

Women related News: A Comparative Study of the Portrayal by National and Local Print Media

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Abstract

The role of media has today stretched far beyond the supply of information because of the outreach and technological sophistication. The media as a chronicler of events, an informer, an educator, a transformative space and a tool to change society has the capacity to make a very positive contribution towards social change. By gradually shaping public opinion, personal beliefs and even people's self-perceptions, media influences the process of socialization and shapes ideology and thinking. The ongoing revolution in the field of media had opened up new avenues for accelerating the development and upliftment of women. In the past few years, there has been an improved and enhanced coverage of issues related to women in print media, especially newspapers. News related to them, have started to periodically occupy key slots like editorials, features, news, etc. But portrayal through media reinforces reality as well as stereotypes. It is believed that women in news are more likely to be featured in stories of sexual harassment, domestic violence, and crime and atrocities, rather than in stories about their professional abilities or expertise. Therefore, it has become necessary to know the nature of the portrayal of women and women issues in print media, so that women related issues are adequately represented in media. This research paper tried to analyze the print media coverage of two National newspapers and two Local Newspapers of Kashmir, regarding women to know the amount of coverage given to women and women related issues and the nature of such coverage. The research study found out that the women-related issues get negligible coverage in both local and national level newspapers; it is 0.8% in local newspapers and 2% in national newspapers. This insignificant coverage is dominated mostly by news stories related to Domestic Violence, Sexual Harassment, Suicide and Crime against Women.

Keywords: *Print Media, Portrayal of Women, Women Issues, Stereotype, Under Representation.*

Introduction

Media is the fastest and most popular access to information for the masses in the world today. With the rapid development of communication and the infrastructural development in recent years, media had provided the masses with a lot more access to information. Media determines the public discourse and therefore shapes our political, cultural, and economic priorities. It also determines and shapes the roles of men and women in our society (Joshi, et. al., 2006). It is a mirror to society and acts as an advocate of people. It provides a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the events, by observing the events, transmitting facts about the events and acting as an interpreter of these events. Media through its increased influence over the masses is able to shape ideas, values, behavior, and concepts of the public. This information being delivered is both positive and negative.

Of various fields covered by media, coverage, and portrayal of women in media is the focus of special attention in contemporary times, due to progress made by the women in almost all fields of life and also due to the decades of research, advocacy and political lobbying at the international level. All these have compelled the media to portray an enhanced and progressive image of women and women issues.

Women and Media Coverage

Over the years, India has developed a fairly extensive communication infrastructure and media with its role as a social constructor and representative of people, had drawn the attention of media critiques over the subject of portrayal of women in media (Sharma, 2012). It arises especially when our society is going through a period of social change, wherein more women are entering the labor market and the number of educated women is increasing day by day. The role of women in family life is also undergoing significant changes. As an educated housewife, or as a working woman, she has acquired a respectable place in society. Today's women are also increasingly aware of themselves and of the happenings around them.

Women's portrayal in the media has been a point of strong international debate and is also a highly sensitized topic in our country (Ahmer, 2011). It is a two-way process, where both media and masses influence and modify each other in an open-ended and undetermined way. It is a fact that the way women are being projected in the media is a reflection of the whole society.

Roy (2012) says, on one hand, it is an acknowledged fact that media can play a significant role in advancing and spreading information regarding social and economic development of women. On the other hand, media creates advertisements, entertainment, and news, which need to be understood by the general public as quickly as possible, under these circumstances media stereotypes are inevitable. Stereotypes are often problematic as they can neglect the differences in people, creating simplistic generalizations, transform assumptions into reality for viewers. They are known to perpetuate social inequalities and prejudices. Female stereotypes created by media, including on-screen portrayal of women, have an effect on cultural ideas of beauty and the role of women in society. They also impact the social development of women in a negative way (Roy, 2012).

In recent times, the coverage of women and women's issues has increased and improved vastly, but there is also an intentional as well as unintentional reinforcement of social stereotypes of women in society.

