semi-structured questionnaire

Where are the gaps in evidence, especially as related to media reporting of violence against girls?	Is there a difference between media coverage of violence against women, and that against girls? What is this difference?	Women vs girls	Literature review Primary data	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications) Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Literature review log Semi-structured questionnaire
	What kind of intersectionalities are covered in the literature with respect to violence against girls? Race, class, caste, ethnicity, disabilities, LGBTQI+ etc. How are they presented?	Intersectionalities	Literature review	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications)	Literature review log
	How are intersectionalities like race, class, caste, ethnicity, disabilities, LGBTQI+ etc., reported in the media with respect to violence against girls?	Intersectionalities	Primary data Media report analysis	Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Semi-structured questionnaire Media analysis guide
	How is the linkage between gender/social norms and reporting of GBV/VAWG analyzed in academic and grey literature?	Gender/social norms	Literature review	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications)	Literature review log
	How is the linkage between gender/social norms and reporting of GBV/VAWG analyzed in UNICEF knowledge products?	Gender/social norms	Literature review	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications)	Literature review log
	Are there contextual differences in the way the linkage between gender/social norms and reporting of GBV/VAWG are analyzed in literature? - regional/country level focus - programme/donor focus - different types of VAWG - different types of media	Gender/social norms	Literature review	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications)	Literature review log

What does the existing literature and primary data tell us about the linkages between media reporting of violence against girls and GBV, and its impact on shaping norms among children, adolescents, and other decision-makers?	What is the relationship between GBV media reporting and state responses to GBV, including impunity [as an indicator of normalization] for violence against girls?	Is there a relationship between how an incidence of GBV/VAWG is reported and the response of law and order? - do some cases get more attention than others (law and order) - do some cases get less attention than others (law and order) - is there a difference in whether guidelines for handling GBV/VAWG cases are followed? (do no harm, gender-responsiveness, child rights approach etc.)	Law & order response	Literature review Primary data	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications) Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Literature review log Semi-structured questionnaire
		Is there a linkage between access to justice for victims/survivors of GBV/VAWG, and how their cases are reported in the media? - does contextual information (about victim identity, age, location etc.) have a bearing on access to justice for the victim/survivor? - any instances where media reporting has fueled positive (rights based) or negative responses on GBV incidence? What were the factors leading up to it?	Access to justice	Literature review Primary data	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications) Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Literature review log Semi-structured questionnaire
	What are the widespread gender norms and stereotypes in context X?	What are the pervasive gender/social norms and stereotypes associated with *this case* and similar cases/other acts of GBV/VAWG?	Gender/social norms	Literature review Primary data	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications) Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Literature review log Semi-structured questionnaire
		Is there evidence of linkage between how instances of GBV/VAWG are reported in media, and their impact on gender/social norms?	Gender/social norms	Literature review	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications)	Literature review log

<p>What is the relationship between media reporting and gender norms? For example: how does media reporting in a particular region reinforce (or challenge) the widespread existing gender norms in that context? (How does this relate to the normalization of violence against girls and toxic masculinity?) How and to what extent does media reporting shape gender norms?</p>	<p>How does media reporting of GBV/VAWG impact gender norms? In what ways does it shape, reinforce and/or challenge widespread gender norms and stereotypes?</p>	<p>Gender/ social norms</p>	<p>Literature review</p>	<p>Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications)</p>	<p>Literature review log</p>
	<p>Is there a linkage between how *this case* was reported in the media, and the acceptance/tolerance/normalization of GBV/VAWG?</p>	<p>Normalization of GBV</p>	<p>Primary data</p>	<p>Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff</p>	<p>Semi-structured questionnaire</p>
	<p>Is there evidence of linkage between how instances of GBV/VAWG are reported in media, and shaping of gender norms among children and adolescents? In what ways does it shape, reinforce and/or challenge widespread gender norms and stereotypes?</p>	<p>Gender norms & children/ adolescents</p>	<p>Literature review</p>	<p>Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications)</p>	<p>Literature review log</p>
	<p>What kind of response on social media does gender-responsive and feminist reporting of GBV/VAWG evoke? - trolling/threats - feedback/comments - changes in readership</p>	<p>Backlash on feminist reporting; digital & social media</p>	<p>Primary data Social media analysis</p>	<p>Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff</p>	<p>Semi-structured questionnaire</p>
	<p>Is there evidence of media's role in the reinforcement of toxic masculinities and/or viewing of women and girls as easy objects/targets of violence?</p>	<p>Toxic masculinities Gender/ social norms</p>	<p>Literature review Primary data</p>	<p>Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications) Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff</p>	<p>Literature review log Semi-structured questionnaire</p>

