
Women Issues in Press Media; The Question of Prominence

Rameez Ali Mahesar

MPhil Scholar, Department of Media & Communication Studies, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur, Pakistan.

Awias H. Gillani

Department of Media Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan.

Ali Khan Ghumro

Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

The studies of newspaper media on women issues have widely been carried out across the globe, but the question of how prominently are those issues covered in press media is left unanswered. To secure the answer to this question, this study was carried out doing quantitative content analysis of daily Jeejal newspaper. The six-month coverage of the said issues (extending from July 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020) was examined to this end. In total, 228 news related to women issues having an average ratio of 38 news a month were found in the newspaper, and the majority (130) of those were about honour killing and rape issues collectively. In terms of the placement of news, the majority (115) of the news were placed in the inside pages following 63 and 50 news placed in the front and back page of the newspaper respectively.

Henceforth, the average rate of front-page news has stood 10.5 each month that is too insufficient as compared to note how serious are the issues prevailing across the country. Besides, the same statistics in terms of the average of inside pages news was 19 news each month which is also insufficient because the inside pages contain different pages other than front and back pages. Thus, prominence in this study was categorized into two portions, frequency and the placement of news. Giving prominence to the news by frequency, the newspaper has succeeded but it has failed giving prominence to the news by placement.

Keywords; Women Issues, Honour Killing, Rape, Kidnapping, Media, Coverage, Prominence, Frequency

INTRODUCTION

Women Issues have a long history as they prevail currently as a serious concern all across the globe. They have various faces such as rape, abduction, honour killing, forced marriages, early marriages etc. With the passage of time, the different channels around the world have been/are being used to counter them all by all accounts. Of them, all inclusive media is considered as the biggest of those influential tools on the earth to fight the issues related to women. All inclusive media such as electronic, print, and social media vary from one another on playing their roles in different areas with different perspective. With this reference, newspaper (print media) media is more robust in highlighting, interpreting, and reporting the genuine issues from social to public health issues of the society.

However, women are fundamentally humans as per human rights discourse. They do have the guarded rights guaranteed by religions, and also in human rights laws. Though they start facing troubles when inequality scintillates in the societies like Pakistan, discrimination begets from various factors such as poverty the most. Poverty bears all the crimes which lead then the gender discrimination and henceforth women start being put into tortures. Due to this gruesome pitfall, gender discrimination in terms of guarded rights leads to various issues which women are going through these days such as home-based violence, honour killing, rape, early cum forced marriages, deprivation of education.

Here starts the role of media now to portray those issues to inform public. But again the questionable thing to understand is that how media portrays them all because media has the responsibility to portray women

issues and it can perform the role to combat them. To this stage, it is profoundly important to understand how prominently the women issues are being reported in media – press.

WOMEN IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan is a Muslim country populated with 208.57 million inhabitants recorded last year – 2020¹. The female proportion contributes 49.2% of the overall population². Pakistan being a country of more than 200 million people ranks currently to be the sixth most venturesome country for women in the global arena. However, the rise in domestic and sexual violence is seen atop. Thus the situation for women in Pakistan is very depressing. They have been facing for long the rigid orthodox, oppressive patriarchal structures, nonflexible and stifling socio cultural traditions and customs. Gender disparities in Pakistan are severe and pervasive as they are left out from decision-making at national, provincial, community and household level. Thus they are less educated than their man counterparts and their freedom to employment to generate income is restricted. Their nutrition and health standards are lower than their male counterparts with higher maternal mortality rates and lower life expectancy³.

Women Issues and Media

Newspapers play a central role of being the major and top-notch sources of information regarding various issues which the society suffers from. By providing information about various societal issues, they set the public agenda through which they wield their influence on the policy makers and affect researchers to prompt them to take the advantages of opportunities. Although they are considered to be the store houses of information from which it flows towards public, In Sindh, women Issues are a common phenomenon⁴.

Women are too less likely than their counterpart men to be represented in the media. As subjects of stories, they only come in a quarter of news via television, radio, and print media⁵. However, it is of a grave need to examine the role of newspapers in running women issues and providing public with adequate information regarding what issues women face more frequently.

Objectives of the study

This study has a three-fold objective such as; a) to determine the frequency of issues regarding women reported in the newspaper, b) to identify which issue is reported more frequently in the news, c) to know if the newspaper gives prominence to the issues regarding women.