Media being the mirror of society and media reports the reflection of happenings in the society, therefore Media has immense power to influence the masses. Besides the communication and IT, the revolution has further increased its importance. But unfortunately there is shrinking space on the newspapers which predominantly report on political issues and hence give insignificant space to women and women related issues at national, local or rural levels. Portraying women as equals in the society is a subject that has been given low priority by the Indian media (Joshi, et. al., 2006) It is widely believed by women activists that the media needs to be sensitized to gender issues and now must focus on women issues in a decisive way as their role is detrimental for the women empowerment in India.

Review of Literature

Many research studies had been carried on, on the amount coverage given to women in media and the portrayal of women in media, be it print media, electronic media or advertisements.

Nandini Prasad (1992) in her book 'A pressing matter: women in Press', analyzed news coverage on women in four leading Indian dailies, *The Hindu*, *The Hindustan Times*, *Indian Express* and *The Times of India*. She found that common women found no place in the dailies - only the privileged and the political did. Whenever women's issues do find coverage, the bias against them exists.

According to a study 'Images of women in print media- a research inquiry', (Joshi, et. al., 2006), "Coverage of women issues in print media is not adequate and without its set of cultural biases. These cultural biases in media, in general, will take time to completely vanish". Meanwhile certain suggestions can be made which can go a long way in eliminating gender biases and help bring in a certain buoyancy where women will have their due place without having to offer justification to occupy.

Ahmar (UKS, 2011) in 'More Women In Media-The Way Forward', states, "The portrayal of women in media is biased and prejudiced. When women do get portrayed on, they are portrayed as sex objects, beauty objects, docile homemakers and as victims. Some categories of women like working-class and minorities get even less attention".

Newspapers give very little space to women issues, even less than one percent. Mostly newspapers give a good space to the glamorous images of women in news stories, features, and advertisements. The coverage of women's issues in terms of sexual harassment is higher than other types of issues like health, education, status/equality, violence/crime, and police atrocities, this view is echoed by (Nautiyal and Dabral, 2012).

Sharma (Media Watch, 2012) says the overall effect of the portrayal of women in media is to reinforce rather than reduce prejudices and stereotypes. The mass media in India has not made adequate efforts to discuss serious issues concerning women and prepare women to play their rightful and equal role in society.

Significance of the Study

This study will provide media results that can help them in their media treatment with respect to coverage and portrayal of women in media. This will help them to give a larger picture to a society that is already so conscious and sensitive to gender biases, that women should be given adequate coverage and balanced portrayal.

It also holds significance for many governments as well as non- government organizations, who are working for betterment of women.

Why Print Media

Print media is one of the oldest and basic forms of mass communication. As a commercial and widespread technology, it found application in the 16th century in Europe by Johannes Guttenberg of Germany. The emergence of newer and better printing technologies from time to time helped the growth and diversification of this media and gave it color and gloss, alluring layout and a variety of typographical designs (IGNOU study material). Today print media comprises newspapers, magazines, trade journals,

textbooks, posters, leaflets, direct mail literature, and printed material graphics of various types shown on the wide and small screens.

One of the chief characteristics of print media is that they offer extensive news coverage and in-depth treatment of themes. They provide a larger variety of coverage, through different kinds of writings than any other media. There are plenty of backgrounders, field-based interviews, spot inquiries and feedback interviews, and incisive comments. Besides special articles, syndicated reports, and features, there are special sections for sports and business. There are also review columns for books, films, media, and art. For those seeking light reading material, there is a great variety of humor, funny comics, and satire

Print media enjoy greater credibility and social respectability than other media (Nautiyal & Dabral, 2012). The press is widely acknowledged as a watch-dog in a democratic country. The diversification and segmentation of reading material, together with the emergence of new styles of reporting, writing, and editing have helped print media to flourish. Today the press is not merely informing, illuminating, investigating and exposing but even warning and biting. Particularly when acting in the public's or reader's interest, all these roles are justifiable (Joshi, et. al., 2006).