Within the existing literature and primary data, what are best or promising practices for promoting more gender and age sensitive media, and victim centered reporting of violence against girls and GBV?	How have existing international or regional guidelines influenced or shaped media reporting of GBV, or contributed to public discussion around these issues? (guidelines can include regulations, protocols, pacts/associations, perhaps even involuntary protocols with fines)	What are the existing guidelines/protocols/mandates with respect to reporting on GBV/VAWG? - how are they enforced? - are they taught in journalism schools? - are they taught in media outlets? (e.g. through training sessions)	Reporting guidelines	Literature review Primary data	Literature (peer reviewed, grey, UNICEF, UN Women, and other key UN publications) Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Literature review log Semi-structured questionnaire
		Have there been any changes in guidelines/protocols/mandates with respect to reporting on GBV/VAWG in the last 10 years? What has prompted these changes? How were they received by the media outlets, and why?	Reporting guidelines	Primary data	Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Semi-structured questionnaire
	Where are there gaps in local, regional, and international guidelines, especially as related to media reporting of violence against girls?	What are the gaps in local/regional/international guidelines with respect to reporting on GBV/VAWG that impede gender responsive media coverage? - examples of misuse/violation of guidelines- and repercussions if any?	Reporting guidelines-gaps	Primary data	Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Semi-structured questionnaire
	What measures can effectively address these gaps?	How can these gaps be addressed?	Reporting guidelines-gaps	Primary data	Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Semi-structured questionnaire
	What can be UNICEF's role in encouraging decision-makers and key stakeholders to implement and enforce guidelines regarding media reporting of violence against girls and GBV?	Within the country/regional contexts, what are the gaps that need to be filled with respect to gender-responsive reporting of GBV/VAWG? - advocacy (guidelines/mandates/legislations) - capacity building - evidence building - others?	Gaps in gender-responsive reporting	Primary data	Journalists UNICEF regional/country staff	Semi-structured questionnaire
		What is the role of international organizations (like UNICEF) in implementing/enforcing guidelines for gender responsive reporting of GBV/VAWG?	Role of international organizations/watch keepers	Primary data	UNICEF regional/country staff	Semi-structured questionnaire

ANNEX 3:

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

*Ask for permission to record and preference re: anonymity (Y/N)

Landscape/Trends

1. In this region/country, we are looking in-depth at how the *case* was reported on by mainstream news media. How has popular media in the country or region reported on GBV/VAWG in general and this case in particular?
 - in terms of gender- sensitivity: revictimization, sexualization, passive framing of perpetrator, sympathy with aggressor, negative stereotyping, visual/graphical depiction, etc.] ,
 - ‘do-no-harm’,
 - ethical considerations etc.
2. Has anything shifted in this trend in the last 5 years?
 - Did *case*, or other events (e.g. #NiUnaMenos, or other local or global events or movements) have a bearing on this shift? How?
3. How would you describe your outlet’s position regarding coverage of GBV/VAWG? (Is it important, unimportant, etc)
4. In general, how do you think media channels (print, broadcast, digital news) differ in the way they cover news of GBV/VAWG? (e.g. by reporting methods; by coverage of particular cases; by geography (provincial, state, and local media vs. national level outlets).
 - Are there distinct groups/categories of media outlets that report on GBV differently? What are these differences?
 - Do you think media outlets may be incentivized (directly or indirectly) to publish stories that are not gender-sensitive or rights based?, (instead blame victims or re-victimize women and girls)

