

INFLUENCE OF PRINT MEDIA FRAMING ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN RWANDA: A CASE STUDY OF THE NEW TIMES

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Abstract: Gender Based violence is a day-to-day tragedy around the world. Many females, both children and adults, have suffered a great deal from different acts of violence because of their sex. Rape, beating, female genital mutilation (FGM), abduction, and early marriage are among the dominant types of Gender Based Violence that affect women physically, psychologically, socially and economically. Scholars in media, gender and politics have interest in the apparent gender differences in media coverage and framing of those in GBV. The general objective of the study was to examine the influence of print media on the framing of the perceptions on Gender Based Violence in Rwanda. The study based on the following three objectives; to assess the perceptions and beliefs of print media practitioners on GBV in Rwanda, to examine the factors that influence the framing of print media content on GBV in Rwanda and to examine the role of Print Media frames on the perceptions and beliefs of GBV in Rwanda for better understanding of these portrayals. The theoretical underpinning of this study is borrowed from the media framing theory. The research approach of the study was qualitative in nature and employed content analysis and in-depth interview data collection techniques. The sample frame for the study included New times publications published daily over a period of one year (January to December) 2017. The sample size for the content analysis included all the newspaper articles that mentioned any form of GBV. A total of ten senior editors and writers working for the New Times was purposively selected for the in- depth interviews. The themes and priming of these articles were identified. The results indicated that there are ten types of Gender based Violence as reported during the period of analysis. The articles given the most prominence was on physical violence and Domestic violence while those that occupied the smallest space were on rape, child abuse, physical violence, and which appeared under letters to the Editor and on News. From the findings, there is need for the Rwandan journalist to be part of the solutions in the fight against GBV. While news can, and often does, offer in-depth and informative coverage of issues, strategies need to be developed to encourage journalists to incorporate more context and analysis when reporting violence against women. This study makes several conclusions. This study has analyzed how the print media in Rwanda has primed GBV. The study used the New Times newspapers to give examples of how the print media in Rwanda prime GBV. The media in Rwanda should have more thoroughly researched feature stories on gender-based violence to communicate to society and set the agenda of a gender-based violence-free Rwanda. The agenda setting role of the media is important because people many times conform to the media agenda and use it in their lives. Due to time constraints, the researcher could not study everything in the field of media, framing and gender-based violence and was restricted to only study sexual violence. After the findings of the study, the researcher also noted that there are areas that can be enhanced to create other useful studies.

Keywords: Mainstream print media, gender-based violence, New Times.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Gender Based Violence is a universal concern. It is a problem of both the developed and the developing world. Gender Based Violence is a global reality that kills and injures millions of girls and women everywhere notes (Steeves, 2009). Those not directly attacked remain affected by an ever-present fear of violence. UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women) in its 2003 report states that one out of three women is likely to be sexually assaulted during her lifetime. In Article 1 of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women, Gender Violence is defined as any act of Gender Based Violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women or men, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (Marshall 2004).

In recent decades the terms framing, and media frames have been used to analyze the coverage of Gender Based Violence by the print media in journalism and mass communication studies. For example, Gitlin (Steeves, 2009) delineates a media frame as a persistent pattern of cognition, interpretation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion, by which symbol handlers routinely organize, discourse, whether verbal or visual. Conversely, Litvinenko (2012) delimits media frames as the fundamental unifying clues for news content which furnish contents and suggests what the issues are through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration. On the other hand, Nikonov (2013) suggests that media frames are the crucial consolidating concepts that journalists routinely utilize in their bids to endow meanings to specific events and issues. This same notion was expounded further by Miller & Riechert, (2010) when they state that media frames is are fundamental unifying designs or storylines because they suggest what an event or an issue really entails in a particular society. This is because by organizing everyday reality, a media frame becomes part and parcel of that everyday reality of people in a given community. This everyday reality is basically an intrinsic attribute of news, which is conceptualized by D'Angelo (2012) as a socio-cultural creation which is given form and substance by framing and media frames used by journalists in their daily work

The United Nations Fund for Population Agency notes that there are different phases and types of violence against women starting from before birth to old age: Pre-Birth: Sex selective abortion; battering during pregnancy (emotional and physical effects on the woman; effects on birth outcome); coerced pregnancy; mass rape in war (Ayhan, 2010). Gender Based Violence causes serious health, social and economic problems. It has severe health consequences for the affected and these can be both physical and psychological. It also brings devastating social and economic impacts.

