

## **Zimbabwe's print media coverage of Gender Based Violence: An analysis of the factors influencing journalists' coverage of Gender-Based Violence issues**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose:** This paper interrogates factors influencing journalists' coverage of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in the Global South, specifically in Zimbabwe. The study analyses mainstream daily newspapers the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*, is motivated by the numerous pressing GBV issues and cases affecting Zimbabwe, chief among them child marriages, sexual abuse, and domestic violence, largely against women. Therefore, the expectation is that with all these challenges on women and children, GBV stories will dominate the front pages of newspapers and airwaves in Zimbabwe as the media plays its role of mitigating the negative perceptions on issues of gender-based violence.

**Methodology:** The study adopted a qualitative research approach and utilised qualitative content analysis for the news articles and in-depth interviews with journalists and editors.

**Findings:** The study reveals that there is generally low coverage of GBV stories in both media, with rape dominating such stories. Further, law enforcement officers are major sources in GBV stories, rather than the victims. Key factors identified include lack of prioritisation of GBV stories by newsrooms, lack of journalistic skills to cover GBV issues, and a culture of silence within society on such issues.

**Originality:** Combining journalistic agency, the social construction of reality, and political economy of media theories in this paper helps unravel how gender-based violence issues remain absent in the order of priorities within Zimbabwean newsrooms, leading us to conclusions that GBV remains de-prioritised rendering the media ineffective in the fight against the GBV.

### **Keywords:**

gender-based violence; GBV reporting; journalistic agency; print media; Zimbabwe

## **Introduction**

Gender-based violence issues in Zimbabwe have been persistent over the years. Such violence includes, amongst others, child marriages, domestic violence, and sexual violence, and has led to the need for a more robust GBV reporting. These forms of violence are largely precipitated by the socio-cultural, religion, economic, and political conditions (Mukanangana, Moyo, Zvoushe and Rusinga, 2014: 121). In Zimbabwe, cultural and religious practices result in families marrying off minors, and the deteriorating economic conditions further expose women and girls to various forms of gender-based violence (Chamisa, Makururu, Nyoni, Hamadziripi and Mutongi, 2019). Thus, according to UNICEF (2020) GBV impacts on African women and girls' capabilities to effectively contribute to development. Furthermore, of the 30 countries in the world that exhibit inequitable gender indices, 27 of these are in Africa (Gender Equality Index Report, cited in Muluneh, Stulz, Lyn, and Agho, 2020). Zimbabwe is among the top 5 countries in Africa in the Sustainable Development Goals program that had pledged to end GBV by 2020. However, the country remains among the worst affected countries in Africa with one of the highest prevalence rates of 60% in GBV (ZimVac, 2020). In addition, empirical research indicates a rise in GBV in some countries including Zimbabwe during the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions (Chikandiwa, 2020). From this premise, the need for robust reporting on GBV has grown in recent years – thus the media has been cited as key in the fight against GBV. The Zimbabwean media landscape warrants such an investigation owing to polarization with state media aligned to government and private media sympathetic to the opposition (Teverah, 2015). These political economy pressures, according to media watchdog, MISA (2019) have resulted in the media failing to objectively report on a wide range of issues.

## **GBV Reporting: An Overview**

Gender-based violence reporting plays a crucial role in the fight against GBV. Media plays a significant role in the distribution of information and it is one of its roles to ensure that there is an extensive distribution of GBV issues and thus help society in the fight against the social ill (Mittal and Singh, 2020). While responsible media coverage can neither end nor resolve the issue of violence against women, it can be instrumental in triggering public response and greater calls for preventive activities (Dekic, 2017: 5). Thus, the media has the power to create awareness and increase public understanding such that if correctly implemented, it can assist in bringing about

immense changes in Zimbabwe. Therefore, journalists have the power to contribute towards building a society that is safe place for women and children (UNICEF, 2020).