5. Is there a difference between how a case of gender-based violence against women may be covered by the media, compared to violence against girls? What is this difference?
6. For journalists, what are the key aspects or considerations when writing and developing a news story on an incidence of GBV/VAWG? Does it differ from other instances of crime, and if so, how so?
7. How are intersectionalities like race, class, caste, ethnicity, disabilities, LGBTQI+ etc., reported in the media with respect to violence against girls?
 - contextual details that might provide justification for the act of violence
 - or, nuanced representation of the power imbalance created due to the intersectionalities
8. In this country, what would need to change to introduce gender-sensitive coverage of GBV cases?

Gender/Social Norms

1. What are the pervasive gender or social norms and stereotypes associated with *this case* and similar cases, or other acts of GBV/VAWG?
 - Is there a linkage between how *this case* was reported in the media, and the acceptance, tolerance, and normalization of GBV/VAWG?
2. What is the role of digital news and social media on reporting of GBV/VAWG, considering its distribution of coverage and reach by age? How does it influence the readers?
3. What kind of response on social media does gender-responsive and feminist reporting of GBV/VAWG evoke? (e.g. trolling or threats, feedback or comments, changes in readership)
4. Is there any evidence of the media’s role in the reinforcement of toxic masculinities and/or viewing of women and girls as easy objects or targets of violence?
5. Who are the main actors/stakeholders in the country that drive conversation around

gender-responsive media representation of GBV? (women's rights organizations, media organizations, international organizations, I/NGOs etc.)

Impunity/Access to justice

1. Is there a relationship between how an incidence of GBV/VAWG is reported and the legal or institutional response?
 - Do some cases get more or less attention than others? [geography, profile of victim/perpetrator, type of violence etc.]
2. Is there a linkage between access to justice for victims/survivors of GBV/VAWG and how their cases are reported in the media?
 - Does contextual information (about victim identity, age, location etc.) have a bearing on access to justice for the victim/survivor?
 - Are there any instances where media reporting has fueled positive (following legal mandate, rights based, do no harm, gender-responsiveness, child rights approach etc.) or negative responses on GBV incidence? What were the factors leading up to it?

Guidelines/Protocols

1. What are the existing guidelines, protocols, or mandates with respect to reporting on GBV/VAWG?
 - How are they enforced in your field?
 - Are they taught in journalism schools or in media outlets (e.g. through training sessions)? Have you ever received official training on media guidelines? Are they well followed?
2. Have there been any changes in guidelines, protocols, or mandates with respect to reporting on GBV/VAWG in the last 10 years? What has prompted these changes? How were they received by the media outlets, and why?

3. What are the gaps in local, regional, and international guidelines with respect to reporting on GBV/VAWG that impede gender responsive media coverage?
 - Are there any examples of misuse or violation of guidelines, and subsequent repercussions?
 - How can these gaps be addressed?
4. Within the country and regional contexts, what are the gaps that need to be filled with respect to gender-responsive reporting of GBV/VAWG? (e.g. advocacy wrt guidelines, mandates and legislations); capacity building; evidence building etc).

Questions for UN colleagues:

1. What is UNICEF's current work in the area of influencing gender and age-responsive media coverage of GBV/VAWG?
2. To what extent have you or your colleagues worked in the area of influencing gender and age-responsive media coverage of GBV/VAWG?
 - How has that experience been for you? Have you been met with interest and cooperation, or skepticism/dismissal by media stakeholders?
 - Do you have any examples of beneficial collaborations or effective advocacy that led to a positive outcome on this topic?
3. What is the role of international organizations (like UNICEF) in implementing or enforcing guidelines for gender responsive reporting of GBV/VAWG?
 - What are the best strategies to fulfill that role?
 - What are the greatest barriers to doing so?