Literature review

Several studies regarding women issue have so far been brought all across the entire globe. Rameez et al (2021) executed their study on violence against women conducting content analysis based on two months coverage. They found 110 news regarding women issues the newspaper reported in the selected time span. They concluded that the 32% of the total news were the domestic violence on women⁶. Somiry, et al (2008) claimed that in the nations such as Pakistan, 5000 women are sentenced to death each year all across the globe in the name of Honor killing. The countries like Iran, Syria, Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt, Morocco, Yemen and the other gulf countries are put atop the list of cases of honor killing⁷. Babur, et al (2010) explained that regarding custom of Vanni in Swara in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and in Punjab, young women are paid or exchanged to rival family in the form of forced marriages or to the hostile as a reward of some kind of crime that is done by any male member of that family. Henceforth, they are fraught with these kinds of violence that should be reported in media with a notion of responsibility⁸.

Shazia Shaik et al (2019) conducted a comparative study of newspapers on women issues selecting three different newspapers such as Daily Dawn, Daily Jang, and Daily Kawish. However, they found that Daily Dawn and Daily Kawish focused and covered the violence related issues more than that of Daily Jang – an Urdu language newspaper of Pakistan⁹. Vandiana Nautiyal and Jitendra Dabral (2012) found in their study that the newspaper did not provide a balanced picture of diverse lives of women, and contributions towards society in a moving world. Much stays yet to be done with reference to the "portrayal, participation, and an access for them (women) to the media against their empowerment and advancement"¹⁰.

Qurat ul Ain et al (2020) claimed in their study that newspaper reported the gang rape issue more frequently as it was more covered as compared to other issues regarding women. They further determined the insufficient coverage the newspaper gave to the women issues¹¹. Syed Hassan Raza & Mahmooda Liaquat (2016) carried out a content analysis study on honour killing in press. They came to know, as their results brought, that social evils were highlighted in the press, facing with a numerous issues regarding women such as honor killing, victims of the Sexual assault, Love marriage, victim statement, arranged marriage, and Karo-Kari malpractice. Murder, however, was also another additional evil against women¹².

In India, Content analysis of women's issues in newspapers was performed by Garima Goswami, Deepali Dhawan and Archana Raj Singh who showed that majority of the women's issues were highlighted in Local/City page but the career consultants and Economy/Business pages did not entail any of the women issues in the selected newspapers. The study concluded showing similarity with the findings of a survey of "The Hindu" (2005) newspaper that informed that localized coverage of issues related to women is valuable to raise women's voice.

Research Method

The quantitative analysis of news particularly related to women issues collected from Daily Jeejal – a new Sindhi language newspaper of Sindh (Pakistan) was conducted. Keeping in mind the nature of topic, the control period of coverage of women issues related news published between July and December, 2020 was chosen to examine the news reported in the newspaper. The news which carried inside two or more than two cases, or which carried statements of victims, and other publics regarding victims, and the depth reports were also excluded from this study. In addition, letters to the editors, advertisements, legal notices, and editorial articles were also kicked off from the analysis for this study. All the news which were published in the 12-month editions of newspaper were taken and analysed as well.

Themes of Analysis

In the current study, the themes to analyse were only the number of news, placements of the news, and the types of issues related to women issues.

Data Collection

Month-wise distribution of news according to their placement

Month	No; of News	Placement		
		FP	IPs	BP
July	36	14	4	18
August	30	12	6	12
September	33	10	15	8
October	45	12	22	11
November	43	11	18	14
December	41	13	20	8
Total	228	72	85	71

FP = Front Page, IP = Inside Pages, BP = Back Page

Description;

Frequency

The table separates the moth-wise frequency of the news related to women issues reported in the newspaper during the last six months (July to December) of the previous year of 2020. However, the total frequency of the news related to women issues covered by newspaper was 228. Therefore, the last three months (October to December) of year have covered collectively more news regarding women issues and the highest proportion (45) of the news was found to have reported by newspaper in the month of October.

Placement

The placement of the news was split into three categories such as, front page, inside page (all the inner pages), and back page. However, as far as the placement of the news is concerned, the highest proportion (85) of news in a collective manner was found in the inside pages of newspaper. The newspaper have placed more news in the inside pages during last three months (October to December) of the year.

