



BREAKING NEWS:

**Gender-Based Violence
in Jamaican News
Media**



Breaking News: Gender-Based Violence in Jamaican News Media

**Caribbean Policy Research Institute (CAPRI)
Kingston, Jamaica**

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Table of CONTENTS

Acronyms	iii
List of Tables & Figures	iii
Executive Summary	iv
1 Introduction	8
VAWG in Jamaica	12
2 Representations of VAWG in the News Media	14
Framing: Dictating Focus	15
Tone: Influencing Feelings	16
Silence: Omitting Perspectives	17
3 VAWG Reporting in Jamaican News Media	20
Framing in Jamaican VAWG Reporting	21
Tone in Jamaican VAWG Reporting	22
Silences in Jamaican VAWG Reporting	23
4 Experiences of Reporting VAWG in Jamaican News Media	26
Gender in Jamaican News Media Organizations	27
Gender-Sensitive Reporting in Jamaican News Media Organizations	28
5 Representation and Gender-Relevant Policy Within Media Organizations	32
Male-Female Representation in Media Entities	34
GBV-related Writing Guidelines	35
Sexual Harassment Policies	36
6 Conclusion	38
Recommendations	40
Appendix 1: Methodology	42
Appendix 2: Gender Breakdown of Media Workers	44

Acronyms

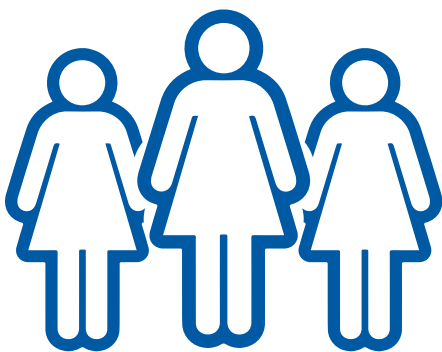
BCJ	Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica
BGA	Bureau of Gender Affairs
CPDC	Caribbean Policy Development Centre
DV	Domestic Violence
GBV	Gender-based Violence
JNSAP-GBV	Jamaica National Strategic Action Plan to Address Gender-based Violence
MCGES	Ministry of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sports
PAJ	Press Association of Jamaica
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
UN	United Nations
WMW	Women's Media Watch

List of Tables & Figures

Figure 1. Percentage of media houses with and without internal writing guidelines in place.	35
Figure 2. Comparison of male and female executives and employees directly involved in reporting/writing/producing/editing at the four media houses, expressed as percentages (%)	44
Figure 3. A) Percentage (%) male and female students enrolled in media-based courses at an academic media institution B) Percentage (%) male and female academic employees at an academic media institution.	45



Executive Summary



All people can be victims of gender-based violence but

Women & Girls

are disproportionately impacted.

Jamaica is one of the most murderous countries in the world. While the majority of murders are committed in the context of organized and semi-organized gang violence, between and among young men, Jamaica also has the second highest rate of femicide, and one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence in the world. Despite decades of concerted efforts at reducing violent crime, however, there has been no meaningful or sustained reduction in the murder rate, and the available data shows a sustained, high level of gender-based violence, in all its forms.

Gender-based violence (GBV) encompasses many behaviours, most commonly violence against women and girls (VAWG) domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence (IPV). While all people can be victims of gender-based violence, women and girls are disproportionately impacted. Violence against women and girls can be direct and enacted on an individual level both physically and non-physically, and are perpetrated predominantly by someone known to the victim, usually their intimate partners, or a family member, and are largely hidden from public view. VAWG also exists at a societal level and is embedded in social systems, cultural norms, and community values.

While the causes of GBV are complex, cultural attitudes have been found to contribute significantly to the scale and nature of

VAWG, and the reactions and responses to it. There is a proven link between media consumption and cultural attitudes, with the news media playing a key role in the development and reinforcement of social beliefs, individual behaviours, and policy development. This means news media actors have the power to influence the way broader society understands and reacts to issues including VAWG.

This study presents a situational analysis on the representation of gender-based violence (GBV) in Jamaican print news media. The aim of this research is to identify the potential of gender sensitive reporting as an approach to media representation of GBV in Jamaica, with the goal of shifting societal attitudes to better recognize GBV as problematic and be less tolerant of GBV, with the ultimate aim being to reduce its incidence and rate.

In so doing, the study asks the questions:

- How is GBV reported and represented in traditional media outlets in Jamaica?
- If, how, and to what extent is gender sensitive reporting considered in media reports, analysis, and discussion of GBV?
- Are gender sensitive reporting protocols (policies & procedures) utilized within Jamaica's media houses?

The research found that there are gaps in relation to media representation of VAWG in Jamaica. Within news houses, several barriers to gender-sensitive reporting were identified, including resistance to key concepts, and staffing issues. Most media houses had a sexual harassment policy, equal representation of men and women in the journalistic staff, and some followed guidance of some sort, though these generally did not specify reporting on gender-based violence.

An analysis of recently published stories related to VAWG showed that practice in this space is underdeveloped and, in some cases, there is clear disregard for local and international guidance. Professionals working in the field have suggested policy makers expand the range of practical guidance available to those working in journalism, and news houses allocate more resources to VAWG reporting, nurturing topic specialisms, and formalising their policies and protocols to demonstrate a commitment to gender-sensitivity in their operations.

There is a proven link between media consumption and cultural attitudes, with the news media playing a key role in the development and reinforcement of social beliefs, individual behaviours, and policy development.

Recommendations



1

Guidelines for journalists regarding gender-sensitive reporting should be developed for the specific Jamaican context through multi-stakeholder consultations, including the relevant ministries, departments, and agencies, and reference to international best practice standards such as the UN Guidelines for Gender and Conflict-sensitive reporting. Context-sensitive and fair reporting is an industry responsibility not necessarily aligned with the interest of any individual publisher. This action should therefore be the responsibility of the Press Association.

Media houses should provide ongoing support and guidance in gender-sensitive reporting. Where expertise cannot be brought in or developed in house, media houses may partner with specialist organisations, such as women's and criminal justice organisations, to meet this objective.

2



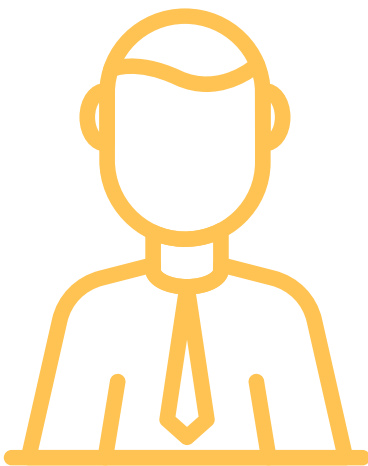
3

Media houses should formalise policies and protocols related to gender-based violence and appropriate sexual conduct within their own organisations (with reference made to the Sexual Harassment Act 2021). These policies and protocols should be readily accessible to all staff and included in the onboarding process. The expectation is that the practice of sensitivity to gender in the workplace will bleed over into more sensitive reporting.





1 Introduction



News media actors have the **POWER TO INFLUENCE** the way broader society understands and reacts to issues including **violence against women and girls**

Jamaica is one of the most murderous countries in the world. While the majority of murders are committed in the context of organized and semi-organized gang violence, between and among young men, Jamaica also has the second highest rate of femicide (intentional homicide of females),¹ and one of the highest rates of intimate partner violence in the world.²

Reducing violent crime, in particular bringing down the homicide rate, is a critical developmental priority for Jamaica. Billions of dollars are spent each year on a wide range of policing and non-policing measures to reduce violent acts, including policies and programmes that attempt to shift dysfunctional behavioural and cultural norms that manifest in inter-personal violence of all sorts. Despite decades of concerted efforts, however, there has been no meaningful or sustained reduction in the murder rate; similarly, the available data shows a sustained, high level of gen-

Gender-based violence is a “result of power imbalances that exploit gender-related distinctions between males and females, amongst males, and amongst females.”

der-based violence, in all its forms.³ Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is the most common form of gender-based violence (GBV). GBV is a “result of power imbalances that exploit gender-related distinctions between males and females, amongst males, and amongst females.”⁴ The term GBV encompasses many behaviours, most commonly domestic violence (DV) and intimate partner violence

(IPV).⁵ While all people can be victims of gender-based violence, women and girls are disproportionately impacted,⁶ hence the common reference to VAWG in the context of GBV.

Violence against women and girls can be direct and enacted on an individual level both physically and non-physically; examples include sexual harassment,

1 “UNFPA in Jamaica Collaborates with Government and CSOs to address GBV and Family Violence, Scale up HFLE,” UNFPA, January 19, 2022, <https://caribbean.unfpa.org/en/news/unfpa-jamaica-collaborates-government-and-csos-address-gbv-and-family-violence-scale-hfle-0>.

2 Delores E. Smith, “Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence in Jamaica: Implications for Prevention and Intervention,” *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies* 7, no. 3-4, (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs73-4201616089>.

3 UN Women, “Spotlight Initiative: To Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls,” Country Programme Document- Jamaica, 2019, <https://mptf.undp.org/document/download/23664>.

4 Planning Institute of Jamaica, “Economic and Social Survey Jamaica 2009,” 2009.

5 Note that in Jamaica, the state’s use of the term and data collection around “domestic violence” considers domestic violence to be “the infliction of harm or threat of harm perpetrated by individuals within the context of a relationship whether through intimacy, blood, or law; and includes, sexual, and physical violence as well as mental, emotional, and financial abuse. I.e., domestic violence in the Jamaican context is much broader than, though it includes, intimate partner violence, and it does not necessarily comprise gender-based violence.

6 Smith, “Prevalence.”

Violence against women and girls can be direct and enacted on an individual level both physically and non-physically; examples include sexual harassment, stalking, battery, trafficking, financial manipulation, coercive control, kidnapping, and torture.



stalking, battery, trafficking, financial manipulation, coercive control, kidnapping, and torture.⁷ These forms of violence are perpetrated predominantly by someone known to the victim, usually their intimate partners, or a family member, and are largely hidden from public view. VAWG also exists at a societal level and is embedded in social systems, cultural norms, and community values; manifestations include the sexualisation of women in the media. It has been argued that the social norms that normalize VAWG/GBV also manifest in less pay for the same work (the gender wage gap).⁸

While the causes of GBV are complex, cultural attitudes have been found to contribute significantly to the scale and nature of VAWG, and the reactions and responses to it.^{9,10} There is a proven link between media consumption and cultural attitudes, with the news media playing a key role in the development and reinforcement of social beliefs, individual behaviours, and policy development.^{11,12} This means news media actors have the power to influence the way broader society understands and reacts to issues including VAWG.

