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development

Gender and the media in the Western Balkans

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Introduction

- The Wars of Succession (1991 - 1999) in the former Yugoslavia incited resurgent nationalisms and a re-traditionalisation of society.
 - The fragmented media sector reflects this, with programming that legitimises ethno-nationalistic policies and emphasises patriarchal norms (Volčič & Erjavec, 2013).
 - How the mass media represent women influences public opinions about gender roles in everyday life.
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Access to media – media consumption

- Most households in the Western Balkans have a television.
 - Public service broadcasters (PSBs) are viewed as the main source of information (see Stojarová, 2020).
 - There is no significant gender difference in television viewership (see Vesnić-Alujević & Bajić, 2013).
 - The internet is the second most important source of information (Stojarová, 2020).
 - There is no significant gender difference in internet usage (see Balas et al., 2011).
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Access to media – airtime and headlines

- Women are vastly underrepresented on the air (as experts and news sources) and in news headlines.
- Female politicians are given less access to the media (see Turčilo & Masnica, 2016).
- There is a notable underrepresentation of LGBTQ populations and LGBTQ issues in all forms of media (Srbinovska, 2015).

Albanian talk shows: women and girls speak only 26% of the time, while men monopolise the conversation at 74% (Kosho, 2019, p.17).

Bosnian political coverage: print media published articles representing only 5.37% of the women who were candidates (see Turčilo & Masnica, 2016, p.130).

Media portrayals – gender norms & stereotypes (1)

Gender portrayals in the media influence the audience's perceptions of appropriate roles for women and men.

- **Representation by sector:** media underrepresent women in political and economic sectors, over-representing them in entertainment and lifestyle.
- **Trivialisation of women's contributions:** portrayals of professional women often involve insignificant aspects (e.g. their clothes, rather than their work).
- **Emphasis on women's private lives:** portrayals of women solely as mothers, wives or girlfriends is connected to the re-contextualisation of women in the private sphere.

Media portrayals – gender norms & stereotypes (2)

- **Sexualisation and commercialisation:** the commercial media landscape promotes an ethno-national femininity, whereby the sexualised female body has become a symbol of empowerment.
- **Masculinities:** rigid perceptions of masculinity are often prominent in reporting on LGBTQ communities.

Women's active agency is seen in terms of the ability to consume rather than political citizenship (Volčič & Erjavec, 2013, 2015).

Gender equality is seen as the freedom to capitalize on one's own body and self-branding (Volčič & Erjavec, 2013, 2015).

Gender equality issues: GBV

The media reproduces patterns of marginalisation of women, through systematic portrayal of women as victims (Radak, 2018; Dekić, 2017).

- Mainstream media reinforces blaming of individual perpetrators and victims, leaving out structural analysis and social explanations for gender-based violence (GBV) (Radak, 2018).
- Coverage tends to be sensationalistic, focusing on the most brutal cases (Dekić, 2017; Turčilo & Masnica, 2016).
- Journalists frequently lack specialised training in reporting on GBV (Turčilo & Masnica, 2016).

Gender equality issues: LGBTQ communities

Representatives of gender minority groups are rarely and misleadingly presented in the media (Koteska, 2015).

- Media silence creates the impression that gender minorities do not suffer from discrimination, exclusion, violence and hate speech (Cvetkovich & Dimitrov, 2015).
 - In the absence of awareness of issues facing LGBTQ communities, advocacy in support of gender minority groups can be seen as ungrounded (Cvetkovich & Dimitrov, 2015).
 - When the media reports on LGBTQ topics, they often do so in a sensationalist and homophobic manner (Pisker, 2019).
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Barriers to equality in the media sector (1)

- **Representation at the managerial level:** women comprise a small percentage of managerial positions in broadcasting stations in many Western Balkan countries.
 - Female journalists can thus feel less empowered to report on various forms of pressure and threats to their media freedom (Momčinović, 2020).
 - **‘Feminisation’ of journalism:** greater representation of females as journalists (over 50 percent in many Western Balkan countries), while a positive development, is connected with job insecurity, reduced wages, and a decline in ‘reputation’ of the profession (Momčinović, 2020).
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Barriers to equality in the media sector (2)

- **Digital media:** the growing need for digital literacy in the media sector can produce gender imbalance. Women comprise a much smaller percentage of the IT sector (e.g. 25% in Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Guglielmetti & Jukić-Mujkić, 2019; BHIGF, 2018).
 - **Political influence:** media outlets and journalists that do not toe the political line face various obstacles, particularly a lack of economic support (Kuduzović et al., 2019).
 - A study of PSBs in seven Western Balkan countries finds a widespread failure to produce independent and impartial programming in the public interest, with minimal airtime given to critical programming and alternative voices (Milosavljević & Poler, 2018; Ahmetašević & Hadžiristić 2017).
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Smear campaigns and violence against journalists

Journalists throughout the Western Balkans face physical or verbal assaults and smear campaigns, conducted by politicians or by pro-government media.