Month-wise distribution of news regarding types of women issues according to their placement

Month	Type of Issue	No. of News	Placement		
			FP	IPs	BP
July	Honour killing	10	3	4	3
	Rape	10	3	5	2
	Kidnaping	8	1	4	3
	Murder	6	2	4	0
	Harassment	2	0	2	0
August	Honour killing	8	3	4	1
	Rape	10	3	5	2
	Kidnaping	6	1	4	1
	Murder	4	1	3	0
	Harassment	2	0	2	0
September	Honour killing	9	3	4	2
	Rape	10	3	4	3
	Kidnaping	5	1	3	1
	Murder	7	2	4	1
	Harassment	2	0	0	2
October	Honour killing	13	3	7	3
	Rape	12	3	6	3
	Kidnaping	9	3	4	2
	Murder	11	2	6	3
	Harassment	0	0	0	0
November	Honour killing	13	4	6	3
	Rape	11	4	5	2
	Kidnaping	9	3	4	2
	Murder	10	3	4	3
	Harassment	0	0	0	0
December	Honour killing	11	4	5	2
	Rape	13	4	6	3
	Kidnaping	8	2	4	2
	Murder	7	2	4	1
	Harassment	2	0	2	0
Total		228	63	115	50

Description

Frequency

The table distributes the six-month frequency of the news related to types of women issues reported in the newspaper across the last six months (July to December) of the previous year of 2020. However, the total frequency of the news related to types of women issues covered by newspaper was 228. The types of women issues most frequently mentioned in the news were; honour killing, rape, kidnapping, murder, and harassment.

Placement

The majority of the news (115) about women issues were placed in the inside pages of the newspaper. In this run, rape as a type of women issues has been more frequently mentioned in 66 news of which major chunk (31) have been placed in the inside pages of the newspaper. The second major proportion (64) of the news was about honour killing as a type of women issues of which the majority (30) of news were placed in the inside pages of the newspaper. In addition, news about kidnapping and murder as the types of women issues were equally reported as 45 and 45 each respectively, but their numbers in placement were different from one another. However, the majority of news about kidnapping (24) and murder (25) were more frequently placed in the inside pages of newspaper. While, the number of news (8) about harassment issue was too insufficient.

Conclusion

Media is considered to be the most powerful tool on the earth to tackle societal grave issues by bringing them up to the surface. Women issues have now become one of the serious concerns across the entire globe. But it matters how the media treat them all. The most important question that was unanswered is, how prominently the women issues are being covered in the press media – of Pakistan. Thus, prominence was meted out through two parameters such as frequency of news, and the placement of the news regarding women issues. However, the newspaper has succeeded in covering more issues (frequency), but it has, on the other hand, failed to bring the news on the front page (placement). It is, to this end, very important for the press media to look into this matter seriously. When media balances other parameters like of this study, great results may come out in the open.

Discussion

Newspapers are widely accessible sources of information regarding women issues. They cover the issues to let them the masses know what's happening around them. It is however important to note that every newspaper has the different working style to cover certain issues, that's why this study has selected one newspaper to observe how it works when it comes the matter of women issues. Going through literature available about women issues helped to find the gap left inside them. Thus, it was found that how prominently the women issues were for the newspaper to report was an untouched theme. To fill this gap, this study has performed a content analysis technique and has examined the content of news about women issues covered throughout the six-month time period.

Units such as articles, letters, announcements, editorials, opinions except news were excluded from analysis. Also, strikes, public and politicians' statements, other civil society members were out of the analysis. In this run, those news which carried inside them two or three different issues were left out. For **Example**, In total, 228 news were identified, of which majority were about rape and honour killing issues. As far as the placement of the news is concerned, majority (115) of the news were found to have placed in the inside pages following 63 and 50 news placed in the front and back page of the newspaper respectively. Yet, this study has not taken the length of the news that is also one of the parameters used to examine the prominence of news. The only reason behind the length left untouched in this study is the smallness of the content of news. All the news were found to have reported with too insufficient amount of words that could help examining the length of news content. Thus newspaper/s should enlarge the content of news so that they could be examined through all the parameters used to perform the role to determine the level of prominence of certain issues being covered in the newspapers.

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