In developing countries, the newspapers are expected to play a special role as social monitors, constructive critics, stimulators of debates on public issues and social vitalizers. Besides being in private sector, they enjoy comparatively greater freedom.

Another added advantage of print media is the ease and convenience of using them. People can read newspapers and magazines wherever and whenever it is convenient to them- at home, in transit, or in office.

When TV came on the scene, Marshal McLuhan prophesied the doom of the print media, yet it survived. Even after the advent of new media technologies, print media hadn't lost its significance (Nautiyal & Dabral, 2012). Whatever may be the future possibility, no visual medium can completely replace or uproot print media. Print media have built their niche in society and their role of providing exhaustive and interpretative information cannot be completely taken away by other media.

In the past few years, there has been an improved and increased reportage of issues related to women in print media. News related to women though marginal, have started to occasionally occupy important slots like editorials, features, news, etc (Nautiyal, 2012).

Print media, regarded as one of the most significant media highlights many issues relating to our society and has also been as torch bearer of issues relating to women.

Almost everyday newspapers are carrying news stories as well as articles related to women. Journalists are now keen to get news related to women, in order to surface them and in many cases try to give a vent to the feelings of women.

As processors of information, it is important to gain an understanding of women related issues, which is necessary for a journalist or reporter in order to get assisted for getting stories on women related issues

Presently more and more women are progressing in the diverse fields of life, in this scenario adequate and progressive coverage of women is necessary. Therefore it becomes crucial to study the coverage and portrayal of women in media.

Objectives of the Study

The research was conducted to examine the following issues:

1. The extent of coverage accorded to women and women related issues
2. Nature of portrayal of such coverage

Sample of the Study

Purposive sampling technique was employed to select the sample.

For that four newspapers-two national, The Times Of India and The HINDU, And two local, Greater Kashmir and Rising Kashmir, of six months duration, i.e, from July 2018 to December 2018, were taken for analysis(immediately preceding the year when the research was started). These newspapers have high circulation at national and local levels respectively.

To analyze the coverage of Women, and the nature of the portrayal of women in such coverage in the selected sample, the women-related issues were divided under following categories:

- Domestic violence/Suicide.
- Sexual Harassment.
- Crime/Atrocities against women
- Health.
- Female Foeticide.
- Discrimination.
- Education.
- Empowerment/development.
- Business.
- Sports.

25 newspapers per month per publication, i.e, 150 issues of each publication (Sundays were excluded) were taken for analysis. All kinds of printed material related to these issues i.e, news stories, features/special articles, editorials, and letters to editor, were taken for analysis separately. These samples were then analyzed.

Choice of Newspapers

For local news:

- **Greater Kashmir:**

Greater Kashmir is the leading daily English language newspaper from Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. It is the most widely read English daily in Jammu and Kashmir. It is the first English language newspaper published from Srinagar.

- **Rising Kashmir:**

Rising Kashmir is one of the prominent and second-leading daily English language newspapers from Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. It started its publication in 2008, and swiftly marked its presence and became one of the leading newspapers.

For National news:

- **The Hindu:**

The Hindu is one of the largest circulated newspapers in India. It is an English-language daily newspaper founded and published from Chennai since 1878. The newspaper enjoys a cult following among students competing in various competitive exams, primarily owing to its comprehensive coverage.

- **The Times of India:**

The Times of India (TOI) is one the leading Indian English-language daily newspaper, published since 1838.

Methodology

The objective of the research was to analyze the newspapers qualitatively, in order to study the coverage of women related news, and the nature of portrayal of such coverage, and for doing so methodology used was Content Analysis.

Content Analysis is the commonly used research method in social sciences and particularly in communication sciences. It involves analysis of the content of documents and other text, with the aim of describing and classifying. It is regarded as an objective, systematic and objective technique. The researcher constructs a set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive categories to analyze documents and then records the frequency with which each of these categories appears in the document under analysis.