Haji Mohammadi, (2011) states that a media frame is akin to the frame of a house. Such a frame provides the silhouette around which everything else fits and it also influences the all-inclusive design of the edifice. This notion made Edström, & Mølster (2014) to surmise that media frames symbolize the working schedules of journalists because they permit them to identify, classify and package information for audiences in particular and meaningful socio-cultural milieus. And as observed by Hetsroni, (2012) it is through the utilization of framing and media frames by journalists that these significant contexts bestow to news its intrinsic value and coherence. In fact, framing and media frames deal with how the media cover, for example, Gender Based Violence as well as with how the media puts this same violence in the minds of audiences. UN Women (2012) suggests that the media may not always be successful in telling people what to think, but they are usually successful in telling them what to think about. Indeed, the report explicate that the mass media usually force the attention to certain issues. They are constantly presenting objects, suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, and have feelings about. On his part, Franks (2013) explains that the kinds of things people discuss, feel, think and worry about are powerfully shaped and directed by what the media prefer to publicize, and this essentially constitutes the public agenda. Therefore, Baumann, & de Laat, (2012) conclude that if the media decide to give size, space and prime time to covering Gender-Based Violence, this will become the most important item on the public agenda. Additionally, if the news media devote prime coverage to school dropouts among girls because of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C), a form of Gender-Based Violence, then audiences will also rate it as the most significant issue to them. Conversely, when the media give prominence to unemployment among women because of gender discrimination the issue becomes vital in the minds of audiences and so forth. This is called agenda setting which is concerned with the relationship between media priorities and audience priorities in terms of the relative importance of news coverage priorities.

Eisend, (2009) suggest that Gender-Based Violence is nowadays recognized as a major development, humanitarian, human rights, justice as well as social relationship problem all over the world. According to European Institute for Gender

Equality (2013) GBV encompasses a wide range of acts that include real and potential threats as well as intimidation that go beyond physical violence and those consequences consist of psychological harm, deprivation and mal-development that compromise the wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. There are several types of Gender-Based Violence including self-directed violence, interpersonal violence and collective violence. The other forms such as dowry-related violence, preference of girl/boy child and female genital mutilation/cutting are culture-specific and constitute grave violations of human rights both in Rwanda as elsewhere on the globe (Eisend, Plagemann, and Sollwedel, 2014).

Furthermore, how the print media frame stories of Gender Based Violence have been criticized for their little attempt to reinforce change in policies regarding the issue. According to Charles, (2016) frames occur when journalists "emphasize certain words and source of information; the writings of the reporters then form thematic clusters. How the media frame stories of Gender Based Violence were scrutinized for failing to show the true danger of the problem. Other studies on media's coverage of Gender Based Violence have found out similar results that how the media cover the issue reinforces patriarchal conceptions of rape and other forms of Gender Based Violence. Patriarchal ideology is grounded in patriarchal notions of male and female sexuality, that is, the notions that males are innately aggressive, and females are innately submissive and receptive (Steeves, 2009).

Rwandan state authorities address domestic violence within the broader context of Gender Based Violence (Rwanda July 2011). The 2008 Law on Prevention and Punishment of Gender Based Violence defines Gender Based Violence as any act that results in a bodily, psychological, sexual and economic harm to somebody just because they are female or male. Such act results in the deprivation of freedom and negative consequences. This violence may be exercised within or outside households. Victims of Gender Based Violence and rape may be subject to stigma and discrimination (UN Sept. 2012; Rwanda Apr. 2011, 8). The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion indicates that spousal rape, physical abuse, denial of property rights, verbal abuse and psychological harassment are often seen as a normal part of family life (*Rwanda Report 2011*). According to the Gender Monitoring Office, the Rwandan government department tasked with monitoring the delivery of services to victims of Gender Based Violence, factors contributing to Gender Based Violence include poverty, illegal marriage, parental rejection of children, and lack of economic independence of women" (ibid. Nov. 2012, 15).