Existing studies on the intersection between the news media and GBV, however, are predominantly focussed on the Euro/American experience and explore issues of sexism from a socio-cultural perspective that is often not relevant to the Jamaican context. To bridge that gap, this study presents a situational analysis on the representation of gender-based violence (GBV) in Jamaican print news media. The aim of this research is to identify the potential of gender sensitive reporting as an approach to media representation of GBV in Jamaica, with the goal of shifting societal attitudes to better recognize

7 Gunilla Krantz and Claudia Garcia-Moreno, "Violence Against Women," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 59, no. 10 (2005): 818-821, DOI: 10.1136/jech.2004.022756.

8 Patricia Homan, "Structural Sexism and Health in the United States: A New Perspective on Health Inequality and the Gender System," *American Sociological Review* 84, no. 3 (2019), DOI: 10.1177/0003122419848723.

9 World Health Organisation, "Violence Against Women and Girls Prevalence Estimates, 2018," 2021, who.int/publication/i/item/9789240022256.

10 Andrew Morrison, Mary Ellsberg, and Sarah Bott, "Addressing Gender-Based Violence: A Critical Review of Interventions," *The World Bank Research Observer* 22, no. 1 (2007): 25-51, DOI:10.1093/wbro/lkm003.

11 Jordan Fairbairn and Myrna Dawson, "Canadian News Coverage of Intimate Partner Homicide: Analyzing Changes Over Time," *Feminist Criminology* 8, no. 3 (March 2013): 147-17, <http://fcx.sagepub.com/content/early/2013/03/13/1557085113480824>.

12 Georgina Sutherland et al., "Media Representations of Violence against Women and their Children: Key Findings and Future Directions," ANROWS, no. 4, 2016, <https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/07/22041215/Media-representations-of-violence-against-women-and-their-children-Key-findings-and-future-directions.pdf>.



GBV as problematic and be less tolerant of GBV, with the ultimate aim being to reduce its incidence and rate.

In so doing, the study will answer the questions:

- How is GBV reported and represented in traditional media outlets in Jamaica?
- If, how, and to what extent is gender sensitive reporting considered in media reports, analysis, and discussion of GBV?
- Are gender sensitive reporting pro-

ocols (policies & procedures) utilized within Jamaica's media houses? The answers to these questions will inform a proposal for promoting gender sensitive reporting in Jamaican media.

A mixed methods approach was utilized to achieve the following research objectives:¹³

- A desk review of the extant literature on the representation of GBV within media.
- Content analysis of media outlet reporting on GBV to gain an understanding of the representation

of GBV in Jamaican traditional print and radio media.

- Elite interviews with news media professionals to explore perceptions and experiences of reporting VAWG in Jamaica.

¹³ See appendix for detailed methodology.

28% of Jamaican women experience direct gender-based violence over a lifetime, and **7%** of women reported abuse from an intimate partner in the past 12 months.

VAWG in Jamaica

Our understanding of the scale of violence against women and girls is imperfect, however it is thought that a third of women globally experience VAWG in their lifetime.¹⁴ An estimated 28 percent of Jamaican women experience direct gender-based violence over a lifetime,¹⁵ and seven percent of women on the island have reported to have experienced abuse from an intimate partner in the past twelve months.¹⁶ Jamaican women are most likely to experience abuse between the ages of 25-29, however, VAWG is experienced to varying degrees by women of all ages.¹⁷

VAWG in Jamaican Culture

Jamaican masculinity is characterized, in popular culture particularly, by violence of a physical and sexual nature;¹⁸ corollary gender norms are also pervasive and thought to predominate the belief system of most Jamaicans. The archetype of the “don” or “bad man” is widely promoted, and one of the nation’s biggest exports,

dancehall music, endorses dysfunctional masculine identities and misogynistic ideologies.^{19,20} The influence of religion, namely Christianity, is also a strong influence. Over two thirds of the Jamaican population identify as a Christian of some denomination,²¹ and family life is strongly influenced by the patriarchal hierarchy central to the faith. Recent efforts to outlaw marital rape, as an example, were met with backlash from religious groups,²² and a third of respondents to Jamaica’s 2016 Women’s Health Survey agreed that it is a wife’s obligation to have sex with her husband when he wants it.²³ Such acceptance, endorsement, and promotion of male policing and ownership of women’s and girls’ bodies, and of misogyny, perpetuate attitudes and views that are considered, at their most severe, a key driver of the high rate of incest and young sexual initiation in Jamaica,²⁴ as but one example of how VAWG is subsequently manifested.

Because GBV has such pernicious effects at the individual and societal level, it is in the state’s interest to enact policies and programmes to combat, reduce, and eliminate it. The Jamaican state’s princi-

pal policy towards reducing VAWG is the 2017 Jamaica National Strategic Action Plan to Address Gender-Based Violence (JNASP-GBV). The plan promotes a “whole population approach,” with calls for action across several priority areas including prevention, protection, prosecution, and enforcement.²⁵ Within this document, the role of the news media in shaping public opinion and moulding cultural norms is highlighted, with a focus on the need for systemic improvements to new media practices and procedures to ensure this role is undertaken with integrity and sensitivity.



**Jamaican Women
are most likely to experience
ABUSE between the ages of
25-29**

14 WHO, “Violence Against Women and Girls Prevalence Estimates,” March 9, 2021, www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women?

15 UN Women, “Global Database on Violence against Women- Jamaica,” 2022, <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries/americas/jamaica>.

16 Carol Watson-Williams, “Women’s Health Survey 2016 Jamaica,” Co-publication of the Statistical Institute of Jamaica, Inter-American Development Bank, and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2016.

17 Watson-Williams, “Women’s Health Survey.”

18 Nancy Muturi and Patricia Donald, “Violence Against Women and Girls in the Caribbean: An Intervention and Lessons Learned from Jamaica,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 52, no. 2-3 (2006), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00086495.2006.11829701>.

19 Farahnaz Mohammed, “Trouble in Paradise: Jamaica’s Culture of Misogyny,” *Girls Globe*, February 9, 2014, www.girlsglobe.org/2014/02/09/trouble-in-paradise-jamaicas-culture-of-misogyny/?doing_wp_cron=1646602183.0675759315490722656250.

20 Home Office, “Country Policy and Information Note Jamaica: Fear of Organised Criminal Groups, August 2019, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/824431/Jamaica-Org-Crim-Groups-CPIN-v3.0-August_2019.pdf.


21 Association of Religion Data Archives, “Jamaica- Major World Religions,” n.d., www.thearda.com/internationalData/countries/Country_116_2.asp.

22 Sharlene Hendricks, “Church Leaders Cautious on Marital Rape,” *Observer*, November 24, 2019, www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/Church-leaders-cautious-on-marital-rape.

23 Watson-Williams, “Women’s Health Survey.”

24 Anthony D. Harriot and Marlyn Jones, “Crime and Violence in Jamaica: IDB Series on Crime and Violence in the Caribbean,” IDB, 2016, <https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/Crime-and-Violence-in-Jamaica-IDB-Series-on-Crime-and-Violence-in-the-Caribbean.pdf>.

25 Bureau of Gender Affairs, “National Strategic Action Plan to Eliminate Gender-Based Violence (NSAP-GBV),” Facebook, posted on July 6, 2017, www.facebook.com/888408944588461/photos/a.888802614549094/1381392578623426/?type=3.



Jamaica's principal policy towards reducing VAWG is the 2017 Jamaica National Strategic Action Plan to Address Gender-Based Violence (JNASP-GBV). It calls for action across several priority areas including prevention, protection, prosecution, and enforcement.



2

Representations of VAWG in the News Media



The **key** guidance available to news media agents in Jamaica is the **Jamaican Journalists' Code of Practice**

Globally, there are well established linkages between the news media's representation of gender-based violence, and how those representations influence societal perceptions on violence against women and girls, intimate partner violence, and domestic violence. A review of the extant literature was undertaken in order to build an understanding of how VAWG's representation in the news media is conceptualized. The key themes presented below provide frames within which one can identify linkages, correlations, and even causation of media and GBV. Where the term "key guidance" is used, this generally refers to articulated protocols, rules, and policies relevant to news media and GBV. The key guidance available to news media agents in Jamaica is the Jamaican Journalists' Code of Practice.²⁶

Framing: Dictating Focus

While the news media ought to be value-free and objective, journalists and editors play a role in deciding which stories to publicise and what information to share. In so doing they influence the public's construction of reality and interpretation of the people and events that exist within it.²⁷ This process is called "framing" as it shapes an audience's understanding of what types of behaviour amount to VAWG, who enacts these behaviours, who is impacted by them, where these behaviours occur, and how they are responded to.²⁸

Offender Pathologisation

The literature demonstrates that the global media amplifies negative stereotypes

of men in order to "other" perpetrators and present them as individuals who are inherently "wrong," or "bad," or "sick"; this is often achieved by focusing on their social inadequacies, level of isolation, history of mental health issues, or substance abuse.²⁹ This form of framing disguises the truth that perpetrators of violence against women and girls are regular people, and VAWG occurs across all societies, cultures, classes, and races.

For example, while the Jamaican Journalists' code does not specify how offenders should be represented, it does state that news personnel should "avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to a person's race, colour, political opinion, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or to any physical or mental disability/challenge," in their descriptions of the subjects at the centre of their stories.³⁰

26 Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication, 2006.

27 Lane K. Gillespie et al., "Framing Deadly Domestic Violence: Why the Media's Spin Matters in Newspaper Coverage of Femicide," *Violence Against Women* 19, no. 2 (2013): 222-245.

28 Celeste Montoya and Lise Rolandsen-Agustin, "The Othering of Domestic Violence: The EU and Cultural Framings of Violence Against Women," *Social Politics* 20, no. 4 (October 2013): 534-557.

