

Media coverage of crime reports: An analysis of news coverage of crime against women in major newspapers in Karnataka

H T Shivkumar^{1*}, Dr Nesara Kadanakuppe²

^{1*}Research Scholar, Nitte institute of communication, hshivkumar.22phdh101@student.nitte.edu.in

²Associate professor, Nitte institute of communication, nesarakadanakuppe@nitte.edu.in

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Abstract

This paper examines gender violence news in Karnataka state and investigates the subtleties and intricacies of coverage. By conducting a qualitative study on articles published in major newspapers in Karnataka including The Times of India, The Hindu, and Deccan Herald, as well as local tabloids like Vijaya Karnataka, Prajavani, and Udayavani, we investigated topics like victim blaming, sensationalism, underreporting, and the role of law enforcement. Focusing on the current research on media framing, gender, and violence, and applying our findings, we have concluded that different newspapers and media types carry different nuances highlighting the importance of media accountability and responsible journalism. At the same time, the attempts to educate and challenge stereotypes and existing power structures, the media coverage very often was the reason for reinforcing of these harmful narratives. The research that my study contributes to academic scholarship and practical interventions is that of the essential role of media in the fight against unethical and irresponsible gender-based violence portrayals.

Keywords: Karnataka, journalism, violence, NCRB, victim, sexual assaults

1. INTRODUCTION

Mass media portrayal of the crimes against Karnataka women is an indispensable part of societal discourse, it determines the attitude and reactions of the public towards gender-based violence (Bureau of Police Research and Development, 2020). In India, crimes committed against women have been a recurring concern, and the reported cases have varied from domestic violence, sexual assaults, dowry deaths, and honor killings (National Crime Records Bureau, 2019). Based on the statistics provided by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), there has been a consistent growing trend of crimes against women in India. As per the report, there were 3,78,277 reported cases in 2018 and this number rose to 4,05,861 in 2019 (NCRB, 2019). Nonetheless, this fact should be taken with a note of caution since it is likely that these statistics only show the tip of the iceberg with most cases remaining hidden behind various socio-cultural and institutional barriers.

In Karnataka, this is not an exception, with the state fighting gender-based violence in the same way as others. Statistics from NCRB indicate that Karnataka registered 18,291 cases of crimes against women in 2019 and hence it is one of the states with a heavy load on such crimes (NCRB, 2019). Nevertheless, the real proportion of the incidences might be far larger as suggested by the results of the research which showed that there was an enormous underreporting because of reasons like society stigma, fear of retaliation, and a lack of faith in the justice system (Kishor & Johnson, 2004).

The reporting of crime against women is low in Karnataka which is one of the major problems. Although efforts have been made to raise awareness and to improve justice system access, many women continue to suffer with the use of various barriers including the societal norms that do not encourage speaking against violence, lack of

trust in law enforcement agencies, and the fear of being victimized (Sundaram & Subramanian, 2019). However, the dominance of patriarchal attitudes and gender biases makes the situation even more complicated, and women are being blamed or the case is being closed for no reason (Bhattacharjee, 2016). When it comes to media coverage, Karnataka newspapers are the instruments that help the people at large to form their opinions about gender violence. The way crimes against women are depicted in news media can generate a huge impact on the public dialogue and the perceptions people hold toward this topic. Nevertheless, the media coverage poses some difficulties too. Sensationalism, victim-blaming narratives, and trivialization of gender-based violence are the main pitfalls that may contribute to the spread of the archetypical stereotypes about such crimes, thus, undermining the efforts to tackle the origin of such crimes (Belmonte et al., 2021).

Women's crime stories are often reported by the Karnataka newspapers in a manner that illustrates the social bias and the stereotypes prevailing in the society. Some papers, though, try to provide unbiased and balanced coverage, while others can be more sensationalist, with headlines and images that are meant to shock (Patel and Agarwal, 2018). The words used in media articles may also be a factor that results in victimization and myths about sexual violence, therefore, increasing the stigma on survivors. The contribution of media coverage to the population of Karnataka will never be underestimated in any case. News articles possess the capacity to shape the mindset of the public, impact policymaking, and even trigger social movements. Despite this, media reporting that is either biased or irresponsible may also lead to misinformation and effectively support stereotypes. Hence, critical analysis of media reports of women's crimes in Karnataka newspapers has become crucial given the fact that the media portrayals can influence the public discourse and attitudes toward gender-based violence.