There is lack of information on accurate estimates of the magnitude of physical and sexual violence against married women in Rwanda largely due to violence being unreported; and in most cases, those reported are not recorded by authorities. The Amnesty International (2002) report titled: *Mistreated the invisible crime*, noted that victims in Rwanda had an enormous problem persuading the police and other prosecuting authorities that they had actually been mistreated. The victims had to prove that they did not consent to the act, or that their agreement was obtained through threats. Also because of the stigma attached to sexual abuse, women blame themselves and fear that they will be ostracized from society if they admit to being sexually abused and thus continue to suffer in silence. Hence, the available statistics may not reflect the actual prevalence.

The vital role played by the print media in the society is of pivotal importance in confronting Gender Based Violence. One of the roles is creating awareness, in this case, issues to do with Gender Based Violence in the society. The media also updates the readers on what is currently going on. Another role of print media is to reflect the public opinion on broad issues, mostly through the letters to the editor. Readers are able to let known how they feel on issues on GBV and how the government may deal with these issues (IRIN, 2007),

Police statistics, as reported by the regional newspaper The Independent, indicate that there were 3,427 cases of Gender Based Violence in 2010, 3,585 in 2011, and 3,444 in 2012 (The Independent 20thFeb. 2013). In 2012, there were reportedly 94 murders resulting from Gender Based Violence, including 26 cases of wives killed by their husbands, and 11 cases of husbands killed by their wives (The Independent 20thFeb, 2013). In comparison, there were 103 murders resulting from Gender Based Violence in 2011 and 133 in 2010 (ibid.). In 2012, there were 480 cases of attempted murder, 255 cases of rape, and 1,654 cases of defilement (defined as forced sexual intercourse with someone under the age of 18).

The Independent notes that additional causes of Gender Based Violence relate to family conflicts over property, poverty, illiteracy, and drug abuse (The Independent Feb 20, 2013). The Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion indicates that Gender Based Violence is "vastly" under-reported (Rwanda July 2011, 13), while the US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012 notes that most instances of domestic violence were not reported or prosecuted (US 19 Apr. 2013, 36). According to the 2010 RDHS, of the 2,398 women who had experienced sexual or

physical violence, 56 percent did not seek help from any source (Rwanda Feb. 2012, 251). Of the 1,016 women that did seek help, the majority sought help from friends, neighbors, family or in-laws, while only 7 percent sought help from the police (*ibid*, 252). The director of a district hospital that provides services to victims of Gender Based Violence explained that there is a "cultural mentality" that it is "shameful" to reveal domestic abuse (quoted. in *The Service Magazine* 18th Dec. 2012). Similarly, the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion said that some victims do not come forward because of "embarrassment or a sense that it is a 'family matter' and that some victims fear the economic or psychological impact of prosecuting the other parent of a child (Rwanda July 2011, 13). Both the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion and the Gender Monitoring Office note that many victims of Gender Based Violence are not aware of their rights.

Rwanda has several governmental departments that play a role in combating Gender Based Violence (Rwanda July 2011, 24-28; UN 2011, 9). Rwanda's Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion oversees, implements, monitors and evaluates the National Policy against Gender Based Violence (Rwanda July 2011, 24). This Ministry has a National Strategic Plan for fighting Gender Based Violence for the years 2011-2016, which includes objectives and cooperation among a variety of multispectral stakeholders including governmental ministries such as the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and several others, as well as the Rwanda National Police, local governments, NGOs, the print media, and the private sector and media in general. It is on this background that the researcher felt important to carry out this study so as to find how print media through framing influences the perceptions of GBV in Rwanda

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Media have the power to influence public opinion as well as social policy about significant social matters. Gender violence is one of the issues that require media's attention and coverage to reinforce change in attitude and policy. How gender violence is represented in the media can certainly affect the public's perception of the issue. Although Gender Based Violence has received attention from the media, it has persisted in Rwandan society and therefore, the issue at hand could be how it is framed has implications for both public perception.