29 Nadja Karlsson et al., "Representation of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in Swedish News Media: A Discourse Analysis," *Violence Against Women* 27, no. 10 (2021): 1499-1524; Emma Williamson, Nancy Lombard and Oona Brooks-Hay, "Domestic Violence and Abuse, Coronavirus, and the Media Narrative," *Journal of Gender-Based Violence* 4, no. 2 (2020): 289-294, <https://doi.org/10.1332/239868020X15893043718030>; Smith, "Prevalence."

30 Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication, "Code of Practice for Jamaican Journalists and Media Organizations," Press Association Jamaica, 2006, http://pressassociationjamaica.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/Code_for_Media_Practitioners-Ratified-8.8.11.pdf.

'Framing' speaks to the shaping of the audience's understanding of what types of behaviour amount to violence against women and girls, who enacts these behaviours, who is impacted by them, where these behaviours occur, and how they are responded to.

Offence Sensationalism

Sensationalism is the act of presenting events in a dramatic way to attract and maintain the attention of readers;³¹ this can occur in the language used, the forms of violence considered worthy of attention, and the elements of the crime focused on. Editors have been found to prefer publishing stories on physical and/or fatal violence, and research has demonstrated that the Jamaican news media is no different, with physical/sexual violence being the most frequent form of VAWG mentioned within key newspapers.³² Journalists can also contribute to sensationalism by utilising uncertain terms and language, which can generate debate and gossip, and the use of salacious and/or emotive language to increase dramatic affect.³³ The Jamaican guidance refers to sensational reporting as a practice the media should avoid, however offers no further details as to what constitutes “sensational.”

Victim Idealisation

Victim idealisation is the act of presenting victims as legitimate and blameless due to their attributes and behaviours. For example, lighter-skinned, young, middle-class women are favoured in media reporting globally, and their cases receive significantly more news coverage than those of older, darker-skinned, poorer women.³⁴ During victim idealisation, traditional gender-conforming behaviours and attributes of the victim will be amplified, providing consumers



The **tone** of an article influences how people perceive and emotionally respond to the **subject** of the article.

with “a toolkit for how to have empathy for them.”³⁵ The Jamaican Journalists’ Code of Practice does not explicitly refer to victim idealisation, however guidelines related to reducing stereotyping could be considered related.

Tone: Influencing Feelings

Where framing influences people’s thoughts about a subject, tone influences the way people feel about and respond to the subject. The overall tone of an article (also known as the valence) influences how people perceive and emotionally respond to the subject of the article.^{36,37} Journalists are generally advised to maintain a neutral tone when discussing

VAWG, utilising objective, value-free descriptors of people (e.g., “women” in-

stead of “ladies”) and behaviours (“sexual assault” rather than “fondling”).³⁸ Journalists are also guided to avoid language that describes people in biased or stereotypical ways or perpetuates stigma about a particular group or community of people.³⁹ Where this does not occur, those working in news media are at risk of perpetuating the actions, which are described in the following section.

Offender Exoneration

It is argued in the literature that presenting violence as something that was done to someone (“the woman was assaulted”) rather than done by someone (“the husband assaulted his wife”) exonerates offenders by failing to attribute blame to anyone.⁴⁰ Exoneration is also found to occur when media agents focus on the “good” character, characteristics, and ac-

31 Sutherland et al., “Media Representations.”

32 Luisa Abbott Galvão, “Reporting on Violence Against Women: A Case Study of Select News Media in Seven Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean,” 2015, <https://publications.iadb.org/publications/english/document/Reporting-on-Violence-against-Women-A-Case-Study-of-Select-News-Media-in-Seven-Countries-in-Latin-America-and-the-Caribbean.pdf>.

33 Sutherland et al., “Media Representations.”

34 Michelle N. Jeanis and Rachael A. Powers, “Newsworthiness of Missing Persons Cases: An Analysis of Selection Bias, Disparities in Coverage, and the Narrative Framework of News Reports,” *Deviant Behavior* 38, no. 6 (2017): 668–683. Note that this research did not identify a similar trend in Jamaica.

35 Yasmin Lajoie, “Missing White Woman Syndrome — Why Do People Care Less When Women of Colour Go Missing?,” *Refinery* 29, July 20, 2020, www.refinery29.com/en-gb/2020/07/9883915/missing-white-woman-syndrome-madeleine-mccann.

36 Sylvie Graf, Pavla Linhartova and Sabine Sczesny, “The Effects of News Report Valence and Linguistic Labels on Prejudice against Social Minorities,” *Media Psychology* 23, no. 2 (2020): 215 – 243, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2019.1584571>.

37 Graf, “Effects of News Report.”

38 Zero Tolerance, “Media Guidelines on Violence against Women,” 2019, www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/Media-Guidelines-on-Violence-Against-Women.pdf.

39 UN Women, “Guidelines for Gender and Conflict-sensitive Reporting,” 2019, https://womensdaytoday.org/UNWOMEN/31-Guidelines_ENG_prew_40719.pdf.

40 Sha-Shana Chrichton, “What Happens When the Media Gets Ahead of Your Client’s Story? An Attorney’s Duty to Use Conscious Word Choice,” SSRN, June 4, 2020, <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3527115>.

41 Fairburn and Dawson, “Canadian News Coverage.”



tivities of the perpetrator, an approach that, it is argued, nurtures feelings of distrust in the victim's experience of this individual.⁴¹ There is no reference to language use and its impact on the perceptions and responses of readerships within the Jamaican guidance.

Victim Blaming

As opposed to victim idealisation, the media is often criticised for taking part in “victim blaming,” the name given when abuse is blamed on the character or behaviour of the victim; examples include commenting on the clothing, substance use, and the sexual or romantic history of the victim.⁴² This behaviour supports the false notion that only women of a certain “honour” deserve a life free from abuse from men, and that abuse is a natural consequence for those who do not. Offender pathologisation, discussed earlier, also supports victim blaming, as it can be presented as the victim's fault for being involved with such a “bad” person, and it feeds into myths related to women remaining in violent situations.⁴³ The Jamaican Journalists' Code of Practice does not explicitly reference victim-blaming within its guidelines.

Offence Normalisation

Instances of GBV are often portrayed as natural responses to life's stressors, or dissatisfaction with one's relationship, particularly in cases of domestic violence.⁴⁴ By presenting reasons as to why VAWG occurs (e.g., divorce, recent unemployment, financial problems) news media runs the risk of normalising and justifying abuse. This presentation is concerning as it reflects the justifications provided by perpetrators of abuse, justifications which, if not addressed, often lead to offending.⁴⁵

Presenting instances of VAWG in this way also nurtures perceptions that it is a private, domestic issue that does not warrant state intrusion, impacting political and public support for future interventions.⁴⁶ This further exacerbates the existing low levels of help-seeking behaviours among women who experience violence, and further complicates the internalisation of violent social norms.⁴⁷ The Code of Practice for Jamaican Journalists does not explicitly reference normalisation within its guidelines, instead focusing on encouraging reporters to avoid sensationalism.

Silence: Omitting Perspectives

Silencing occurs where “language is used in order to enable some kinds of expression and to disable others.”⁴⁸ In the news media, the most common form of silencing is omission, whether this is the omission of perspective, voices, or context. The news media has a role in not only reporting stories, but also providing information and analysis that explore the broader societal context in which those stories occur. The primary devices to do this are the inclusion of data showcasing the scale and the nature of the problem, commentary regarding the legal and policy frameworks that exist to manage the issue, and insight from people and organisations with expertise in the topic at hand. At the same time, the media also chooses what not to report, and what stories not to tell.

Offender Identification

Questions as to whether offenders should be identified in news reports have been

42 Sue Ann Barratt, “Reinforcing Sexism and Misogyny: Social Media, Symbolic Violence and the Construction of Femininity-as-Fail,” *Journal of International Women's Studies* 19, no. 3 (2018): 16-31.

43 Abbott Galvão, “Reporting on Violence Against Women.”

44 Smith, “Prevalence.”

45 Rhiana Wegner et al., “Sexual Assault Perpetrators' Justifications for Their Actions: Relationships to Rape Supportive Attitudes, Incident Characteristics, and Future Perpetration,” *Violence Against Women* 21, no. 8 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2016.1197618>.

46 Abbott Galvão, “Reporting on Violence Against Women.”

47 Sarah Bott et al., “Violence Against Women in Latin America and the Caribbean: A Comparative Analysis of Population-based Data from 12 Countries,” PAHO, 2012, <https://iris.paho.org/handle/10665.2/3471>.

48 Lynn Thiesmeyer, *Discoursing and Silencing: Representation and the Language of Displacement*, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003).

raised in the literature, but remain unanswered, with most journalists (66 per cent) claiming disclosure would depend on the specific situation.⁴⁹ Reasons for disclosure centre on public protection, whereas reasons for confidentiality focus on the protection of the identity of victims or family members of the offender, so that the public has fewer avenues through which to identify the victim.⁵⁰

The Jamaican Journalists' Code of Practice makes explicit that the identity of victims of sexual assault should remain hidden, and media agents should work to ensure that they do not directly or indirectly identify victims. This often means

not publishing details of the offender to ensure that the victim cannot be indirectly identified. For this purpose, journalists should also avoid publishing details of "relatives or friends of persons convicted or accused of crime." The most prescriptive element of the Jamaican guidance is related to crimes committed against children. The code of practice makes clear that journalists should not identify any person under the age of 18 involved in a sexual offence (whether victim, witness, or perpetrator). Victims under the age of 18 should not be recognisable due to the identification of the offender – for this reason, "the term 'incest,' where applicable, should never be used," and, "care

should be taken that nothing in the report implies the family relationship between the accused and the child."⁵¹

Victim Isolation

As regards VAWG, media reports have been found in some instances to promote victim silencing by presenting victimisation as something to be ashamed of, repeating stories of stigma when reporting, or questioning the victims' choice to speak out.⁵² The silencing of victims also occurs when journalists omit the victim's perspective, fail to engage victims and their families, or ignore data sources such

49 Elvira Jukić-Mujkić, "Research on Media Reporting on Gender-based Violence against Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina," UN Women, 2017, <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/12/research-on-media-reporting-on-gender-based-violence-against-women-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina#view>.