ANNEX 4:

INITIAL SCAN OF

VAWG DATA

Data on forms of violence against women and girls, disaggregated by age, was compiled from key sources including, UNODC, UNICEF, UN Women, UNFPA, WHO and OECD. This was done to ensure that cases selected according to the Spotlight Initiative priorities align with prevalent VAWG/GBV statistics. We present here a snapshot of regional priorities in this

regard, as emerging from the data. In this summarized snapshot, we include the most recent data and where possible, age disaggregated data available across sources. We note that this data closely aligns with Spotlight Initiative regional priorities with respect to prevalent forms of violence against women and girls.

Form of Violence	Indicator	Data Source	Reference Year	Region	Country
Homicide	Female 0-14 rate	UNODC	2017	Latin America	Mexico
Homicide	Female 15-29 rate	UNODC	2017	Latin America	Mexico
Female genital mutilation	Prevalence among girls aged 0 to 14 years (%)	UNICEF	2020	West and Central Africa	Mali
Female genital mutilation	FGM prevalence among girls and women (%)	UNICEF	2020	Eastern and Southern Africa	Somalia
Child marriage	Married by 15	UNICEF	2019	West and Central Africa	Central African Republic, Chad
Child marriage	Married by 18	UNICEF	2019	West and Central Africa	Central African Republic, Chad
Sexual violence	Sexual violence in childhood %	UNICEF	2012 - 2019	Caribbean	Trinidad and Tobago
Sexual violence	Proportion of females aged 18-29 years who experienced sexual violence by age 18	UN Women	2017- 2019	Caribbean	Grenada
Intimate partner violence	Proportion (%) of ever-partnered women and girls (age 15- 49) subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months	UN Women	2017	Oceania, Eastern and Southern Africa, Southern Asia	Country not specified
Violent deaths due to collective violence	Girls death rate per 100,00	UNICEF	2000-2015	Middle East and North Africa	Country not specified