WHO reports that there have been increased calls to address the many negative consequences of Gender Based Violence in many communities around the world although progress has been slow (WHO 2016). One approach which has been suggested as being constructive in promoting efforts aimed at preventing Gender Based Violence is the use of framing by the mainstream print media. This is because the media are today recognized as having a central role to play in highlighting several vices such as Gender Based Violence which bedevil communities around the globe.

Gender Based Violence is a serious issue in Rwanda despite different means of combating it that have been employed by the Government of Rwanda like electing of Isange One Stop Centers in all districts of Rwanda and teaching about the issues to the local people through media and social gatherings. Gender Based Violence is one of the issues that require media's attention and coverage to reinforce change in attitude and policy and has actually been getting this attention through news, opinion pieces, and feature stories in Print media.

Researches conducted on the framing of an issue or event are important in examining the roles of the media in defining a problem, stating the cause, providing moral evaluation and suggesting treatment. Even though several mass media studies were carried out on gender and the media as a whole, there are very few researches that focused on media and gender violence in particular. For example previous studies on GBV by Steeve (2009) studied the print media's coverage of the so-called St. Kizito story, where nineteen girls were murdered and over seventy were raped in Kenya. She found out that the framing used in the media supported patriarchal views of rape. She has noted that rape myths were reflected during the framing; "...the common myth that rape is motivated by lust is reflected in stories blaming the crime on mixed-sex schools, or on inadequate religious training." She also found out that although they were not detailed in providing alternative suggestions for the problem, there were few stories which show real concern about the wellbeing of the St. Kizito survivors.

Similarly, Carlyle et al (2008) examined newspaper coverage of intimate partner violence in the U.S.A. Their findings show that newspaper framing of IPV tended to be greatly dominated by episodic framing, "which focuses on the individual and tends to ignore the larger social context within the IPV occurs". When discussing the implications of such framing, the writers state that "by portraying IPV as an individual or a relationship issue without discussing the underlying causes of IPV, victims may be more likely to feel blamed for their own victimization."

As to the researcher's knowledge, despite the significance of media framing in tackling gender violence, little research has been done on media and gender violence in general and the Ethiopian media and gender violence in particular. Therefore, there seems to be a need to conduct a research which aims at finding out how the local media portray and represent an important social issue like gender violence. As a result, this study is believed to fill in the gap by studying how three local newspapers frame gender violence. This research will therefore aim at finding out how the local print media portrays and represents an important social issue like Gender Based Violence and fill in the gap. This study therefore seeks to research on how the local newspapers frames Gender Based Violence and the influence those frames have on the people's perceptions concerning Gender Based Violence.

1.3. Objectives of the study

1.3.1. General objective

The general objective of this study was to examine the influence of print media on the framing of the perceptions on Gender Based Violence in Rwanda.

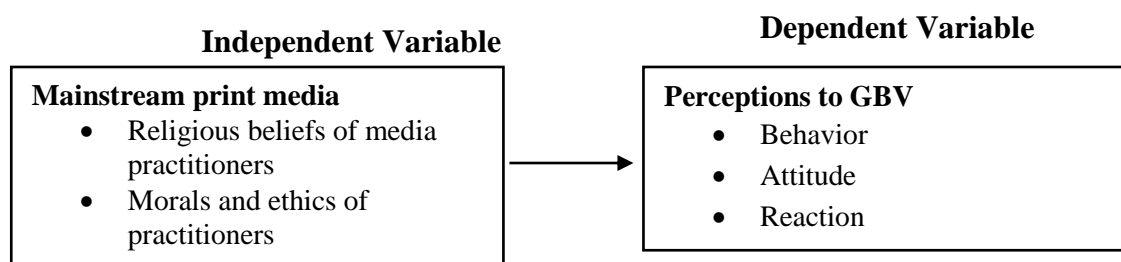
1.3.2. Specific Objectives

The study specifically sought to research on the following objectives:

1. To assess the extent of the mainstream print media coverage on gender-based violence in terms of number of articles and topics.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In this study the dependent variable is the perception to GBV of a firm while the independent variables are the mainstream print media.