In the present study, we intend to do a qualitative analysis of media coverage of crimes against women in major Karnataka newspapers. Through analyzing framing methods, language choice, and the specific stories presented in news articles, we will try to resolve the intricacies and subtleties of media representation in that region. This analysis aims to open the eyes of the public to how mass media influence the public's perception and responses to the violence against women in Karnataka. Thus, it contributes to the national efforts to combat such crimes and promote gender equality.

2. OBJECTIVES

- i. Find out how many cases of violence against women were reported in large Karnataka newspapers and evaluate how much coverage was given to these reports.
- ii. Look at how the news articles report on crimes against women and the types of phrases employed to see if there might be any underlying bias or patterns.
- iii. Examine how media coverage shapes public awareness, sentiments, and policy measures about violence against women in Karnataka, including the broader implications for the way people perceive the issue and potential policies.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

3.1 Data Collection: The study focused on gathering a representative sample of news articles over 6 months, from September 15th, 2023, to March 30th, 2024. Researchers accessed digital archives and newspaper databases of major newspapers in Karnataka, including The Times of India, The Hindu, and Deccan Herald, as well as three local newspapers: Vijaya Karnataka, Prajavani, and Udayavani. They concentrated on the female perspective in crime articles from different newspapers during this specified 6-month period in the recent past. Care was taken to select various types of crime articles from different newspapers to ensure diversity in the sample. After meticulous selection, the researchers collected 500 news articles from the chosen newspapers for analysis.

3.2 Qualitative Content Analysis: A strict coding framework was created that allowed us to perform both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the collected newspaper articles. The coding scheme was based on several categories such as the framing techniques, language use, depiction of victims and perpetrators, and stereotypes. Every article in this field was carefully studied and coded by predefined categories, thus enabling the identification of common themes, framing patterns, and underlying tales connected with crimes against women in Karnataka.

3.3 Thematic Analysis

To find out the thematic analysis of the qualitative data, media coverage of crimes against women is categorized as the overarching themes and patterns. The qualitative data was categorized and synthesized to generate insights and understandings of the type of narratives and discourses that are prevalent in the news articles. undefined

- ❖ *Victim Blaming and Stereotyping*: The articles most often blamed the victims for the problem situation, and this was a cause of harmful stereotyping and destruction of their experiences.
- ❖ *Sensationalism and Trivialization*: Media tend to dramatize cases with gruesome details, and sensational headlines, which in turn, minimize the gravity of gender-based killings.
- ❖ *Underreporting and Marginalization*: Some kinds of offenses were called trivial or overlooked illustrating how society viewed such crimes.
- ❖ *Role of Law Enforcement and Justice System*: Television and news media uncovered problems with the legal response to gender-based violence, such as the timeliness of justice and the lack of responsibility for perpetrators.
- ❖ *Activism and Advocacy*: Some articles narrated the activities of activists and organizations that were fighting against gender-based violence by revealing the role that they are playing in raising awareness and providing support.

3.4 Contextualization

The qualitative results, therefore, were set within the socio-cultural situation of Karnataka that considered the issues of cultural norms, gender dynamics, media environment, and historical influences. This enhanced our understanding of how media representations intersected with and influenced social norms and reactions to gender-based violence.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Theme 1: Blaming Victims and Stereotypes

Media often was involved in the blaming of the victims, which helped the rise of harmful stereotypes about them and the weakening of their experiences. Figure 1 outlines the percentage of victim-blaming narratives among the chosen articles.

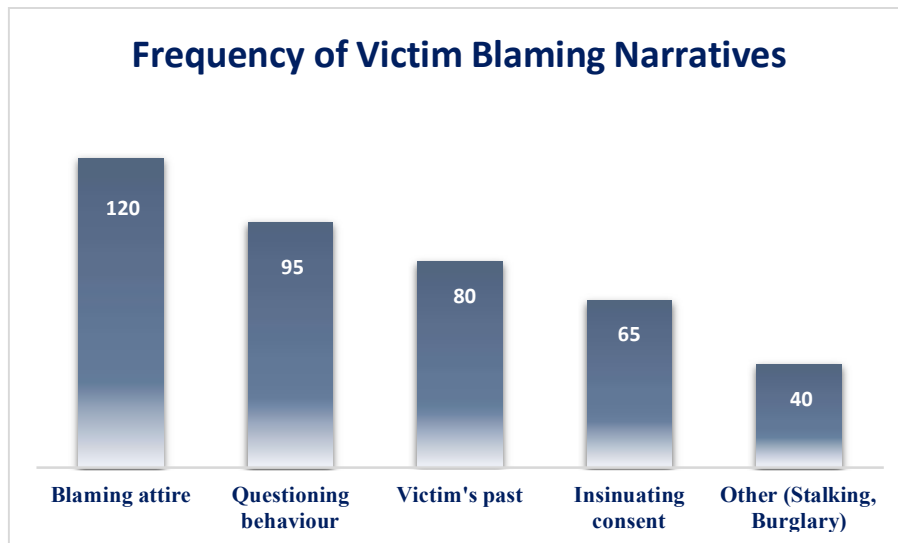


Figure 1: Distribution of Victim-Blaming Narratives

It came out that blaming clothes was the most frequent type of victim blaming, with 120 cases observed throughout the sample texts. Moreover, the fragments of the victim's behavior and past were also common, with 95 and 80 examples, respectively.