- Verbal assaults have become normalised, leading to self-censorship (Stojarová, 2020; Milosavljević & Poler, 2018; Gall, 2015).
- Female journalists experience disdain for journalists alongside misogyny (Momčinović, 2020; Jeremic et al., 2019; Gall, 2015).
- Women's NGOs tend to leave this form of violence out of reports on violence against women (Momčinović, 2020).
- There is a systematic failure to punish perpetrators.

Initiatives that address gender inequalities in the media (1)

The media has the potential to play a transformative role in working toward gender equality.

- **Investigative journalism:** the most widespread forms comprise centres established by journalists themselves.
 - Such non-profit media outlets can address social issues and act as watchdogs (Petković, 2016; Popović et al., 2014).
 - These centres and teams are reliant on donations, which undermines their sustainability (Popović et al., 2014).
 - Croatia has established financial mechanisms to support non-profit and minority media, which has contributed to media integrity (Petković, 2016).
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Initiatives that address gender inequalities in the media (2)

- **Journalist training:** training opportunities, such as at the University of Zagreb, which provides students with the opportunity to work at various students' media, addresses the common shortfall in gaining practical skills in educational programmes (Car & Bukvić, 2016).
 - Targeted support to increase the skills and leadership abilities of women in the media sector, e.g. through mentorship programmes, could help to improve gender equality in the newsroom (see Kosho, 2019).
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Initiatives that address gender inequalities in the media (3)

- **GBV coverage:** specialised education and training is necessary for journalists who cover GBV (Dečić, 2017).
 - Allowing journalists to specialise in GBV enables them over time to become sensitive to the topic and to know how to approach a victim of violence (Dečić, 2017).
 - A handbook for media professionals, published by UN Women, includes tips on what to do and what not to do when writing about GBV and tips for the editorial role.
 - It emphasises that GBV coverage should avoid being sensationalistic.
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Initiatives that address gender inequalities in the media (4)

How to write about violence against women

UN Women has published the following guidance on writing about violence against women:

“If you are writing about violence against women, **refrain from the following:**

- Revealing in any way the identifies of the perpetrator, victim and children involved.
- Using generic images depicting blood, bruises, brutality of the victim and the perpetrator in question.
- Relying only on police reports and statements of relatives or neighbors.
- Sensationalistic sentences, dramatic headlines and subheadlines.
- Writing about violence against women only when violence or murder has been committed.

If you are writing about violence against women, **strive to do the following:**

- Use more than one source - you can include NGOs or some institutions.
 - If you are writing about a specific case, observe it in a broader context. How many cases of domestic violence have been reported thus far? How were these cases resolved, it at all? Whom can women victims of violence approach for help, etc.
 - Focus on the general problem of violence against women, rather than one particular case.
 - Follow the work of institutions regularly. How are police, social work centers, prosecutor's offices doing their job...
 - Write about other forms of violence against women, not only physical violence.
 - Promote the use of SOS phone lines.” (Dekić, 2017, p.16)
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Initiatives that address gender inequalities in the media (5)

Media literacy is relevant not only for those working in the media sector but also for the general population.

- **Media literacy:** NGO project activities have raised literacy among citizens by targeting young populations, such that they develop the ability to critically analyse media content from an early stage (Nedeljković & Jovanović, 2019).
 - Education workers should help to develop students' critical thinking such that they can understand the different types of information they receive outside the classroom and learn to filter out false information (Nedeljković & Jovanović, 2019).
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Initiatives that address gender inequalities in the media (6)

High levels of political control of media in the region has resulted in independent journalists and media outlets relocating to online media.

- **Digital literacy:** journalists need the tools to improve their technical skills in alternative forms of communication.
 - A growing number of women across the region are using the internet to combat sexism, publicly condemning those who engage in sexist remarks and harassment (Pisker, 2018).
 - Social media has also been used to raise awareness more generally of the importance of gender equality in and through the media (see BHJA, 2020).
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Initiatives that address gender inequalities in the media (7)

M4W2020



M4W2020

"Javni servisi trebaju biti lideri u rušenju stereotipa o ženama kroz medijske sadržaje. Nas tri idemo zajedno i hrabro u borbu za ženska prava i veću vidljivost u medijima"

Tijana Kecman
novinarka
BHT

Vedrana Mijić
snimateljica
BHT

Arijana Saračević Helać
novinarka
FTV

Arijana Saraceic Helac, journalists of Radio and Television of Federation BiH, **Tijana Kecman**, journalist and **Vedrana Mijic**, cameraman of Radio and Television of Bosnia and Herzegovina said: "Public service broadcasters need to be leaders in breaking the stereotypes of women through media content. The three of us are moving together and boldly in the fight for women's rights and greater visibility in the media"

Media4Women campaign

Raising awareness of media professionals about the need for greater equal representation of women in media content.

Source: BHJA, 2020. © 2020 BH Journalists Association. Reprinted with permission.

Initiatives that address gender inequalities in the media (8)

Elvir Padalovic is journalists of portal BUKA from Banjaluka. His message is: *“It is very important for me to promote gender equality in my texts, as well as sensitive language. It’s a way of showing that women and men are at least in our texts equal, because in the society in which we live it will be a long time to pass until we reach real equality, if we ever do. Although gender texts do not seem to change many things, every step in the fight for equality is counted.”*



Media4Women campaign

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