The conceptual framework justifies the rationale behind the investigation. It gives the reason for searching for new data and for analyzing, interpreting and synthesizing these data. The conceptual framework is composed by two parties which are independent variables (factors that have influence on the framing for Print media) and perceptions of gender-based violence as dependent variable.

Furthermore, the first variable shows how print media frame stories of gender violence have been criticized for their little attempt to reinforce change in policies regarding the issue. Frames occur when journalists emphasize certain words and source of information; the writings of the reporters then form thematic clusters. Media's coverage of gender violence has found out similar results that how the media cover the issue reinforces patriarchal conceptions of rape and other forms of gender violence.

3. TARGET POPULATION

Population can be defined as the totality of persons or objects with which a study is concerned. Thus, population is any group of people, organization about which one wants to draw conclusions (Grinnell & Williams, 1990).

The study targeted all publications of The New Times for a period of one year, and on all articles on Gender Based Violence. A content analysis on articles dealing with Gender Based Violence on The New Times was conducted for a period of one year from January 1 to December 31, 2017. The themes and framing of these articles were identified. The existing materials or articles comprised the study. This period was chosen because many cases of Gender Based Violence were mostly reported according to the Rwanda National Police.

The unit of analysis in the study was the items or stories on GBV, the themes of these stories, characters or attributes, the amount of space which the story was being given. Mugenda and Mugenda (2008) notes that the unit of analysis is the individual unit about which or whom descriptive or explanatory statements are to be made.

The content was examined in terms of the number of articles; their size (in cm); the type (news, opinion, feature, editorial, book review, letter to editor, or advertisement); placement (front page, page 2, page 3, other inside pages, special feature/magazine section, or back page); prominence (edition lead, page lead, main editorial, or special commentary); main event (or occasion); main actor (Government, NGO, the United Nations system); and main subject.

4. INTERVIEW INFORMATION FROM RESPONDENTS

On the attitudes towards gender-based violence in general respondents indicated that Collecting quantitative data on gender-based violence (GBV) is fraught with difficulties. Not only is it difficult to obtain the information initially, it is also problematic to capture all the cases of GBV in any given study. The proclivity of survivors not to report or disclose any incident of GBV because of the associated risks and dangers they may face, (including being re-victimized, accused of lying, being mistreated by police, experiencing further violence by the community or their families, being stigmatized or being forced to marry the perpetrator) means that the quantitative data available on GBV represents only a small fraction of the total cases of GBV.

In addition, international guidance, recommendations and standards require that GBV data is only gathered where services exist to ensure that appropriate referrals and support can be provided in the event of GBV related disclosures. Data is also reported in the form of trends and patterns instead of individual cases in order to protect the confidentiality of the identity of survivors.

How can we effectively address Gender-Based Violence if there is no available data? Globally, there is a strong evidence base for providing GBV response programmes in the absence of data. Most women and girls experience multiple forms of violence throughout their life cycle, from infancy into adolescence and adulthood. Conflict, destruction of homes and communities, flight and upheaval erode the scant protections afforded to women and girls thereby escalating the incidence of GBV. In the same respect that there is a need for water and sanitation and food distribution programmes, the need for GBV response programmes is ever present but often not evident. Without GBV programmes, survivors continue to face the consequences of violence. The daily threats women and girls face as they seek everyday necessities, such as water, firewood, shelter and food often go unreported and unaddressed. Though difficult to quantify, it is clear from lessons learned from humanitarian responses, that the failure to address GBV at the outset weakens women's health in the medium and long term and creates barriers to reconstructing the lives and livelihoods of individuals, families and communities.

How can the impact of GBV programming be measured? Measuring the impact of GBV programmes (beyond the health sector) is difficult. GBV programmes are not commodity-based; they are staff-reliant. It is difficult to measure any improvement in the safety and well-being of women and girls. However, it is possible to measure the effectiveness of referral systems, the number of women and girls accessing support programmes and, upon the implementation of a GBV Information Management System, to quantify the number and percentage of survivors who report their case to a service provider and who are both able to, and choose to, access further care and support. Likewise changes in community knowledge, attitudes and practices with regard to GBV are difficult to measure in a quantifiable way. However, over time, changes in social norms may become apparent through attitudinal assessments.