Content Analysis is done to study diverse problems relating to:

- i. Characteristics of communication sources.
- ii. Messages.
- iii. Causes and antecedents of these problems.
- iv. Effects of such messages.

Thus Content Analysis has wide applicability in communication research.

Procedure:

Content Analysis follows a logical and relatively straight method, which includes;

1. **Selection of sample of material of analysis:** this requires deciding what material is relevant to the research topic and then obtain a sample from the available material.
2. **Defining the categories that are to be analyzed, e.g News:** National, International, Local. Editorial, subject-wise: Political, Economic or Social.
3. **Selecting the unit of analysis:** the unit may be each word, each sentence, each theme or themes like headlines. It can also be based on the content of pictures or visual images.
4. **Analysis:** the analysis can be made in terms of,
 - Presence or absence of a content category.
 - The frequency with which each category appears.
 - Amount of space allotted to the category.
 - Strength and intensity with which the category is represented.

Findings and Analysis

1. In 150 newspaper editions of Rising Kashmir, there were a total of 7176 news stories published, approximately at an average of 48 news stories per day. Out of these 7176 stories, only 66 stories were relating to women, at an average of 0.45(less than half) stories per day. It also published 9 editorials, but there were no special features or letters to editor.
2. Out of these 66 women-related stories, maximum i.e, 18 were relating to crime and atrocities against women,15 were relating to domestic violence and suicide, 9 each to sexual harassment and empowerment/development and 3 each to discrimination and business.
3. In 150 newspaper editions of Greater Kashmir, there were approximately a total of 8418 news stories published, at an average of 56 stories per day. Out of these 8418 stories, 63 stories were women-related, that's an average of 0.42 stories per day. It also published 6 women-related editorials. There was no special feature or letter to the editor.
4. Out of these 63 women-related stories, 21 were relating to crime and atrocities against women,15 were relating to domestic violence and suicide, 9 were relating to sexual harassment, 6 were relating to health, and 3 each to female foeticide, education, and empowerment/development.
5. For local newspapers, i.e, both Greater Kashmir and Rising Kashmir, in 300 newspapers, a total of 15585 news stories were published, making it an average of 52 news stories per day. Out of these, 129 were women-related, that's an average of 0.43 women-related stories per day. Besides, there were a total of 15 women-related editorials, with no special feature/article or letter to editor.
6. Out of these, most were relating to crime/atrocities against women i.e,39, followed by news related to domestic violence and suicide with 30 stories, 12 each were related to education and empowerment/development, 6 stories were related to health, and 3 each to female foeticide, discrimination, business and sports.
7. In the 150 newspapers of Times of India, approximately a total of 15459 news stories were published, at an average of 103 stories per day. Out of these 15459 news stories, 339 stories were women-related, that's an average of 2.06 news stories per day. Besides, 6 editorials and 1 feature article were also published. No letter to editor was published.
8. Out of these 339 women related stories, maximum i.e,159 were related to sexual harassment, followed by crime and atrocities against women with 102 stories, 24 were relating to domestic violence and suicide, 27 were relating to empowerment/development, 18 were relating to business, 3 news story each were relating to health, discrimination, and education.
9. In 150 newspapers of The Hindu, a total no of 13119 news stories were published approximately, at an average of 87 news stories per day. Out of these, 243 news stories were related to women, which is an average of 1.62 women-related stories per day. It also published 4 special articles/features on women, besides 9 editorials and 1 letter to editor.
10. Of these 243 women-related news stories, most i.e,114 were relating to sexual harassment, 63 were related to crime and atrocities against women, 18 to domestic violence/suicide, 21 to empowerment/development, 12 stories were relating to discrimination, 6 to health, and 3 news story each were relating to female foeticide, education, and business.
11. For national newspapers, i.e, both The Times Of India and The Hindu, in 300 newspapers a total of 28524 news stories were published, at an average of 95 news stories per day. Of these 582 were women-related news stories, making it an average of 1.94 stories per day. Besides, there were also 15 women-related editorials, 5 special articles/features and 3 letters to editor.
12. Of these 582 women-related news stories most i.e, 273 were relating to sexual harassment, followed by crime/atrocities against women with 165 stories, 48 stories were relating to empowerment/development, 42 were related to domestic violence/suicide, 21 were relating to business, 15 to discrimination, 9 to health, 6 to education and 3 were related to female foeticide.