50 Jukić-Mujkić, "Research on Media."

51 Caribbean Institute of Media and Communication, 2006.

52 Abbott Galvão, "Reporting on Violence Against Women."



as victim statements.⁵³ This helps to isolate victims by “othering” them, promotes perceptions of worthlessness, and reduces the ability of victims to identify shared experiences.⁵⁴ News media can also perpetuate victim isolation by failing to provide information such as contact information for local support lines, advocacy groups, or victim services, minimising awareness of these options and opportunities for victims to access support.⁵⁵ The Code of Practice for Jamaican Journalists does not contain any guidance regarding the scope of news stories, or the responsibilities journalists have in relation to the breadth of their coverage.

Offence Isolation

Omission also occurs where there is a clear pattern of offense isolation within news media reporting of VAWG, where the act of violence is presented as a “one-off” event, without consideration of previous histories of abuse and violence, or the possibility of premeditation.⁵⁶ This presents VAWG as something that happens spontaneously and therefore cannot be accurately predicted and prevented, especially by the state.⁵⁷ These presentations of VAWG can influence the development and perception of public policy by alleviating the state of responsibility for the protection of women and girls.

This review has identified the ways in which media practitioners, in particular editors and journalists, consciously or not, influence their readership and their understanding of the world around them in relation to VAWG. While elements of local guidance can be applied here, and considered to promote elements of gender-sensitivity in reporting, gaps remain in the guidance available to Jamaican news professionals, and in their application of the available guidance.

53 Sutherland et al., “Media Representations.”

54 Kellie Carlyle, Michael D. Slater, and Jennifer Chakroff, “Newspaper Coverage of Intimate Partner Violence: Skewing Representations of Risk,” *Journal of Communication* 58, no. 1 (March 2008): 168-186

55 Carlyle, Slater and Chakroff, “Newspaper Coverage.”

55 Carlyle, Slater and Chakroff, “Newspaper Coverage.”

56 Williamson, Lombard, and Brooks-Hay, “Domestic Violence and Abuse.”

57 Williamson, Lombard, and Brooks-Hay, “Domestic Violence and Abuse.”





3

VAWG Reporting in the News Media



The **disproportionate** focus on some of the most shocking & socially unacceptable forms of violence against women in the local media demonstrates a lack of consideration in accurately framing the range of forms of violence against women and girls

In order to gain an understanding of the representation of VAW in Jamaican news media, 63 articles from four popular news outlets were analysed, and in-depth interviews with Jamaican media professionals and stakeholders undertaken. Key themes are presented below.

Framing in Jamaican VAWG Reporting

Instances of VAWG were framed in a variety of ways within the articles reviewed, ranging from short-form “bulletin” style reports to long-form “deep dive” personal accounts. Most reports did centre on information obtained from law enforcement or criminal justice officials, focusing on a very specific perspective and view of GBV. Questions regarding the freedom that journalists have to “frame” their reports were raised as it appeared that one news outlet utilised a template in which basic information (i.e. date and time of incident) were inputted to develop a short news story.

Sensationalism

Most articles reviewed did report cases of VAWG perpetrated by someone known

to the victim, well representing the reality of abuse against women and girls. Nearly half of articles reviewed however focused on cases of murder, rape, and buggery. This disproportionate focus on some of the most shocking and socially unacceptable forms of VAWG demonstrates a lack of consideration in accurately framing the range of forms of VAWG. Emotive language and phrasing was used in 15 articles to creatively describe acts, rather than present them objectively (e.g., brutal attack, vicious, etc.) and to increase the sense of gossip and salaciousness (e.g., eyes widened, high drama involved). Authors were also found to use language reminiscent of fictional entertainment genres; examples include using the words “hunt”, “rescued”, and terms such as “the hit”, “hush money”, and “bullets pumped”. Accordingly, articles with more sensationalist elements were found to generate feelings of disbelief and anger among online commenters, with some calling for “jungle justice”.

Victim Idealisation

Within the sample, authors were not witnessed to explicitly afford or encourage empathy utilising typical patriarchal notions of beauty or purity, as often seen in Western media. Pregnancy however was considered worthy of empathy, with a

judge quoted as saying, “You can see that she is pregnant and she is pregnant with your child, which didn’t stop you from putting the licks on her,” and a member of the public noting in the comments, “him never have no right fi deal wid her so and she pregnant.” The promotion of such views, it could be argued, encourages traditional patriarchal tenets related to women’s bodily autonomy, and facilitates assumptions that violence against a woman is unacceptable only when a woman is carrying a child. Despite this, in the sample self-idealisation was more common, with quotes from victims reinforcing stereotypes that being a good mother (“didn’t even drop the baby”), and modest/pure (“it’s not like we were talking over the phone, or we were talking over social media”), as examples, makes one less worthy of abuse, or more worthy of justice.

Offender Pathologisation

Pathologisation was witnessed explicitly in headlines (“Monster!”), and in the quotes provided by police personnel (“some sick men in society”), however authors did not rely on common themes from the literature (e.g. drugs or mental health issues) in the sample. Stereotypes of offenders were explicitly identified in seven articles, with quotes included

While guidance states that the broader context and background to a report should be shared, events were presented in such a way that indicate a cause-effect relationship between an individual victim’s behaviour and the harm caused to them.

that perpetuated stereotypes (e.g. “dem churchman yah love likkle pickney too much”).⁵⁸ This can propagate myths related to whether some groups of individuals are more or less “harmful” than others, and whether individuals can easily identify those who might harm them. Within the reports, this thought process is apparent in quotes from victims’ family members (e.g., “if me did know say that deh man deh a rapist, him couldn’t even talk to me daughter”).

Tone in Jamaican VAWG Reporting

Nearly two thirds of articles reviewed took a neutral tone and presented the account of violence in a “crime report style,” representing information from police reports, police sources, or court reports, in a factual and objective manner. The level of detail provided in these articles ranged from basic detail sharing (e.g., this crime happened here, this person was arrested, this is when the court date is), to more detailed accounts of the offence (this was their relationship, this is what happened before and after, this was how it was done).

Offender Exoneration

Nearly a third of articles promoted offender passivity, by framing violence against women and girls as something that occurs with no cause, rather than something that is done by another person (e.g., “she was forced,” rather than “he forced her”). In some cases, the “reasons” for perpetrators’ violence were provided by authors. For example: “Riley confessed to shooting Joeth, because she was making too much noise,” and in others, negative stereotypes of women went unchallenged. These include the stereotype that women “trap” men (“all of this is because she ask mi fi marry her”), and that they are dishonest and not to be trusted (“a bare lie she a tell pon mi and she say she wi do anything to get mi lock up”).

Offender Normalisation

Language that could be interpreted to minimise VAWG was found in the sample, with frequent instances of informal language used to describe criminal acts (e.g., “fondled”). Only three articles explicitly refer to the actions discussed as a crime, even though a considerable number of the articles reviewed covered a criminal conviction or sentence. Many articles instead described events as “incidents” or “matters”, which helps to normalise abuse by presenting it as something that

has little effect on those involved. Quotes included in reports also minimised violence against women and girls, with one police official stating, “this sexual offence thing has become a headache.” Several articles, particularly those that covered assaults committed by an intimate partner, also presented victims as similarly capable of violence (either beating a child, or physically defending themselves from an attack), normalising and minimising the violence enacted upon them.

Victim Blaming

While most articles did not contain elements of victim blaming, eight articles do present the behaviour of the victim in negative tones (e.g., “the grade nine student was behaving ‘in a disrespectful manner’”). Over half of the articles that discussed instances of physical assault, murder, or threats of murder described an altercation/confrontation some time before, or immediately prior to the abuse. While guidance states the broader context and background to a report should be shared, in several articles reviewed, events are presented in such a way that indicates a cause-effect relationship between an individual victim’s behaviour and the harm caused to them. Within the reports, “reasons” for women being assaulted include “behaving in a disrespectful manner”, “not taking part in a three-

⁵⁸ “The churchmen (pastors etc.), you love little children too much.”



some”, and “having a boyfriend”.

Parental blame as a theme stood out during the analysis. Within these cases, crimes were directly attributed to neglectful parenting, naïve caregivers, and young motherhood. These views were expressed by both experts: (“They lack parenting skills, and the cycle is perpetuated because their mother had them very young; couple that with mothers having to earn a living and being out of the house, the lack of supervision affects children in many ways because they are exposed”), and members of the public: (“di parents too worthless... some a dem must did know wha a gwaan... dem turn a blind eye”).

Self-blame was expressed in articles through the inclusion of quotes from survivors (e.g., “and like a fool, I followed him”). Self-minimisation was also evident in articles, with a reluctance to recognise victimisation witnessed in some accounts (e.g. where a child was attacked by a man in a position of power and quoted referring to it as a “fight,” inaccurately inferring equal power relations).

Silences in Jamaican VAWG Reporting

Due to the narrow focus taken within the articles reviewed, silences were common in the sample and emerged as a significant theme.

Offence Isolation

While 12 articles did highlight that VAWG is a social issue, this was often limited to providing statistics describing the scale of the issue in objective terms. Opportunities to highlight social issues (e.g. links between economic deprivation and victimisation) were not seized. Many articles reviewed did not discuss elements of premeditation, feeding into notions that offenders are passive actors in events that occur without cause, and that the harm caused was not part of a decision-making process by the perpetrator. Very few articles explicitly referred to



perpetrators’ criminal history.

Victim Isolation

Victim isolation was a key theme throughout the analysis, with only one article out of 63 including details of an organisation readers could contact. Many articles did not provide details of the process of reporting; this can lead to victim isolation as those with similar experiences do not have a clear understanding of what reporting might look or feel like, or the consequences of doing so. This also supports victim passivity by removing the role the victim may have played in seeking justice for their assault. Thirteen articles reported negative experiences of disclosing assault, potentially discouraging readers to report their own abuse. Examples include refusal of a health service to support the

victim and further violence toward the victim because of reporting their abuse: “having been denied medical treatment by doctors in Kingston, who expressed hesitation about becoming involved in a police matter, the student was taken to a doctor in Spanish Town.” Arguments that reporting such issues highlights weaknesses in the authorities’ approaches and generates change were not corroborated by authors in either the topics covered, or quotes included from authority figures.