According to the extant literature, editors consider stories on GBV as trivial and this has resulted in many journalists refraining from reporting on GBV issues (UNFPA, 2020; Sonke Gender Justice, 2017). Further, Jukic (2017) considers journalism as a way of creating knowledge that is guided by professional ethical values and the newsgathering process – thus journalism can create awareness on such issues as GBV. Other scholars posit propose that journalists should receive training on GBV reporting so that they can report effectively on it (UNFPA, 2020; Sonke Gender Justice, 2017). In other words, GBV is a specialized area that journalists need skills to effectively report on it. According to Muluneh (2020), the major GBV issues affecting Zimbabwe today are domestic violence, sexual violence and child marriages.

Globally, studies on GBV and the media in Europe and Central Asia focused on ethical principles of reporting on GBV during the humanitarian crisis, for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Jukic, 2017). The study found out that although the media reported on GBV daily (during the study period), reporting was sensational and did not address the root causes of the issue. Another study by Montiel (2008) revealed that both traditional and new media normalize GBV. This normalization was achieved through the commodification of women's bodies which reinforces gender inequalities, as well as the normalization of rape, sexual assault and other forms of GBV (Montiel, 2008). Further, a study in Spain by Martin, Etura, and Ballesteros (2016) revealed the need for specialized training of journalists to effectively cover GBV, while in Australia, Sutherland, Easta, Holland and Vaughan, (2019) revealed that while the coverage of GBV was extensive, situating violent experience from a broader context was infrequent and news reports rarely elevated voices of survivors.

In Africa, print media coverage of GBV has shown low coverage of GBV across many countries (for example, Kankhono, 2020). The study further revealed that GBV stories were not prioritised in terms of placement and sexual violence was the common GBV type. In addition, there are few female reporters writing on GBV, and the majority of victims are children followed by women while male victims were given less coverage (Kankhono, 2020). Furthermore,

Kankhono (2020) noted that rape and intimate partner violence were the prevalent forms of GBV in Liberia. In Zimbabwe, research on GBV has focused on GBV in conflict societies (e.g. Ramisetty and Muriu, 2013), and the role of the church in GBV (e.g. Musodza, Mapuranga and Dumba, 2015). Other research has focused on effectiveness of intervention measures such as radio drama (e.g. Yule, Vhutura and Gwirayi, 2017). Therefore, identifying factors that impede media coverage of GBV and eliciting views of media content producers such as journalists becomes critical.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This paper is guided by the journalistic agency concept (Golding and Elliot, 1979); the political economy of the media theory Mosco, (2009), and the social construction theory (Berger and Luckmann, 1996). The journalistic agency is concerned with journalists' independence in their profession (Sjoovag, 2013). Sjoovag (2013) adds that this idea has been a vital means in modeling out a social position for journalism claiming to serve the public. The concept explains journalists' autonomy in their everyday practice and is centered upon Kant's conceptualization of the social contract which is based on the belief that people have moral and political responsibility (Sjoovag, 2013). In this sense, journalists' autonomy refers to speaking and publishing freely without interference – therefore this concept is crucial for understanding the challenges and prospects of GBV reporting in Zimbabwe because it speaks to journalists' independence. This concept enables an analysis of journalists' independence in the actual news writing process, in particular what and how it is impeded.

Professional autonomy is largely conditioned by organizational factors, political-economic analyses of journalistic autonomy tend to emphasize the conditional nature of this relationship (Jin, 2018). The political economy of the media involves the study of social relations that mutually constitute the production, distribution and consumption of communication resources, such as newspapers, videos, films and audience. The theory assumes that the mass media are first and foremost commercial organizations which produce and distribute commodities. The owners of the media detect the kind of content produced. In this sense, media content is seen as a reflection of media ownership. In some instances, the media shows the interest of those who finance them that is the advisers. Sjoovag (2013: 4) backs up this argument and posits that

“owners conspire to determine which position, which facts, which version of facts and which ideas should reach the public.” This theory helps explain whether ownerships of *NewsDay* or *Chronicle* affect how GBV issues are covered or not covered in the media.