Newspapers	Total News Stories	Women related stories			
		News Stories	Editorials	Special Articles	Letter to Editor
Rising Kashmir	7176	66	9	0	0
Greater Kashmir	8418	63	6	0	0

Total for Local Newspapers	15585	129	15	0	0
Times Of India	15459	339	6	1	0
The Hindu	13119	243	9	4	3
Total for National Newspapers	28524	582	15	5	3

Table 1: Showing a total number of news stories published and the total number of women related stories published, as mentioned in the data point 1, 3,5,7,9 and 11.

Nature of coverage	Local Newspapers		National Newspapers	
	Total	%age	Total	%age
Domestic violence/ Suicide	30	23.0%	42	7.21%
Sexual Harassment	18	13.95%	273	46.90%
Crime/Atrocities Against women	39	30.2%	165	28.35%
Health	6	4.65%	9	1.54%
Female Foeticide	3	2.32%	3	0.51%
Discrimination	3	2.32%	15	2.57%
Education	12	9.30%	6	1.03%
Empowerment/Development	12	9.3%	48	8.24%
Business	3	2.3%	21	3.60%
Sports	3	2.3%	0	0%

Table 2: Showing the breakup and percentage of the women related news stories published in the local and national newspapers in the period under study.

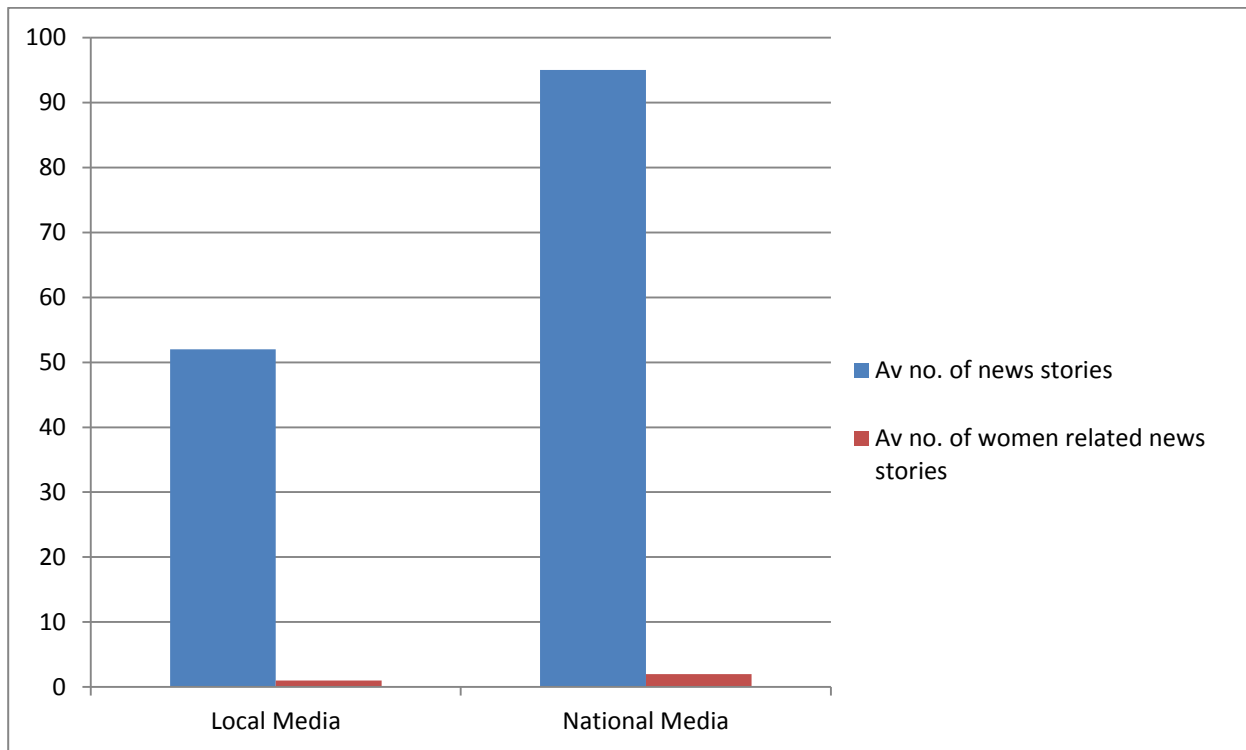


Fig 1: Comparison between the average no. of stories in the newspapers and the Women related stories as mentioned in data points 5 and 11.

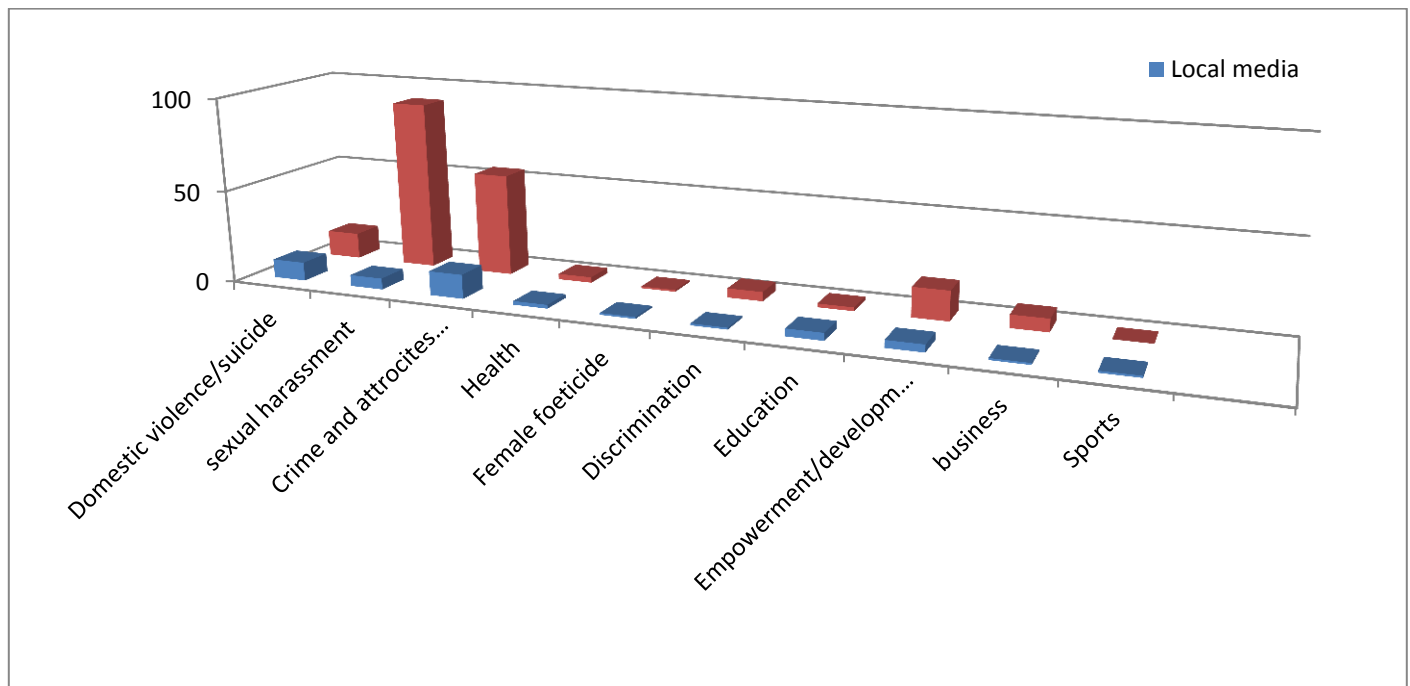


Fig 2: Showing the breakup of women related stories in the national and local newspapers, as mentioned in the data point 6 and 12.