One media professional reflected on the impact of silences in media reporting of VAWG and highlighted that the omission of stories related to middle class women reinforces skewed perceptions of victimisation: “I know this has all kinds of complex sociological dynamics at work because they tend to be better able to flee, but some of them were mistaken into be-



believing that they can better protect themselves. They can't."⁵⁹

Offender Identification

Victim identification was a recurrent theme in discussions with media professionals, with many recognising and advocating for the protection of victims: "Yes, we don't name the names. We don't tell

their locations. Because of the sensitivities, many times women are having to flee for their lives."⁶⁰ This understanding covered issues related to identifying offenders; the media professionals interviewed highlighted: "You are protecting any minors who are tangential to the story or who are involved in the story. You don't want to identify people."⁶¹ Despite this, disregard for the Code of Practice for Jamaican Journalists was clear, as sever-

al articles reviewed made clear incest had occurred (eg, "Principal charged with sexual assault of daughter"), and in some cases, website commenters noted their ability to identify people involved due to the level of detail provided in reports.

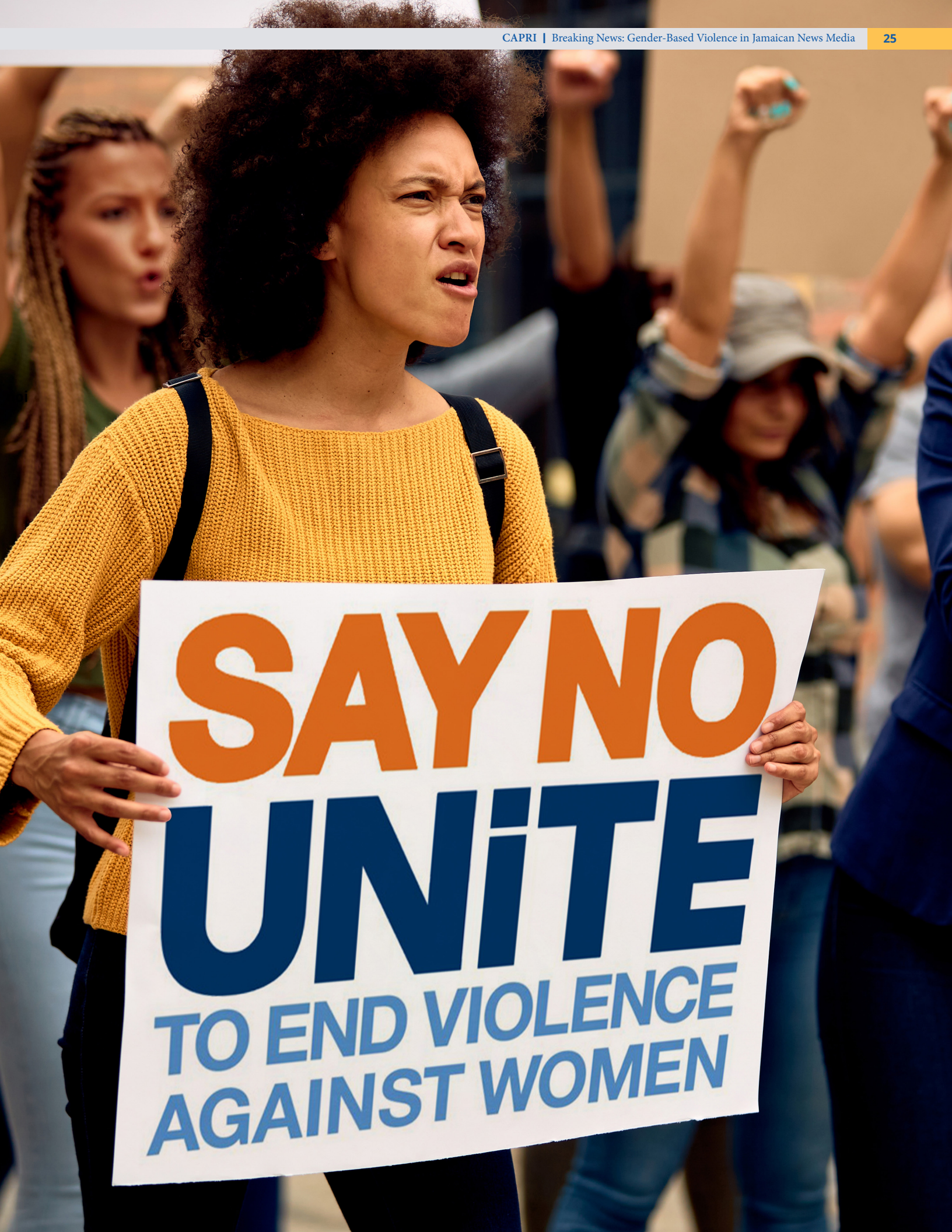
59 Male Media Professional, phone conversations with researcher, March 23, 2022.

60 Male Media Professional.

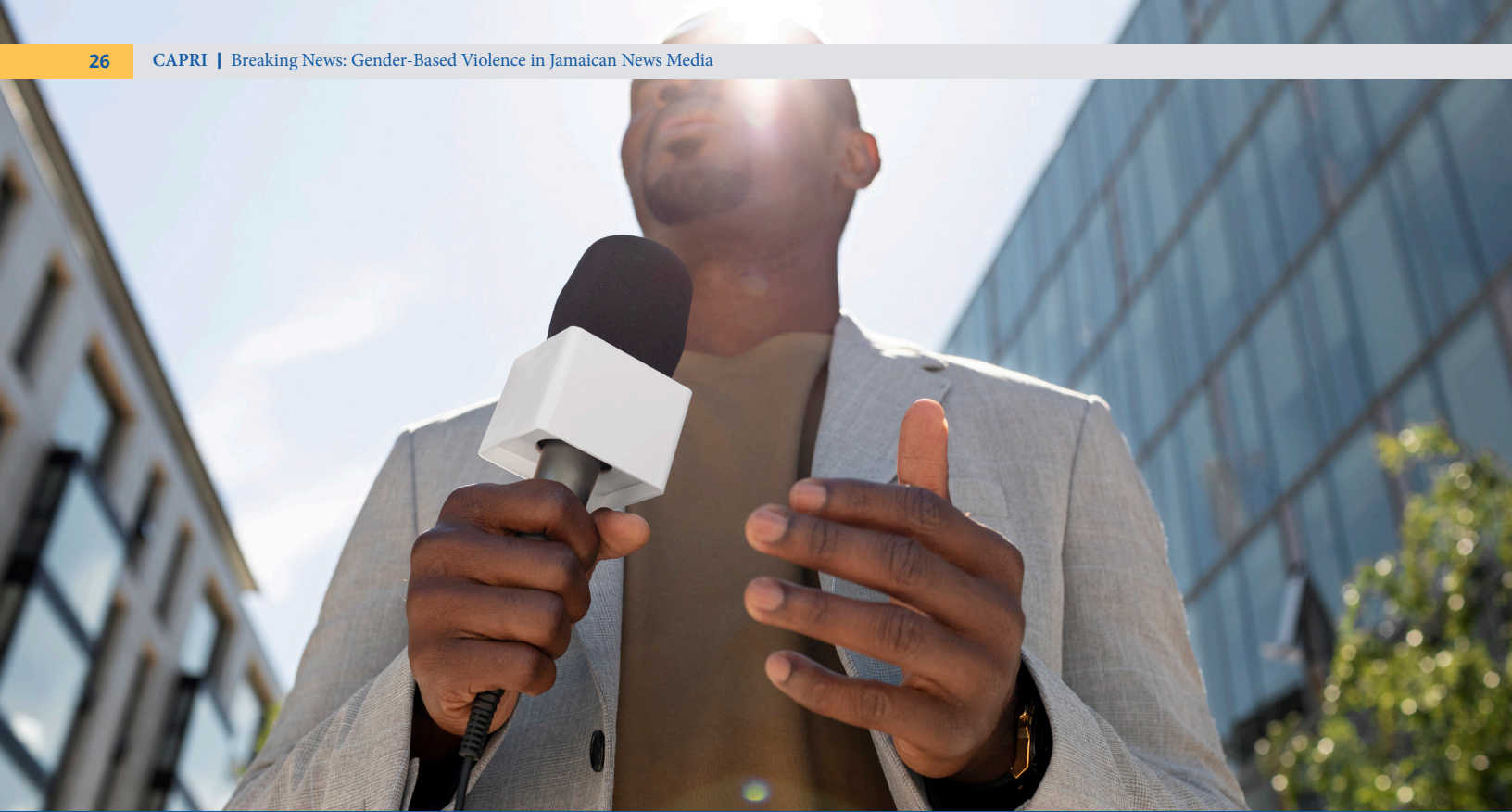
61 Male senior media professional, phone conversations with researcher, March 2022.

...we don't name the names. We don't tell their locations. Because of the sensitivities, many times women are having to flee for their lives.

- Media Professional



SAY NO
UNITE
TO END VIOLENCE
AGAINST WOMEN



4

Experiences of Reporting VAWG in Jamaican News Media



High staff turn-over

was considered a barrier to building pools of well-informed staff who are trained in gender-sensitive reporting.



Several media professionals, women's organisation representatives, and academics shared their perceptions and experiences of how VAWG has been managed and reported in news media organisations, and what might be done to improve gender-sensitivity.

Gender in Jamaican News Media Organizations

Media professionals held conflicting views on the importance of gender in reporting. Some participants argued, for example, that female reporters provided “a depth, and tend to humanize people from stereotypes,”⁶² whereas others dismissed claims that female journalists' gender is a contributing factor, arguing, “what you see in reporting is an issue of whatever people's backgrounds are, because women can be just as ignorant as men.”⁶³

Gender analysis of articles reviewed found that there were some significant differences in the framing and tone of articles written by men and women, with men more likely to cover severe VAWG, present cases using creative language, and cover stories involving a weapon. Men were also found to more frequently engage in victim-blaming and present offenders in a passive light. Women were found to more frequently present positive attributes of victims, but less likely to explore the broader societal links and

⁶² Ruth Howard, WMW Jamaica, phone conversations with researcher, March 17, 2022.

⁶³ Female senior media professional, phone conversations with researcher, March 16, 2022.

Men are more likely to cover severe forms of VAWG, engage in sensationalism and victim-blaming, and present offenders in a passive light. Women are found to more frequently report on positive attributes of victims, but less likely to explore the broader societal links to their victimisation. (pg 28)

complexity related to their victimisation.