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ENDNOTES

- 1 UN Women 2020.
- 2 Zulver et al. 2021.
- 3 Babvey et al. 2021.
- 4 Babvey et al. 2021; UN Women 2020; Jatmiko et al. 2020.
- 5 Usher et al. 2021; Babvey et al. 2021. As Dib et al. 2021 note, online news and social media can also be sources of harmful mis- and dis-information.
- 6 Miller et al. 2020; Usher et al. 2021.
- 7 Perez-Vincent and Carreras 2021: 7; Miller et al. 2020: 4.
- 8 Javed and Chattu 2021.
- 9 Acosta 2020; Rieger et al. 2022.
- 10 UN Women 2020.
- 11 UN Women 2019a.
- 12 It is worth noting that pandemic-related restrictions also instigated some innovative practices in the area of VAWG/GBV response, including by leveraging digital technologies to maintain service provision. See UN Women 2020c; Zulver et al. 2020.
- 13 See for example Ali and Khalid 2021; Dissanayake and Bracewell 2021; Perez-Vincent and Carreras 2021.
- 14 Fairbairn and Dawson 2013; Simpson 2016; Fuentes 2020a; Fuentes 2020b; Mahadeen 2017; Wright 2011; Spies 2020.
- 15 UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA 2020.
- 16 UN Women 2019a.
- 17 Cookson et al. 2020; UNICEF and ODI 2020; UNICEF 2019; ODI 2015.
- 18 Cislighi and Heise 2019; ODI 2015.
- 19 UNICEF and ODI 2020.
- 20 UNICEF 2019.
- 21 Elischberger et al. 2016.
- 22 Cookson et al. 2020.
- 23 UNICEF and ODI 2020.
- 24 Bonnes 2011; Baaren 2018; Fuentes 2020a; Fuentes 2020b; Sarac 2020.
- 25 Toledo 2020; Gilbertson and Pandit 2019.
- 26 Menon et al. 2020; UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA 2020; UNICEF and UN Women 2020; UN Women 2019a.
- 27 UNICEF 2019; UNICEF and UN Women 2020.
- 28 Menon et al. 2020; UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA 2020.
- 29 Barajas et al. 2020; García 2018; Sofia 2017.
- 30 UN Women 2021: 12, 16.
- 31 UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA 2020; UN Women 2019a. See also UNICEF and Geena Davis Institute 2021.
- 32 Babvey et al. 2021; UN Women 2020b.
- 33 For example, Rodriguez (2014) highlights the role of social media in boosting the flow of information and thus increasing the visibility of cases of gender-based violence that would otherwise remain obscured, while Simons (2017) notes that social media is increasingly shaping media practitioners' sourcing practices, and spurring journalists to do more reporting on gender-based violence.
- 34 Notably, given the global coverage of the case-based research, news stories from these outlets were viewed and analysed in their online versions, as discussed further in the Methodology.
- 35 UN Women 2019a.
- 36 As discussed in the Introduction, 'gender socialization' refers to the relational process by which "individuals develop, refine and learn to 'do' gender through internalising gender norms and roles as they interact with key agents" (John et al. 2017: 6) as well as key institutional sites of socialization, such as family, peers, schools, places of faith or leisure, and of course, forms of media (Cookson et al. 2020).
- 37 'Mainstream' is referred to here, rather than counter-cultural or fringe media, which might present readers/viewers/consumers with alternative values and views.
- 38 Butler 1993; Rubinstein 2005; Fairbairn 2013; Torres 2014; Isaacs 2016; García 2018; Slakoff 2019; Spies 2020.
- 39 Importantly, these written and unwritten rules operate within the broader political landscape of a given country context. Therefore, whether media is tightly controlled by the government or media houses simply benefit from government resources, these dynamics will necessarily have varying influences on reporting.
- 40 Morgan and Simons 2018; Lopes and Pimentel 2016; Rockwell and Janus 2001.
- 41 Torres 2014.
- 42 Notably, this also suggests that audiences can be 're-trained' through alternative modalities of representation. See also Das and Kleinman 2000; Fuentes 2020b; Jiwani and Young 2006.
- 43 Torres 2014; Moeller 1999.
- 44 Canada: Fairbairn and Dawson 2013; Simpson 2016; Guatemala: Fuentes 2020a; Fuentes 2020b; Jordan: Mahadeen 2017; Mexico: Wright 2011; South Africa: Spies 2020.