Lastly, social construction theory is an interdisciplinary discourse based on the belief that human reality is greatly influenced, understood, and experienced through cultural and social norms (Gablin, 2014). This constructed reality sets parameters on the notions on gender. As such, gender is a product of human definition and interpretation shaped by cultural and historical contexts (Vinney, 2019). This theory speaks to the fact that GBV has to be understood through the Zimbabwean culture. As such, there is a complex relationship between culture, religion and GBV. Hence this theory is applicable as it appreciates that religion and culture play a pivotal role in the reporting of GBV issues.

## Methodology

In line with the goals of the study, the qualitative methodology was deemed the most appropriate framework for unpacking the journalists’ interpretation of their professional practice. Qualitative studies are premised on the belief that meaning is a social construct by humans as they interact with the world they live in (Sharan, 2002). That is, qualitative researchers seek to describe and understand phenomenon from an emic perspective (Babbie and Mouton, 2001). Case study approach was utilised to study in-depth the coverage of gender based violence in Zimbabwe and two cases: the *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* were selected. The two newspaper were purposively selected representing state-owned media (*Chronicle*) and the private-owned press (*NewsDay*) so as reflect the political and ideological divergences in the country and generally to ascertain whether media ownership is a critical factor when it comes to GBV coverage in Zimbabwe or not. From a total of 182 editions during the study period (April 2020 to June 2020), three weekdays were purposively selected to reduce the editions to 78 (39 for each newspaper). Monday was chosen because it is the beginning of the week and stories reflect what happened over the weekend including GBV stories. Wednesday being the midweek has what's happening during the week and Fridays have round-ups of what would have happened during the week. From the 78 editions, the researcher identified all newspaper stories that on GBV, resulting in a total population of 24 stories from both *NewsDay* and *Chronicle*. Fourteen stories were from

*NewsDay* and ten were from *Chronicle*. All these stories were, all hard news are then subjected to qualitative content analysis. Further, 10 journalists including editors, reporters and interns from *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* were purposively selected for in-depth interviews. The selection criteria for journalists included: selecting journalists with the by-lines on the analysed stories, journalists that report on crime and courts, the gender desk and the general news desk, as well as editors.

### **Findings and analysis from content analysis**

On overview of the findings is given first followed by findings and analysis from the qualitative content analysis and findings from interviews and later discussed and analysed. Overall, the study found out that there was low coverage of GBV by both private and state-owned media. The study also found out that all the stories were source from the courts. Furthermore, all the stories obtained from the sample were hard news stories. The study also found out that law enforcement officers were the dominant voices. The study also found out that the male reporters and interns were the dominant voices. These findings are discussed in detail below.

### **Low coverage of GBV stories in *Chronicle* and *NewsDay***

The study found out that there was low and inconsistent coverage of GBV stories in both *NewsDay* and *Chronicle* despite the fact that Zimbabwe recorded an increase of GBV cases during the period under study. From a total of 1 763 articles published by both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* during the study period, only 24 (1,3%) news articles focused on GBV. This therefore, implies that both the private and state-owned media do not regard GBV stories as important. This finding is consistent with a study conducted in Malawi by Kankhono (2020) which revealed that there was low coverage of GBV generally and that there was a lack of priority given to GBV articles. The journalistic agency concept has been a vital means in modeling a social position for journalism claiming to serve the public (Sjoovag, 2013). It can therefore be argued that the rise of GBV issues in Zimbabwe is attributable to the media as journalists fail to serve the public in creating awareness, generating debate, and prompting solutions on curbing GBV. Therefore, the contribution of both *NewsDay* and *Chronicle* in fighting GBV is insignificant evidenced by the finding that both papers do not regard GBV issues as important and requiring attention.

**Rape dominates GBV stories in both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay***

The study also found out that rape dominates the GBV stories in both *NewsDay* and *Chronicle*. The GBV stories were analysed and placed into different categories and these were rape, domestic violence, poverty and religion. *Chronicle* published 8 stories on rape while *NewsDay* published 12 stories on rape. Both *NewsDay* and *Chronicle* focused more on stories of young girls below the age of 18 who were being forced into sexual intercourse by men. This is similar to findings by Kankhono (2020). The fact that the majority stories on GBV were on rape imply that the media do not initiate discussion on violence against women, but report on events from the police or similar such sources. Even then the stories, reported as news events, do not discuss in-depth the issues that need attention in such cases. The two other themes that emerged in the study, that of poverty and religion are also synonymous with findings by UNICEF (2020) that revealed poverty and religion as the top major causes of GBV.