Across the three media organisations reviewed, it was found that a marginally larger proportion of executive and management roles were held by women, however men were more likely to hold roles related to news reporting (including journalists/editors) than women. Men were also more likely to hold positions that were not directly related to reporting the news (e.g., human resources, maintenance etc.). A majority of newly enrolled students at the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica, are female, and there were indications that these numbers may continue to rise in news media houses.^{64, 65}

Experts interviewed proffered that gender-sensitivity and equality in media organisations had improved considerably over the length of their career: “we still have a way to go, but I think it’s better than when we were starting out. I think we have a better understanding of the issues in relation to what causes the issues affecting women.”⁶⁶ Despite claims that “generally, the basic understanding is there,”⁶⁷ some male respondents demonstrated frustration or confusion over the focus on VAWG in definitions, reporting, and sensitivities, in comparison to other forms of crime, “why do we say gender-based violence? Why is it not just simply violence?”⁶⁸ or crimes against men: “I’d like to see, is a man being victimized in the way that so many women have long been victimized, that the stories are treated with the same seriousness.”⁶⁹

Organisationally, few news houses demonstrated commitment to gender equality, with media professionals respondents demonstrated a lack of interest in, or attendance at, such training oppor-



tunities.^{70,71}

Gender-Sensitive Reporting in Jamaican News Media Organizations

Representatives from women’s organisations generally agreed that: “We still find that women are underrepresented, misrepresented, over victimised, and overrepresented as victims.”⁷² Gender Studies academics agree that much work is still required; one stated, “I am seeing some level of improvement in terms of the cov-

erage of the stories, the background information, the context, and the language to some extent.”⁷³

Barriers to Gender-Sensitive Reporting

Despite younger journalists having a firmer understanding of the gendered world and being more receptive to adopting gender-sensitive reporting,⁷⁴ professionals did complain that while younger journalists may have this understanding of the broader social issues, they often lack

64 There is one principal tertiary institution dedicated to media and communication research, teaching, and training in the Caribbean, located at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica.

65 Assistant Lecturer at the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica, phone conversations with researcher, April 11, 2022; Lecturer, the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica, phone conversations with researcher, April 11, 2022.

66 Female senior media professional.

67 Female senior media professional.

68 Male media professional.

69 Male senior media professional.

70 Male senior media professional.

71 Female senior media professional.

72 Hilary Nicholson, WMW Jamaica.

73 Lecturer, the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica.

the knowledge to effectively apply this in practice. This perspective was also shared by a women's group representative, who claimed, "many journalists do a university degree... maybe they do it in English and they write very well... but they themselves do not automatically come trained in how to do gender-sensitive reporting."⁷⁵ High turnover rates were considered a barrier to building pools of well-informed staff who are trained in gender-sensitive reporting: "You train somebody and in two years, they're out, and you have a new set of young ones coming in from [the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica] and you have to go through the whole process again."⁷⁶ ⁷⁷ Currently, education and training related

to gender, media, and violence are available at [the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica], however it is not mandated.⁷⁸

Responses from media professionals reflect the limited coverage of VAWG in the Jamaican guidance: "I don't remember a specific section on gender-based violence, but it covers enough the issues in terms of privacy and not calling people's name."⁷⁹ There was little reference to the use of guidance to support gender-sensitive reporting, with no international examples discussed within the literature review noted. Participants explained that professionals in their organisations understood the concept of gender-sensitive reporting,

however formal guidance on the matter was either non-existent or failed to directly address issues related to gender.

A number of professionals identified time and resource constraints as significant barriers to gender-sensitive reporting, with one media professional recognising the lack of long-form reporting in this space.⁸⁰ Participants from women's organisations also note that many journalists often do not have the capacity to give the topic the time and consideration it deserves: "it might have been lazy reporting, but also, we learned, it had to do with the number of assignments one reporter could be given."⁸¹

Tension between normalisation and sen-

74 Male Media News Professional.

75 Judith Wedderburn, WMW Jamaica, phone conversations with researcher, March 18, 2022.

76 The school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica.

77 Female senior media professional.

78 Lecturer, the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica.

79 Female senior media professional.

80 Male senior media professional.



sationalism was highlighted as a key issue by several professionals interviewed. Media professionals raised the issue that violence is “normal” in Jamaican society and demonstrated that the level of exposure to violence Jamaicans experience in the news media may serve to desensitize people, thus creating an imperative to draw attention to such stories: “gender-based violence is never out of the news or out of our programmes, because Jamaica has a chronic problem of violence, period.”⁸² In the context of VAWG, therefore, journalists are almost “forced” to apply sensational elements to their work in order to highlight the importance of the topic and garner the required attention: “it needs to be more detailed because the more it happens, is the more we get desensitized to it.”⁸³

Nurturing Gender-sensitive Reporting

Practitioners and other media professionals have their own experience-based ideas about how news houses might nurture greater gender-sensitivity within their organisations, and, in turn, in reporting about gender-based violence. They articulated a preference for practical guidance that demonstrates what news professionals can and should do, rather than what they cannot or should not do. This they consider would benefit those working on the frontline, for example developing manuals for reporters covering “the whole issue of language use and how you represent ‘these people.’”⁸⁴ There has been previous work undertaken by human rights and women’s organisations internationally, however guidance specific to the Jamaican cultural and social context is required.⁸⁵

Experts and stakeholders further suggested that the subject of GBV/VAWG

requires specialist knowledge, and that journalists should seek to become more specifically proficient in this area: “just like we have people who report on climate change and climate change only... and who know the ins and outs, and the changes in policies, and all those things... I think that is something that would make a noticeable difference.”⁸⁶ Such action could address issues raised in relation to lack of knowledge in this space. For example, one stakeholder articulated: “I don’t think there is a thorough understanding of the legislation and the kind of deficiencies there are in with regard to the protection of women.”⁸⁷ Issues related to staff turnover (discussed earlier) would need to be considered in the development of any such initiative, due to questions regarding return-on-investment that media houses may have.

A focus on longer-form reporting, and a stated commitment to gender-sensitive reporting, were other predominant themes that emerged from the consultations. Media professionals expressed a de-

sire to focus more on VAWG in its broader forms, arguing that there is currently a lack of “documentary form and long form of reporting, where we sit down and trace the impacts of gender-based violence on families.”⁸⁸ Academics highlighted the fact that news houses ought to be required to make a formal commitment to any approach to nurturing gender-sensitive reporting, in order to develop well-rounded, well-researched stories, to, “go beyond what the police told you, find the woman and interview her.”⁸⁹ Resource constraints were also brought up as a barrier, regardless of the journalist’s gender.

In Jamaica there is a lack of documentary form and long form reporting, where we sit down and trace the impacts of gender-based violence on families.

- Male Media Professional

81 Judith Wedderburn, WMW Jamaica.

82 Male News Professional.

83 Assistant Lecturer, the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica.

84 Lecturer, the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica.

85 UN Women, “Guidelines.”

86 Assistant Lecturer, the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica.

87 Judith Wedderburn, WMW Jamaica.

88 Male Media Professional.

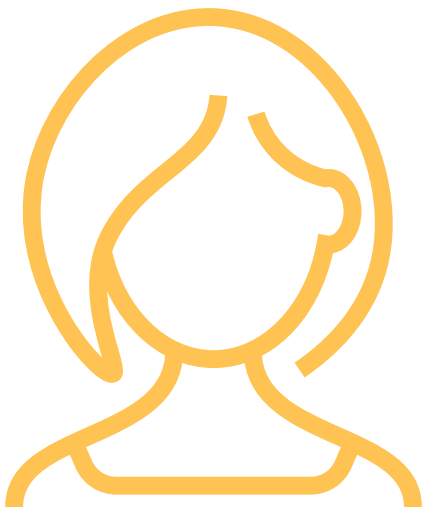
89 Judith Wedderburn, WMW Jamaica.





5

Representation and Gender-Relevant Policy Within Media Organizations



women represent

75%

of persons in positions of seniority across the nation's prominent news media houses.

The wider literature on violence against women and girls draws correlations between gender-sensitive reporting and gender representation within media organisations, as well as the presence and prevalence of gender related policies. Research highlights the impact of gender representation on the prevalence of gender stereotypes.⁹⁰ Typically, equitable representation of both women and men in a media organization lends itself to a balance of perspectives, and as a result, a more objective and comprehensive approach to reporting. Gender representation ought to be taken into consideration by media heads and at the institutional level, as gender representation in staff and student population also play a role in shaping the future of gender-responsive content in journalism. This emphasis on gender representation should be complemented by the implementation of formal, gender-influenced writing guidelines for journalists to abide by; the presence of in-house sexual harassment policies to build awareness and change the culture within the workroom, ultimately reflecting in reported stories; and a more resounding reception of support from media advocacy groups that spearhead efforts around gender-sensitive reporting through training opportunities and workshops.



To ascertain the extent to which contemporary gender influences are engrained within the Jamaican media context, data was collected from seven organisations, including four media houses, a media advocate organisation, a media academic institution, and a women's media advoca-

cy group (WMW Jamaica). These findings provide some indication as to the level at which gender-related issues are taken into consideration by local media organisations and allow for the formulation of appropriate recommendations for further improvement.

90 Ariel Skeath and Lisa Macpherson, "Gender Equity in the News Media: Analysis and Recommendations for Newsroom Leaders," Harvard Kennedy School, 2019, www.fordfoundation.org/media/5489/grej-gender-media-report-102519.pdf.

The media training institution has a nearly equal representation of males and females in the capacity of educators, and an almost three to one female to male ratio student population.

Male-Female Representation in Media Entities

There is a near equal male and female representation in news media networking and in news media coverage across the sampled media organisations. (See appendix 2.) The data depicts a slight edge for male direct involvement in news media writing and reporting, a 25 percent edge for female dominance in the same category, and a 25 percent equal gender distribution in the same category. As it regards gender distribution in positions of seniority, 75 percent of the data sample illustrated greater female representation, and 25 percent exhibiting an equal distribution of power between the two genders. These statistics demonstrate a step in the right direction in terms of improvement in the representation of women directly involved in traditional news media-coverage, in positions of media seniority, and amongst executives and spare-headers in media networking. It can therefore be implied that local journalism has a fair representation of female voices who can directly and indirectly contribute to the quality of gender-responsive content produced and disseminated by local media.