- 45 Fuentes 2020a; Simpson 2016; Razack 2000.
- 46 Fuentes 2020b; Wright 2011; Berns 2001.
- 47 During the initial study design, a research grid was developed that mapped in detail the probe areas, means of verification, data sources and tools (see Annex II).
- 48 The term ‘femi[ni]cide’ is used in this review to acknowledge that there are varying legal frameworks and feminist and women’s movement preferences pertaining to the use of ‘femicide’ or ‘femicide’. Broadly speaking, femi[ni]cide refers to the gender-motivated killing of women and girls, which is often followed by impunity (Fuentes, forthcoming).
- 49 While some grey literature does look at the ‘news-worthiness’ of events or issues that pertain to children, the focus is not specifically on gender-based violence against children (see, for example, Swain 2019).
- 50 Fairbairn 2020.
- 51 Van Baaren 2018; Easteal et al. 2019; McManus and Dorfman 2005; Marmolejo and Peña 2015.
- 52 Gilbertson and Pandit 2019; Buiten and Salo 2007.
- 53 Owusu-Addo et al. 2018; Boonzaier 2017; Fuentes 2020a.
- 54 Sutherland et al. 2016.
- 55 Vives-Cases et al. 2002; Gilbertson and Pandit 2019.
- 56 Simmons 2018: 10.
- 57 Gilbertson and Pandit 2019.
- 58 Slakoff 2020; Bonnes 2011; Meyers 2004.
- 59 Slakoff and Brennan 2019; Boonzaier 2017.
- 60 Wright 2009; Fuentes 2020a; Alves 2013; Spies 2020. Of course, this does not mean that these dynamics are only unfolding in these specific country contexts.
- 61 Slakoff and Brennan 2019.
- 62 Gilchrist 2010.
- 63 Morrison et al. 2021; Estes and Webber 2021.
- 64 Main stories analysed: Unnao rape case: Accused BJP MLA sent to 7-day police custody; Woman accuses BJP MLA of rape, tries to immolate self near Adityanath’s house; All that has happened in Unnao rape case, a timeline; Unnao rape case: Here’s everything you need to know.
- 65 See for example Bonnes 2011.
- 66 Tranchese 2019.
- 67 Pande 2021. Notably, scholars are paying increasing attention to the problem of image-based sexual abuse (IBSA) and the child and women’s rights implications of the broader use of sexual violence materials through online markets. See for example Broadhurst 2019; Flynn and Henry 2021.
- 68 DiBennardo 2018.
- 69 See, for example, UNICEF and UN Women 2020; Fuentes 2020b; UN Women 2019a.
- 70 See also McDougal et al. 2021.
- 71 Fuentes 2020a; Torres 2014; Das and Kleinman 2000.
- 72 Fuentes 2020b; Boonzaier 2017.
- 73 Berrington and Jones 2002.
- 74 Ullivarri and Manuel 2011.
- 75 UNICEF and UN Women 2020; Fuentes 2020b.
- 76 Pande 2020.
- 77 Minwalla et al. 2020; Foster and Minwalla 2018.
- 78 Balica 2020.
- 79 Sutherland et al. 2016.
- 80 Tranchese 2019.
- 81 Bonnes 2011; Lopes and Pimentel 2016.
- 82 Owusu-Addo et al. 2018.
- 83 Alat 2006.
- 84 Cripps 2021.
- 85 Jiwani and Young 2009.
- 86 Das 2012.
- 87 Amjad et al. 2021.
- 88 Minwalla et al. 2020.
- 89 Amjad et al. 2021.
- 90 Halim and Meyers 2010; Bonnes 2011.
- 91 Siefkes-Andrew and Alexopoulos 2019; Menon 2020; UI Ain Nasir et al. 2020.
- 92 Razack 2000; Wright 2006.
- 93 See for example UNICEF and UN Women 2020; UN Women 2019a; UN Women 2019b; Sarmiento et al. 2014.
- 94 Simons and Morgan 2018; Sutherland et al. 2016.
- 95 Cristóbal 2015.
- 96 Owusu-Addo et al. 2018; Morales and Alejandra 2018.
- 97 Simons and Morgan 2018.
- 98 Mutsvairo and Salgado 2020.
- 99 Main stories analysed: Tears for Ochana in Imo; Raped to death: Story of 13-year-old Ochanya Ogbanje; Ochanya: Court remands accused lecturer’s wife in prison. Additional coverage that was consulted: Two Years After 13-Year-Old Girl Was Raped To Death In Benue State, Family, Others Demand Justice.
- 100 See for example Willem and Tortajada 2021; Koirala 2020; Stahel and Schoen 2020; Melki and Mahlet 2014.
- 101 Andelsman and Mitchelstein 2019; Fuentes 2020b.
- 102 Andelsman and Mitchelstein 2019.
- 103 Andelsman and Mitchelstein 2019.
- 104 Fuentes 2020a; Torres 2014; Razack 2000.
- 105 Krinsky 2016; Gilchrist 2010; Madriz 1997.