Conclusions

This analysis was conducted to know the amount of coverage given to Women and Women related issues by leading local and national newspapers and the nature of portrayal of such coverage.

The study revealed that women-related issues get negligible coverage in both local and national level newspapers; it is around 0.8% in local newspapers and around 2% in national newspapers. This insignificant coverage is dominated mostly by news stories relating to Domestic Violence, Sexual Harassment, Suicide and Crime against Women. Together they constitute about 70% of total news coverage about Women. Most of the coverage is in the form of hard news stories, whereas there are very few special articles, features, and editorials published about women. Women also got least importance in the reader's mind, as there were just three letters to editor in six months.

In most of the coverage, women had been under-represented, this under-representation of women has profound consequences on the image of women as competent leaders in the society or as role-models. In most news stories women were portrayed either as victims or passive recipients of violence, which promotes a stereotypical image of women. The coverage of violence against women was found to be sensational and exploitative, whereas, media being the eye, ear, and limbs of the society can play an active role in the fight for violence against women. Media's role in the coverage of violence against women is very crucial as it is a tool that can be used to help activists and government raise awareness and implement programs on this issue.

Important issues like Women Empowerment and development, their contribution to society, and their achievement in the field of education, sports and business, also hadn't been adequately covered. These issues get the least coverage. Also news stories, as well as informative feature articles promoting awareness about diseases and good health among women, are negligible. Coverage regarding female foeticide and discrimination against women too is insignificant.

To summarize, the conclusion

1. The newspapers analyzed in this study give very little space to women related news and issues, which was 0.83% of total coverage in local newspapers and 2.04% of total coverage in national newspapers.
2. Of this coverage, women issues got prominence in hard news stories and less preference in special articles/features.
3. Women-related issues got the least attention from readers also, letters to editor, as in the 600 newspaper issues analyzed, there were just three letters to editor about women related issues.
4. In local newspapers, the highest coverage was given to crime and atrocities against women at 30.23%, followed by domestic violence and suicide at 23.25%.
5. In national newspapers, the highest coverage was given to news related to sexual harassment with 46.90% of coverage, followed by crime and atrocities against women at 28.35%.
6. News stories relating to domestic violence/suicide, sexual harassment and crime and atrocities against women dominate the coverage given to women issues in both local and national newspapers. In local newspapers its 67.43% and in national newspapers it's 82.46%.
7. Empowerment and development related issues concerning women got less coverage in both local newspapers at 9.30% and national newspapers at 8.24%.
8. No other newspaper had any significant women-related special articles and features. All the four newspapers combined had 5 special articles/features in the six-month coverage under study.

Recommendation:

Women are under-represented and the news about them, though small, is biased and unfair. This journalistic stance, however, may not be deliberate, but rather the result of certain concepts and biases being inherent in society. Therefore, there is a need to train journalists in order to increase their awareness levels and to increase their capacity to differentiate between balanced, gender-just reporting as opposed to biased and gender insensitive reporting.

Women's issues should be given proper space and placement. The aim should be to increase coverage of women-related news in a manner that breaks negative stereotypes and helps to bring about positive behavioral changes.

Scope

If this study is conducting on a large scale with a sample that is representative of the whole country, involving other media like broadcast media, social media or advertisements, it will be highly beneficial to know how women are portrayed across media and how that portrayal can be improved, according to the changing character of women's development and empowerment.

Limitations:

This is a limited study that analyzed the six months coverage, of four newspapers only, hence results cannot be generalized, especially in a diverse country like India. A larger sample of more time duration would reveal better results.



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