The media training institution's nearly equal representation of males and females in the capacity of educators, and the almost three to one female to male ratio student population, has its own implications. Among them are the suggestion that the content being imparted upon the students is, although primarily objective, less likely to be intermittently guided or influenced by overly dominant male biases as there ought to be female perspectives represented in the academic staff.

The future and current Jamaican news media network is equipped with a substantial number of female voices, but female representation does not necessarily lead to more gender-sensitive content.

This also translates to reflect the future of local journalism, as with most of the student population being mostly female, more female voices are likely to be represented in local journalism. However, though greater female representation in media does not necessarily equate to more gender-sensitive writing or reporting, it is a safe approach to have representative female voices, as they may be better able to translate issues pertinent to VAWG to the public.

The future and current Jamaican news media network is equipped with a substantial number of female voices, but female representation does not necessarily lead to more gender-sensitive content. It is also guided by the advocacy and support of women's media groups such as WMW Jamaica, to produce more gender-responsive print media content. Nevertheless, several female journalists, especially those newly minted into the world of work, are also found to occasionally carry traditional views or perpetuate outmoded, gender-biased stereotypes in their writing.⁹¹ This points to a wider societal issue, which is also reflected in research, where a number of women tend to blame themselves or other women for their victimisation.⁹² This amplifies the need for continued training including general gender-conscious education within media houses, especially in light of the high turnover rates of local media houses.⁹³

91 Female senior media professional.

92 Watson-Williams, "Women's Health Survey."

93 Female senior media professional.

Concepts of gender-sensitive reporting are not explicitly outlined internally or at the national level. There is therefore a lack of recognition of gender-related issues expressed on both scales for local journalists to heed.

Gender-based Violence - related Writing Guidelines

Amongst the media houses, we also sought to ascertain the presence of writing guidelines that govern the writing strategies of their writers and editors. Figure 2 illustrates the responses.

Fifty percent of the sampled media houses have a written Code of Conduct or writing guidelines for their writers and editors

to adhere to. Although these guidelines do not speak definitively to gender-based violence, they do acknowledge writing on matters of crime, discrimination, evaluating sources, the importance of “guiding questions” from which to formulate a story, and how to handle confidential information.⁹⁴ The other half of the sample was not able to provide such policies or documents, formal or informal.

While it is acknowledged that most of the sampled media houses have internal

codes of practice, as well as the key guidance available to news media professionals (the Jamaican Journalists Code of Practice), concepts of gender-sensitive reporting are not explicitly outlined internally or at the national level. There is therefore a lack of recognition of gender-related issues expressed on both scales for local journalists to heed. Interlocking guidance related to crime and sexual assault was recalled as a strategy used to formulate stories on gender-based violence.⁹⁵ The absence of such specific guidelines has

⁹⁴ Data obtained from Media Houses 1 and 2, communication with researchers, March 23, 2022.

⁹⁵ Media Professional 1, interview with researchers, March 18, 2022.



Figure 1. Percentage of media houses with and without internal writing guidelines in place.



the potential to hinder improvement in the quality of writing of gender-related content, further perpetuating the current cultural narrative of GBV that the media aids in shaping.

A “Proposed Media Code of Ethical Practice on Gender” was produced by WMW Jamaica in 2015. The code aimed to benefit Caribbean media professionals (namely: Cuba, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago). Prior to this code, all listed countries, excluding Cuba, previously had in operation non-binding, voluntary, non-gender specific codes of ethics for media.⁹⁶ Although Cuba’s Code of Ethics is legally bound, it was not found to be gender responsive. The proposed conventions were curated to “build gender-equitable coverage” in regional journalism.⁹⁷ Matters surrounding balance, coverage and credibility, language and treatment, shared principles, accountability and impartiality, advertising, reporting on gender-based violence, and capacity building and promotion of gender in the workplace were all highlighted. Considering the absence of gender-sensitive influences in internal and external media guidance within the Jamaican media network,

the adoption of key elements from these proposed guidelines would do well to be considered by local media organisations, as well as on a national scale.

A 2016 WMW Jamaica study put forward recommendations to increase women’s visibility in the news media, enhance gender-awareness among civil society, educators, and other stakeholders, enhance gender-awareness among professionals in the news media through training, and vary sources and make efforts to include the voices of other well-informed women and men whose diverse perspectives can give depth and balance.⁹⁸ Key elements from this document are incorporated into some university course content,⁹⁹ but the concepts and practices would do well to be integrated into media organizations’ respective codes of conduct and orientation documents, for reinforcement. In addition, within media advocacy groups, elements of this code would be suitable to be added to already existing codes of practice, and be disseminated or made available to the Jamaican news media network, including media professionals who work independently.

Sexual Harassment Policies

All sampled media houses were able to provide testimony of a sexual harassment policy within their organisation. Three of the four sexual harassment policies drafted by the four media houses were adapted from the Sexual Harassment Act of 2020.¹⁰⁰ Summarized, each defines and identifies variations of sexual harassment, noting that it is “the making of any sexual advance towards a person, by another person, which is reasonably regarded as unwelcome(d), offensive or humiliating by the person towards whom the advancement is made.”¹⁰¹ Each policy also expresses the respective organisation’s “zero-tolerance” for breaches of the act, with a keen focus on power dynamics, and the recognition of victim status regardless of gender. That all sampled media houses were able to provide evidence of internal policies pertaining to sexual harassment suggests that journalists do have an awareness of these issues, which might influence how GBV is represented in their writing.

96 WMW Jamaica and Caribbean Policy Development Centre, “Proposed Media Code of Ethical Practice on Gender (Caribbean), 2015.”

97 WMW Jamaica and CPDC, “Proposed Media Code.”

98 WMW Jamaica, “Whose Voice, Whose Choice? Monitoring the Presence of Women and Men in Radio and Print News in Jamaica,” 2016.

99 WMW Jamaica Representative, interview with researchers, March 17, 2022.

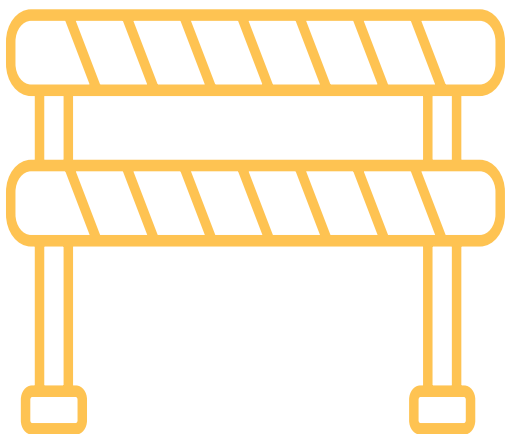
100 Information obtained from Media Houses 1, 2, and 3, communication with researchers, March 23, and 28, 2022.

101 Sexual Harassment Bill, 2020.





6 Conclusion



Barriers

to gender-sensitive reporting include **resistance to key concepts and staffing issues.**

There is a proven link between the role of news media organizations and media consumption, and the culture and attitudes of the people and places where that news media operates. In the context of one of the highest murder rates in the world, and one of the highest levels of gender-based violence in the world, this study sought to explore how GBV is reported in the Jamaican print news media. A review of the literature on media and GBV, an analysis of the current guidance available to Jamaican journalists, and interviews with key stakeholders and experts revealed gaps in relation to media representation of VAWG in Jamaica. There is a consensus among stakeholders that there has been an improvement in

the representation of women directly involved in traditional news media coverage, in positions of media seniority, and amongst executives and spare-headers in media networking. However, several barriers to gender-sensitive reporting were identified, including resistance to key concepts, and staffing issues. Most media houses sampled had a sexual harassment policy, equal representation of men and women in the journalistic staff, and some followed guidance of some sort, though these generally did not specify reporting on gender-based violence. An analysis of recently published stories related to VAWG has shown that practice in this space is underdeveloped and, in some cases, there is clear disregard for relevant local and international guidance. Professionals working in the field have suggested

policy makers expand the range of practical guidance available to those working in journalism, and news houses allocate more resources to VAWG reporting, nurturing topic specialisms, and formalising their policies and protocols to demonstrate a commitment to gender-sensitivity in their operations.



Practice in the space of reporting on stories related to violence against women is underdeveloped and, in some cases, there is clear disregard for relevant local and international guidance.

Recommendations



1

Guidelines for journalists regarding gender-sensitive reporting should be developed for the specific Jamaican context through multi-stakeholder consultations, including the relevant ministries, departments, and agencies, and reference to international best practice standards such as the UN Guidelines for Gender and Conflict-sensitive reporting. Context-sensitive and fair reporting is an industry responsibility not necessarily aligned with the interest of any individual publisher. This action should therefore be the responsibility of the Press Association.

Media houses should provide ongoing support and guidance in gender-sensitive reporting. Where expertise cannot be brought in or developed in house, media houses may partner with specialist organisations, such as women's and criminal justice organisations, to meet this objective.

2



3

Media houses should formalise policies and protocols related to gender-based violence and appropriate sexual conduct within their own organisations (with reference made to the Sexual Harassment Act 2021). These policies and protocols should be readily accessible to all staff and included in the onboarding process. The expectation is that the practice of sensitivity to gender in the workplace will bleed over into more sensitive reporting.



Appendix I

Methodology

A mixed methods approach was utilized to achieve the intended research objectives. First, a narrative review was conducted and systematic search methods were utilised, with a number of Boolean search strings using terms like: (“gender-based violence” OR “intimate partner violence” OR “violence against women” OR “domestic violence” OR “domestic abuse”) AND (“news” OR “news media” OR “newspapers” OR “media reporting” OR “journalism”) applied. Searches were undertaken in both academic and grey literature databases and articles were included if: they were written in the English language, primarily focused on violence against women and or girls, published between 2002 and 2022, and research was undertaken/commissioned by a reputable organisation (e.g. academic institution, think tanks, NGOs). No criteria were set in terms of study type, due to the emerging nature of the knowledge base, however studies chosen for final inclusion were quality assessed using Gough’s Evidence Weighting Framework.^{102,103} Finally, reference lists of identified articles were screened for additional literature and following screening and quality assurance activities, a total of 25 articles were taken forward for inclusion in the review.