Gender-based violence is often in the news. Its prevalence in society makes it a 'hot topic' for reporters and its complex nature makes it an interesting issue for feature writers. However, the fact that gender-based violence is so complex can mean that even journalists with the best of intentions can misrepresent some of the issues and perpetuate myths that are harmful to those who experience it, and also to women more generally.

While journalists are busy reporting on gender-based violence in the society, they consciously or unconsciously forget that they are also human beings and thus they can as well be victims or perpetrators of GBV within and outside the media.

Rukundo Josephine who recently graduated with a bachelor's degree in Journalism at the Mount Kenya university has done internship in two different newsrooms. She did the internship in one of the popular newspapers (which she prefers to remain unknown) and describes her internship at the media house as "terrible". She says: "The newsroom is like a cell where nobody would want to go."

She expresses concerns over sexual harassment directed at the interns who tend to feel "very uncomfortable and vulnerable" in the newsroom. "We were four female interns and every one of us was subjected to sexual harassment in various ways," says Rukundo.

Some of the acts they had to persevere include lewd messages, verbal abuse, physical touching or unwelcome comments on behavior or dress.

"These are seen as less severe acts, but they are embarrassing," notes Rukundo.

Such kind of acts affects one psychologically. "It's somewhat bewildering to recall at the time you wake up in the morning that this is what awaits you at the office," says Rukundo.

As for the interns, the issue does not necessarily start in the newsroom as Mutesi, a student at the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SCMC) puts it: "When you send your applications they will always have your contacts, they will start calling you unnecessarily and try to get near to you, if you don't show some cooperation, you are likely to miss the internship."

Regarding how such acts are done, Domina, a student at the RTUC confesses that she faced sexual harassment during one of her internships in a newsroom. "Men were unnecessarily sexist, they would wait for you to walk before them, send you to do something for them that they may see you at the back and laugh," Domina explains.

Threat

Damascene concurs with the idea that sexual harassment in the news room remains a threat. With her experience as a journalist in many newsrooms, she sees that many of the young female interns are being sexually harassed and taken advantage of. "It's truly disgusting that acts like these occur daily, as interns are not able to do what they come for but rather suffer and go back with nothing new learned," explains Damascene.

Another female correspondent (name withheld) who has worked in more than five newspapers says she has witnessed many disputes regarding sexual harassment not only involving employed journalists but also interns. She notes that such issues should be addressed through a formal process.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study highlighted that the Rwandan print media can play an important role in promoting GBV. Increasing the media's role in highlighting GBV could be accomplished by improving dialogue between public health and media practitioners, as well as by considering specific measures. Therefore, media could play a greater role in putting the government to account.

5.1. Recommendations

As a result of findings of the study, the researcher came up with the following recommendations that could play an important role as far as dealing with media framing on gender-based violence is concerned.

1. The media in Rwanda should have more thoroughly researched feature stories on gender-based violence to communicate to society and set the agenda of a gender-based violence-free Rwanda. The agenda setting role of the media is important because people many times conform to the media agenda and use it in their lives.
2. The media should review how it reports on and frames GBV and have more balanced stories to expose the audience to all characters involved in the assault or the action taken after the assault, so audiences can make an informed choice when they interpret the media message. Balanced stories ensure the suspects are also given a voice and even interviewed, without necessarily giving their identity, so that all sides of the stories are told.
3. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Services and the Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology should use the media to communicate sexual and gender-based violence stories and change society's views on GBV and communicate policies on rights of citizens. The ministries can use media-based information, education and communication materials to educate people on GBV. The government ministries can also guide media on how to report on gender-based violence and policies associated with GBV.

5.2. Areas for further research

Due to time constraints, the researcher could not study everything in the field of media, framing and gender-based violence and was restricted to only study sexual violence. After the findings of the study, the researcher also noted that there are areas that can be enhanced to create other useful studies. There are still many unexplored areas in media and violence. The researcher recommends the following studies to be done:

1. A study on the agenda setting role of media with regard to sexual violence.
2. Framing of other kinds of sexual violence, especially with regard to defiling of boys and raping of old women, which have been reported in media several times.
3. Framing and priming of gender violence.

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