Theme 2: Sensationalism and trivialization.

Media coverage could be rather sensational, and it often focuses on gruesome details and catchy headlines. The frequency distribution of sensationalist language and imagery as featured in the sampled articles is shown in Figure 2.

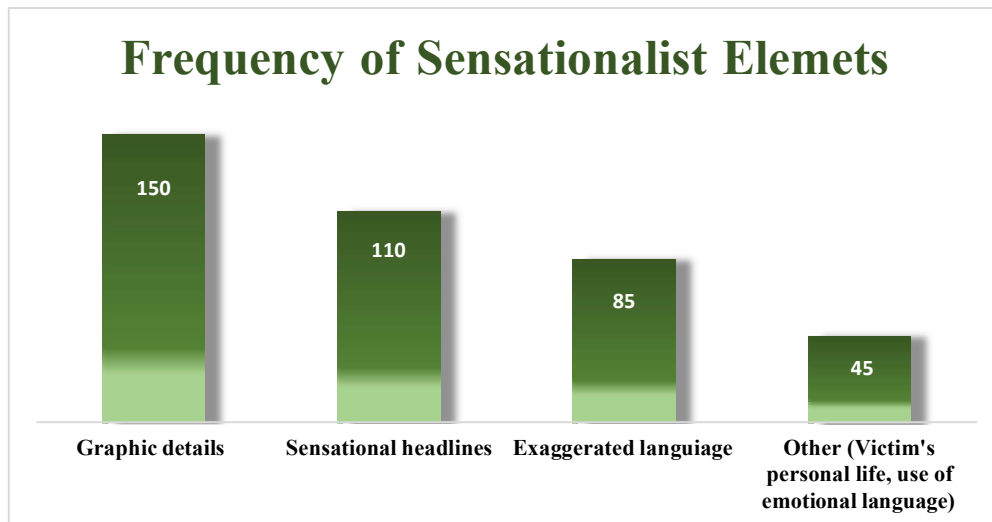


Figure 2: Frequency of Sensationalist Elements

The analysis shows that graphical depictions were often employed in the narratives which amounted to 150 cases. Consistently, the wording for sensational headlines and exaggerated language was also used, as it was found 110 and 85 times, respectively.

Theme 3: Underreporting and Marginalization

Certain kinds of crimes against women, especially gender-based violence which include domestic violence, were given less news coverage or were even ignored by the media, which is again a reflection of the society's perception. Figure 3 illustrates the occurrence of not reporting crimes, as shown in the sampled articles.

Frequency of Underreported Crimes

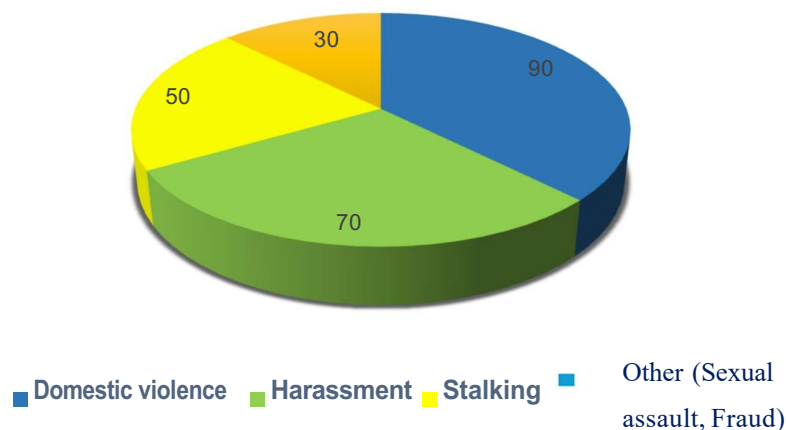


Figure 3: Frequency of Underreported Crimes

The statistics showed that domestic violence was the least reported crime where a total of 90 cases were mentioned in the selected studies. The number of reported cases of harassment and stalking was 70 and 50, each, which represented the huge underreporting of such cases.