- 106 Slakoff and Brennan 2020.
- 107 Nilsson 2019; Lopes and Pimentel 2016; Alat 2006.
- 108 As discussed in the previous sections, stakeholders across South Africa, Nigeria, and India noted these improvements, but suggested that they remain limited to aspects such as not publishing photographs of victims or revealing victims' identities, as well as some improvements with respect to blaming victims. However, scholars note an ongoing gap in GBV reporting with respect to the provision of information about services and resources for victims/survivors, and the inclusion of calls to action (see for example Owusu-Addo et al. 2018; Sutherland et al. 2018).
- 109 See Fuentes 2020a.
- 110 See for example Spies 2020; Fuentes 2020a; Jiwani and Young 2006.
- 111 Gilchrist 2010.
- 112 Jiwani and Young 2006; Lykke 2016; Slakoff and Brennan 2019.
- 113 Valdemarca and Bonavitta 2010.
- 114 Gilchrist 2010.
- 115 Fuentes 2020a; Slakoff 2019.
- 116 DiBennardo 2018; Swain 2019.
- 117 Main stories analysed: Justice for Zainab: Riots erupt in Kasur after 7-year-old's rape, murder; 6-year-old Zainab's autopsy suggests child endured rape, captivity before murder; The search that ended in a garbage dump; Zainab murder: protest continues on second day.
- 118 See for example Slakoff and Brennan 2020; Gilchrist 2010.
- 119 Baker 2020.
- 120 Ullivarri 2011.
- 121 Halim 2010.
- 122 Little 2018.
- 123 Rubenstein 2005.
- 124 Fuentes 2020a; Lopez and Pimentel 2016; Boesten 2014; Nzuma 2015; Buiten and Salo 2007.
- 125 Some of the media reports referred to the perpetrator as 21 years of age, others 20.
- 126 The comments in response to one article suggest that this was, indeed, an interpretation/takeaway from some readers.
- 127 Main stories analysed: Lover Slays 14 year-old; Twenty-year-old man charged for killing 14 year-old school girl; 'Wrong is wrong'. Additional coverage that was consulted: <https://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/lead-stories/20210512/14-y-o-cut-herself-cry-help>.
- 128 For instance, research from the United States shows how black female students who have been victims of gender-based violence are represented as "over-sexed Jezebels whose lewd behaviour provokes men to grope, fondle, and even rape" (Meyers 2004). Similarly, evidence from South Africa highlights the tendency for media coverage to emphasize the sexualized clothing and alleged drug-using behaviour of female victims of rape and murder (Buiten and Salo 2007).
- 129 Lopes 2016.
- 130 Lopes 2016.
- 131 Siefkes-Andrew 2019; Das 2012.
- 132 Sutherland 2016.
- 133 Nzuma 2015.
- 134 Balica 2020.
- 135 Das 2012.
- 136 Lopes 2016; Fuentes 2020a.
- 137 Das 2012.
- 138 Lopes 2016.
- 139 Main stories analysed: Horror en Mar del Plata Drogan, violan y matan a una adolescente de 16 años; Perfil: Horror en Mar del Plata: Lucía, pasión por el arte y sueños de veterinaria; Caso Lucía Pérez: por qué los jueces sostienen que no hubo abuso sexual ni femicidio. Additional coverage that was consulted: La desesperación de los acusados del crimen de Lucía Pérez: "No hubo abuso ni femicidio"; Convocan a un Paro Nacional de Mujeres tras el brutal asesinato de Lucía Pérez - LA NACION; Buscan a un tercer implicado en el salvaje crimen de Lucía Pérez.
- 140 Both perpetrators were absolved in the initial trial; however (and in no small part due to the societal backlash led by women's and feminist movements and beyond), a new trial is forthcoming (though no date has been set).
- 141 Marmolejo 2015.
- 142 Halim 2010.
- 143 Halim 2010.
- 144 Rubenstein 2005.
- 145 Forster and Minwalla 2018; Mansour 2020; Karlsson et al. 2021.
- 146 Fuentes 2020b.
- 147 Boonzaier 2017.
- 148 Zulver et al. 2021.
- 149 McIlwaine 2019.
- 150 Gilchrist 2010.
- 151 Fuentes 2020a; Fuentes 2020b; Wright 2006.
- 152 Dowler et al. 2006.
- 153 Morrison et al. 2021.