**The courts are the major sources of GBV stories**

The study found out that the major sources of news stories on GBV are the courts. Out of the 10 stories published by *Chronicle* on GBV, eight were court stories, one was based on an event and the last was a culmination of the journalist's newsgathering efforts. Out of the 14 stories published by *NewsDay* on GBV, 10 were court stories, three were on events and one was the reporter's own efforts. This finding that the court dominates as a news source for GBV stories in both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* support the earlier finding of rape dominating the GBV stories. The reporters relied mostly on court documents for GBV coverage. This is in contrast with the journalistic agency concept which speaks of journalists being free and helping to establish an order of priorities in a society about its problems and objectives. If GBV stories were a priority of both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*, then editors would have assigned reporters to generate stories on GBV rather than wait for the courts to preside over such cases. In other words, GBV is absent in the order of priorities of Zimbabwean journalists, and thus it remains de-prioritised, allowing negative perceptions about GBV to be perpetuated. Therefore the journalistic agency concept is not implemented in the Zimbabwean context, especially on issues regarding violence against women and girls. In addition, by limiting themselves to the courts and covering mainly rape cases, both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* narrowed their understanding of GBV.

### **Hard news dominate both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*'s coverage of GBV**

The other major finding was that GBV stories were covered through hard news format. All the 24 stories published on GBV by both the public and private media were hard news. There were no images, feature articles, opinions and editorial pieces published by both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* during the study period. Potter (2006:6) defines hard news as 'news of the day.' Porter (2006) further explains hard news as information that people need right away. This means that it will be information that will be important to that particular time when the reader is consuming the text implying that the story may be irrelevant to the reader a moment later. Considering that both *NewsDay* and *Chronicle* are daily newspapers it is critical for them to set an agenda on GBV through publishing information-rich stories, such as feature articles and opinions, not hard news stories. Hard news stories are "deficient in information about the background and context of news events" (Orgaret, 2010:47). Hard news stories draw attention of the public for that particular time when the readers are reading the article, which might not be used afterwards.

Similarly, the absence of editorial comments on GBV in both *NewsDay* and *Chronicle* shows the lack of support to the GBV narrative by editors themselves. Quinn (2001) explains that editorial comments in the newspapers enable media organisations to tell their own stories that are independent from public opinion, and thus they indicate the stance of the newspaper on matters. In addition, editorial comments indicate directions and or suggestions on measures/policies needed. Editorial, opinion pieces and feature stories, unlike hard news stories are soft news within a human-interest perspective (Potter, 2000). Furthermore, such stories are unusual articles which evoke debate amongst the readers and improve their understanding in some issues that affect their day to day lives, in this case GBV stories. Potter (2000:6) further argues that for soft news, "there's no compelling reason why it has to be published or broadcast at any particular day." This means that soft news do not lose their sense to the readers regardless of the day in which they are published. This means that soft news articles would remain meaningful to the readers in order to effectively fight GBV.

### **Who speaks on GBV stories in *NewsDay* and *Chronicle***

The voices of law enforcement agents and victims of GBV are heard in the GBV stories in both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*. Seven of the stories in the *Chronicle* have no sources attributions and



nine stories in *NewsDay* have no other sources. This could be largely because the stories are sourced from court. According to Porter (2006: 9) sources make a story authentic by verifying information hence journalists should “consult multiple sources to make sure the information they receive is reliable.” However, court reporting requires that journalists stick to information in court documents or proceedings in court. This therefore limits the number of people who can speak on a story. However, good news stories require that journalists use multi-sources to present a broader perspective on issues that affect society so that public clearly understands (Jukic, 2016). When a story has reliable information, then readers will believe it. To validate how destructive GBV is to society both *NewsDay* and *Chronicle* should have gathered stories for publication through multi-sourcing so that the readers would believe the story and act positively on the call to end GBV. Multi-sourcing enables journalists to go deeper with an issue. In other words, multi-sourcing enables the reporter to gather all the necessary information that will make the story authentic to readers. However, lack of depth, through single-sourcing stories by both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* arguably contributes to the continuing existence of GBV in the country.