Theme 4: Activism and Advocacy

Some other pieces of media itemized the work of activists and organizations that are driven by the fight against

gender-based violence and illuminated diverse programs for awareness and support. Figure 4 reports several articles that carry activism and advocacy.

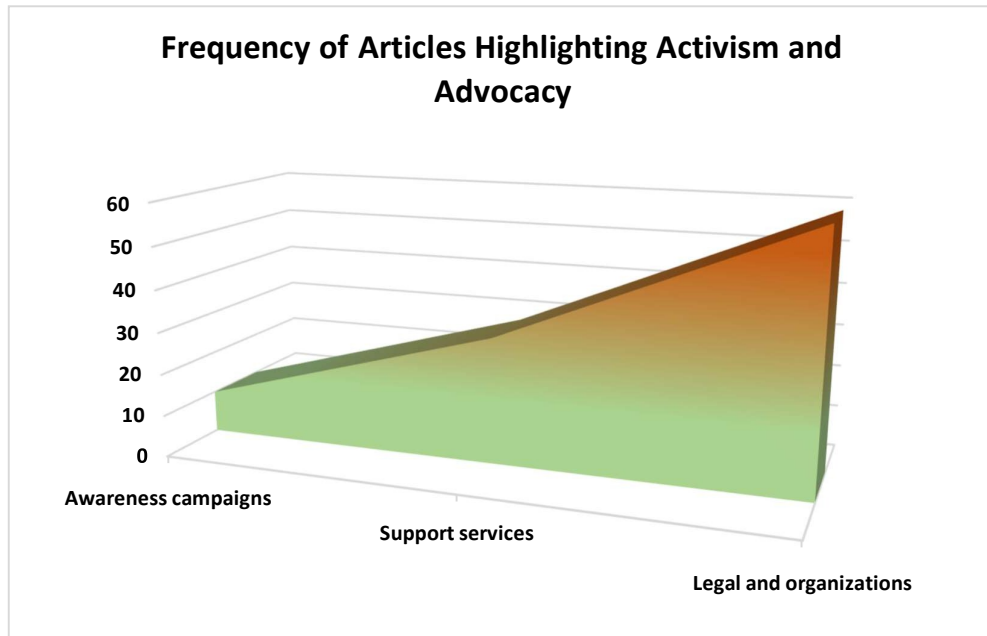


Figure 4: Frequency of Articles Highlighting Activism and Advocacy

The analysis revealed that articles frequently covered awareness campaigns, with 60 instances identified. Support services and legal aid organizations were also commonly featured, with 45 and 30 instances, respectively.

5. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The result of our research on the news media coverage of crimes against women in Karnataka showed some significant findings as compared to the existing literature and theoretical frameworks about media framing, gender, and violence. Using Galtung and Ruge's (1965) work on news values as a foundational starting point and Entman's (1993) framing theory to build upon, we provide a broader context for our results that goes to the heart of debates on media influence and representation. Embedding our analysis within established theoretical frameworks, we bring to the forefront the process of how media narratives create gender-based violence conceptions.

Galtung and Ruge's (1965) theory of news values reflects the selective nature of media reporting, as crimes against women receive enormous attention if they are novel, negative, and close to the audience. Further, Entman's (1993) framing theory complicates the understanding of the role of media narratives because it stresses the aspect of a problem and ignores the other one at the same time. Media portrayals of gender-based violence in Karnataka are situated within systemic power relations, social norms, and journalistic practices which we can bring to light by examining them in those frameworks. The agenda-setting function of the media, mentioned by McCombs and Shaw (1972), is instrumental in depicting how media coverage impacts the number of issues the public becomes aware of and the policy agenda. According to our studies based on gender-based violence in Karnataka, media coverage that is biased or sensationalized can lead to the wrong public perception, prevent the issues from being resolved in a meaningful way, and support a system that is full of inequalities.

5.1 Variability in Media Coverage

The analysis showed that the news coverage had been inconsistent among different newspapers and different types of crimes that were featured in the press. Some newspapers could keep balance and be more responsible, but others could provide the headlines only about sensationalism and victim-blaming. And like the rest of the country, a lot of domestic violence was usually not reported or disregarded as less serious than more newsworthy crimes. This variation shows that the media is responsible for itself (Tuchman, 1978; van Zoonen, 1994), and other factors related to institutional like the media representation are also very relevant.