The rapid nature of this review is emphasised, as the search strategy was applied to limited databases and therefore, a comprehensive overview of all studies in this field is not presented. Second, the Euro-American focus of the majority of the literature identified means this review is inherently culturally biased and vigilance

was needed to ensure this bias did not hinder recognition of new or previously undiscussed elements within the content analysis. Some studies included in the review did focus on the experiences of women from the Caribbean, however the Caribbean experience is not homogenous and therefore, these findings cannot be relied upon with total confidence. Third, gender-based violence is extremely complex: definitions are continuously evolving and the scope of behaviours broadening. Because of this, some elements of this review have had to be simplified for conciseness. Finally, violence against women is much better understood than that against girls with data for women being more detailed and easier to obtain. This implies a false distinction between the violence experienced as a child and the violence experienced as an adult, even though research demonstrates they are inextricably linked, and VAWG is a threat that often follows women throughout their lives.¹⁰⁴ Violence against elderly women as a distinct population and the presentation of such violence in the media was not distinctly highlighted within the literature reviewed, even though data suggest violence continues for women into old age.¹⁰⁵

In order to explore if, how, and to what extent gender-sensitive reporting is considered in media reports, analysis, and discussion of GBV, content analysis was undertaken on a sample of 63 online written news articles, which were selected from four key Jamaican media outlets published between 2016 and 2021. Quan-

titative coding was used to measure the frequency of content across the sample to identify the manifest content (surface level information) and inform the framework for qualitative analysis to explore the latent content (the underlying meanings of the text). The combined findings of this exercise are presented below, themed as per the previous analysis.

In order to assess whether or not gender sensitive reporting protocols were utilised within Jamaica’s media houses, data was collected from seven organisations, including four media houses, namely, the Gleaner Company (Media) Limited, the Jamaica Observer, the Jamaica Star, and Nationwide News Network. Other organizations included in the data collection exercise were the Press Association of Jamaica (PAJ), the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica, Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica (BCJ), and WMW Jamaica (formerly known as Women’s Media Watch).¹⁰⁶

Information from the Bureau of Gender Affairs was requested but was not provided due, the research team was told, to the reconfiguration of an office space which was previously used to house the Bureau’s Gender Documentation Centre. The migration of the organisation’s librarian in 2021 was also cited as a reason for the BGA’s failure to provide the requested information.¹⁰⁷

Amongst the media houses and the me-

102 David Gough, “Weight of Evidence: A Framework for the Appraisal of the Quality and Relevance of Evidence,” *Research Papers in Education* 22, no. 2 (2007): 213-228, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02671520701296189>.

103 David Gough, “Appraising Evidence Claims,” *Review of Research in Education* 45, no. 1 (2021): 1-26.

104 Watson-Williams, “Women’s Health Survey.”

105 Watson-Williams, “Women’s Health Survey.”

106 In the footnotes to the report these are named media house 1 (MH 1) through to media house 4 (MH 4), where media house 1- The Gleaner, media house 2- The Star, media house 3- Nationwide, media house 4- The Observer.

107 They can also be referred to as “the gender department of the Ministry of Gender, Entertainment and Sports.” In lieu of documents, an interview was promised. Despite extensive efforts, attempts to secure the interview with their Principal Director proved futile. We were informed that she was unavailable, at an any time, for an interview. The representative second in command was also not available for an interview as she was in the process of leaving the organisation.

media advocacy organisation, data was collected to analyse the gender breakdown and role status of employees and members. Specific to the media academic institution, a gender breakdown of students enrolled in media-based courses, as well as information on the presence of courses that speak to gender-sensitivity in media was requested. In addition to employee data, information was also sought from the four media houses as well as the academic institution, details

surrounding the presence of guidelines for writers around reporting on issues of GBV, and the presence of in-house sexual harassment policies for staff members (documented or verbal). Finally, specific to WMW Jamaica, archival research on gender-based violence and media within the last five years was requested. Specific to the school of media and communication at the regional tertiary education institution, at the campus in Jamaica, information reflecting the num-

ber of students enrolled, a breakdown of the student population in media-based roles based on gender, and the presence of course(s) that cover gender-sensitive reporting was sought after. Specific to the PAJ and WMW Jamaica, internal documents on gender-based violence and the media, and any archival research carried out within the last five years on the portrayal of gender-based violence within the media, respectively, was requested.



Appendix II

Gender Breakdown of Media Workers

Data collected from the media houses was broken down to reflect male and female employees 1) directly involved in reporting and writing, and 2) in executive roles or management positions. The first category specifically describes reporters/journalists, presenters, producers, editors, and online editors, while the second category focuses on individuals that have been categorized as managers and supervisors of their respective departments. Figure 1 below displays the results collected.

At media house 1, there is an almost equal number of male and female employees with 14 percent of the total population comprising females directly involved in news reporting, presenting, producing, or editing, and 17 percent representing males in the same category. Female executives or management personnel accounted for 3 percent of the population, while males of that same category accounted for 2 percent of the population.

Media houses 1 and 2 share employees, including management staff. Data reflecting individuals directly involved in reporting, writing, producing, or editing, however, represents those that are solely employed to media house 2. Therefore, at media house 2, there is a levelled split in the population of employees directly involved in news reporting, presenting, producing, or editing, with both males and females having equal numbers in this category. Each gender accounted for 13 percent in this category.

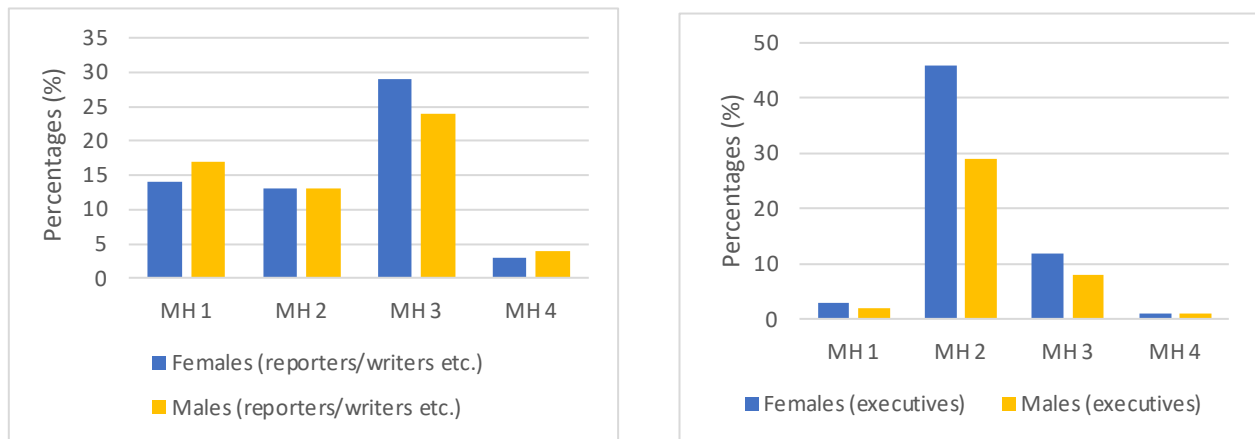


Figure 2. Comparison of male and female executives and employees directly involved in reporting/writing/producing/editing at the four media houses, expressed as percentages (%).

Twenty-nine percent of the employee population at media house 3 represents females directly involved in reporting and writing while 24 percent of the population represents males in that same category. Twelve percent of the employee population represents female executives and management personnel, while 8 percent represents males in the same category.

At media house 4, there is an almost equal distribution of male and female employees with 3 percent of those involved in re-

porting and writing being females, 4 percent of those in the same category being males, and 1 percent representing female executives and male executives.

Within the media advocate organisation, one that supports and lobbies on the behalf of media professionals, more women, (who accounted for 43 percent of the total member population) than men (36 percent of the total member population) were elected to be a part of the executive, demonstrating a slight advantage in favour of the women of the organisation.

Within the academic media institution, there is a total of 713 students, 74 percent of which are females and 26 percent, males. The institution also has an academic staff comprising of 51 percent females and 49 percent males. Figure 3 on the following page more clearly illustrates this.

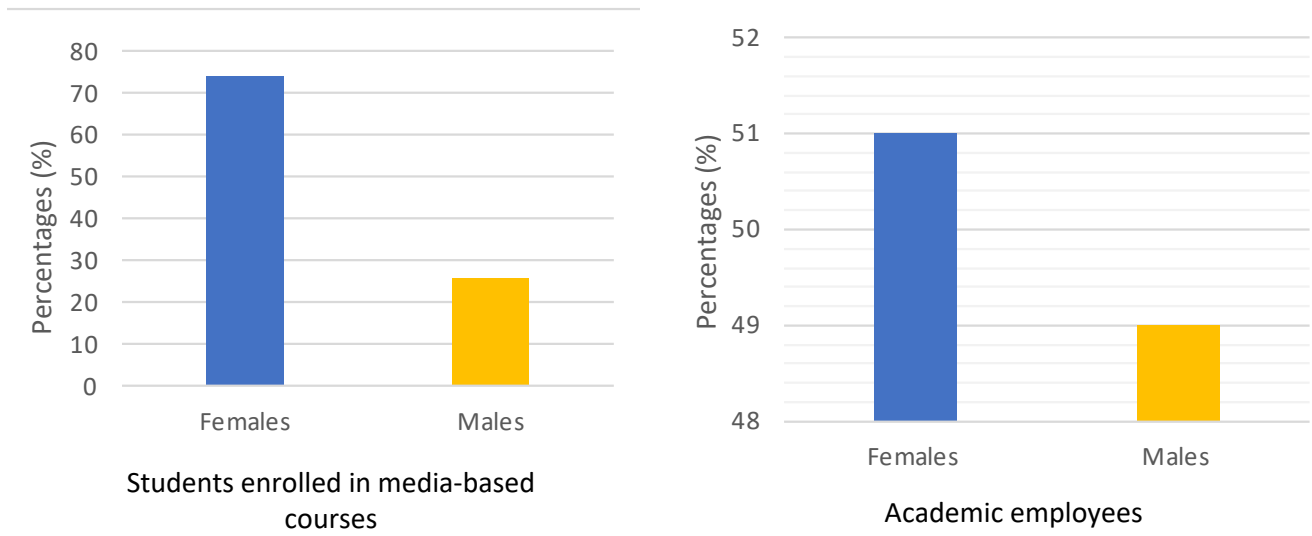


Figure 3: A) Percentage (%) male and female students enrolled in media-based courses at an academic media institution.

B) Percentage (%) male and female academic employees at an academic media institution.



Notes

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