- 154 Isaacs 2016.
- 155 In Guatemala: Fuentes 2020a; in Argentina: Andelsman and Mitchelstein 2019.
- 156 Jiwani and Young 2006.
- 157 Bitterly 2021.
- 158 Fuentes 2020a.
- 159 Slakoff 2019.
- 160 Main stories analysed: Body of murdered Cape Town girl, 14, found in backyard (News24, September 2, 2019); PURE EVIL Raped girl, 14, found dead with her 'brain leaking out' after her head was smashed in with a brick in horrific attack in South Africa (The Sun, September 13th, 2019); 'It makes me sick': Family reveals cousin 'confessed' to Janika's murder (Independent Online, September 23rd, 2019.). Additional coverage that was consulted: Death of Janika Mallo, 14, has people saying 'I can't handle this anymore'; <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-09-03-girl-14-found-murdered-in-grannys-back-yard-in-cape-town/>; <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/girl-14-raped-murdered-found-20057757>; <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-11-27-16-days-of-activism-for-what-eight-brutal-cases-that-rocked-us-in-2019/>.
- 161 Lykke 2016.
- 162 Slakoff 2020; Fuentes 2020b; Gilchrist 2010.
- 163 Fuentes 2020a; Klein 2017.
- 164 Niblock 2018.
- 165 Alat 2006; Koç 2020.
- 166 Fuentes 2020a; Wright 2009.
- 167 Fuentes 2020a.
- 168 Sutherland 2016; DiBennardo 2018.
- 169 This is often because these are not even recognized as forms of violence against women and girls/gender-based violence.
- 170 Connell and Messerschmidt 2005.
- 171 Balica 2020.
- 172 Owusu-Addo et al. 2018; Shandilya 2020.
- 173 Balica et al. 2020.
- 174 Marmolejo 2015.
- 175 Alat 2006; Sutherland et al. 2016.
- 176 Tranchese 2019.
- 177 Siefkes-Andrew and Alexopoulos 2019; Shandilya 2020.
- 178 Lopes 2019; Tranchese 2019.
- 179 Balica 2020.
- 180 Kitzinger 2008.
- 181 Pseudonym used in all media coverage.
- 182 Main stories analysed: In English, Top French court to decide if sexual assault by firemen on 13-year-old was rape; Firefighters should not face charge of raping girl, French court rules; 'It's your turn to shake': Woman who claims 20 firefighters raped her in France condemns her alleged attackers. In French, *Affaire << Julie >>: les pompiers ne seront pas juges pour viol; Affaire Julie: les pompiers accusés bientôt poursuivis pour "corruption de mineur"?*.
- 183 Tranchese 2019.
- 184 Baker et al. 2020.
- 185 Sutherland et al. 2016; Karlsson et al. 2021; Morales and Alejandra 2018.
- 186 Buiten and Salo 2007.
- 187 Lopes 2016.
- 188 Niblock 2018.
- 189 Little 2015.
- 190 Niblock 2018.
- 191 Buiten 2021.
- 192 Fuentes 2020a; Caloussi 2018; Rubenstein 2005.
- 193 Tranchese 2019; Rubenstein 2005; Boonzaier 2017.
- 194 Jiwani and Young 2006.
- 195 Lykke 2016; Boonzaier 2017.
- 196 Nillson 2019; Shandilya 2020; Tranchese 2009; Jiwani and Young 2006.
- 197 Boonzaier 2017.
- 198 Main stories analysed: Man Allegedly Raped 10-year-old at Evacuation Centre Remanded; Safety of women, girls, and children in evacuation centres; Evacuation centre rape accused remanded; Man jailed over TC Yasa evacuation centre rape.
- 199 A non-exhaustive list of these frameworks includes: at the international level, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Article 5(a) (1979), and General Recommendation No. 19 (1992), as well as the Beijing Platform for Action (1995); at the regional level, The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women Article 8(g), the Latin American Model Protocol for the Investigation of Gender-related Killings of Women (Femicide/Feminicide) (2014), as well as the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Women (2015). For more examples see UN Women 2019a; Fuentes 2020b.
- 200 UNICEF, UN Women and UNFPA 2020.
- 201 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization 2019.
- 202 UN Women 2019a.
- 203 UN Women 2019a: 38, 46.
- 204 WACC and IFJ 2012.
- 205 Easteal et al. 2021.
- 206 Andelsman and Mitchelstein 2019.

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