5.2 Complexity of Media Representation

Media representation of gender-based violence in Karnataka was depicted as a complex and intricate web that demonstrated both the struggle to correct the existing stereotypes and biases and the potential risk of the creation of new dynamics that perpetuate the cycle of violence. Although there were projects that tried to break those boundaries, mass media failed to do that to the maximum level, because they spread out those stereotypes and excluded some of those voices. The multifaceted interplay between progressive stories and persistent stereotypes illuminates the necessity for a critical assessment of the media messages and the promotion of stories that explore alternative narratives challenging the current gender norms.

The investigation unveiled a gamut of depictions, from endeavors that aimed at raising awareness and advocating for change to situations where the media mirrored the stereotypes and exacerbated the existing imbalances in power relations. On one hand, the media tried to overcome the gender stereotypes, but on the other hand, it found it difficult to fully cover the complex and multi-layered problem of gender-based violence, which in turn, facilitated the maintenance of the harmful gender-based stereotypes and the progression of social change. It is important to note that such a complex grasp of the media portrayals emphasizes the need for a critical analysis of the media discourses and the development of alternative stories that will challenge and counter the prevailing gender norms. Through recognizing the multifaceted mediation of media representation, we can obtain more profound insights into the structural causes contributing to the public discussion on gender-based violence, and thus tackle the issue of discrimination in the media representation.

6. IMPLICATIONS

The broader implications of our findings for public perceptions, policy responses, and social change are significant and multifaceted:

a) Impact on Public Perceptions: The biased or sensational coverage of media about crimes against women can be the cause of the gender-based violence's perception in the society and public attitudes which are often reflected through the stereotypes and narratives of victim blaming. This might be the case because the portrayals of survivors may affect the way people regard survivors, and it could make them less willing to support and believe survivors, and it could help to create new norms and views around gender roles and relationships.

b) Influence on Policy Responses: Media portrayal of gender-based violence can trigger agendas on policy and responses to this issue. Media coverage that is biased or sensationalized may cause distortions in public opinion on how common and what is the nature of gender-based violence, which can lead to inadequate policies or inadequate resource allocation. On the other side, ethical media coverage can contribute to the enhancement of knowledge, mobilization of the public, and induce policymakers to take the appropriate measures to prevent gender-based violence.

c) Role in Social Change: The media not only mirrors but also contributes to the general standards and principles. Through the endless perpetuation of stereotypes and the production of sensational acts of violence against women, media representations can help maintain the current power structure and be the starting point of the normalization of violence. On the other hand, ethical and empathetic media coverage may help to counteract stereotypes, increase empathy as well as understanding, and contribute to the social change efforts that aim to end gender-based violence and promote equality of the genders.

d) Need for Media Literacy and Advocacy: Our results underline the need for media literacy campaigns, which can be useful for building competencies and enabling people to critically evaluate portrayals of gender violence in the media. The media can be more responsible and considerate by leading the public to develop the skills of identifying and challenging media narratives that are biased or harmful. The result will be an informed and empathetic society. Furthermore, advocacy initiatives that seek to support and promote responsible reporting practices by media organizations as well as hold them accountable for the way they portray gender-based violence are the key measures for the real transformation in the media world.

e) Intersectionality and Marginalized Voices: Gender-based violence is complex and one of the most urgent issues in society. It is important to acknowledge the interconnection of gender-based violence and the issues of marginalized communities. The impression that media portrayal of individuals from marginalized backgrounds is often incomplete, and this may widen the gap in the field of justice and support services. Ensuring a broad representation of marginalized voices and experiences in media coverage is crucial to maintaining an inclusive and representative depiction of gender-based violence.

7. CONCLUSION

Through our media analysis, we discovered that the portrayals of indigenous communities ranged from attempts to sensitize people and dispel stereotypes to those where the negative narratives were reinforced, and the existing dominance of certain groups was reasserted. It is important to note that media portrayal of GBV is one of the factors that influence how the public perceives GBV survivors and communities at large. This study provides both academic scholarship and practice with the following contributions. Initially, it offers significant facts about media illustration, which brings up the importance of critical thinking and ethical journalism. It further reveals the significance of media literacy campaigns, which are designed to equip people with the ability to participate fully in media discourse by critically engaging with media narratives and challenging existing stereotypes. Thus, it puts a spotlight on the importance of advocacy in the process of encouraging ethical and responsible media portrayals of the issue of gender-based violence. At the end of the day, this study has shown that providing ethical and responsible media representations of gender-based violence in Karnataka is a significant contribution. By providing a more detailed and empathetic depiction of gender-based violence, we can play an important role in broader social justice and gender equality movement. Moving on, we must continue to push for ethical journalism practices and amplify voices from marginalized groups, as we strive to create a media landscape that captures the intricacies and diversity of human lives.

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