### **Interns and male reporters dominate GBV coverage in *NewsDay* and *Chronicle***

The study found out that of the 10 stories on GBV in the *Chronicle*, male journalists reporting on GBV comprise 60% and interns were 70% in which mostly were males. Of the 14 stories published by the *NewsDay*, male reporters comprise 40% whilst 60% of the stories were covered by both male interns. This is similar to the study by Kankhono (2020) where male interns are assigned to cover GBV stories. Also, of interest is that a total of 10 reporters wrote 14 stories on GBV in *NewsDay* with one story written by two reporters whilst 6 reporters wrote the 10 stories in *Chronicle*. An analysis of the GBV stories shows that interns wrote 66.7% of the GBV stories whilst full time reporters covered 33.3% of the stories. This indicates that both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* did not give special consideration to the GBV issues in the country. Full time reporters who have more journalistic expertise failed to identify GBV as an issue of concern which needed attention and coverage. The fact that such stories were assigned to interns, implies the lack of priority and prominence of the issue by the media.

Based on these findings from the analysis of the GBV stories in *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*, in-depth interviews were then conducted with journalists from these organizations to ascertain

influential factors that impact and inform their coverage of GBV. Ten journalists, comprising five females and five males from *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* were interviewed. Three males and two females were drawn from the *Chronicle*, while three females and two males were from *NewsDay*.

### **Findings and analysis from interviews**

An analysis of the data extracted from participants through the use of interviews revealed that journalists believe GBV reporting exists but it is not given much attention. Findings also revealed that *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* do not have reporters that specifically cover GBV issues. One of the factors limiting coverage of GBV issues includes the lack of specialized skills on how to cover GBV by the journalists. Therefore, training of journalists and editors was outlined as one of the solutions to improve the coverage of GBV in the country. All respondents understood that good coverage of GBV in the country is critical to fight against the social ill. For purposes of clarity, participants 1 to 5 are journalists from *Chronicle* and participants 6 to 10 are journalists from *NewsDay*.

### **Journalists' understanding of GBV reporting in Zimbabwe**

There were diverse interpretations of GBV by journalists from both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay*. All of the ten journalists interviewed were of the view that GBV was a social ill and hence its reporting was necessary to combat its fight. Participant 9 stated that:

GBV reporting entails stories that are generated towards raising awareness on the issues of Gender Based Violence for example child marriages, sexual violence, domestic violence and physical violence directed on women and girls. In simpler terms, it is the violation of the rights of women and girls specifically because of their gender. GBV stories are not adequately covered in the country because newsrooms feel GBV stories do not sell, especially for newspaper media. Thus, these issues are only covered when there are major issues like the death of a person or people. With this, I think there is insufficient coverage of GBV stories. (Participant 9, 2021)

Another journalist, participant 7 added that GBV is a serious human rights violation. This is in line with the definition of UNFPA (2020) definition of GBV which see GBV as a violation of a person's right directed towards them because of their gender. He added that GBV issues are not reported as they should be in the media because GBV issues are not deemed as interesting for the

audience thus not much attention is given to them. “Newspapers want stories that attract a large audience and GBV stories are not those kind[s] of stories and hence they are not given much attention.” (Participant 7, 2021). Further, Participant 2 added that there was insufficient GBV issues reported in the country as these stories were less prominent compared to political and religious stories. She also pointed out that GBV issues are reported when there is a bizarre nature to it such that day to day abuses like domestic violence and child marriages are rarely reported. The journalist felt that operational constraints and poor staffing in newsrooms were some of the major reasons for the inadequate reporting of GBV.

Therefore, journalists are of the view that GBV issues are not adequately reported in the country due to the fact that newsrooms demand stories that sell and that GBV issues do not attract a large audience, as well as operational constraints. It can be argued that commercial pressures propounded by the political economy theory continue to persist in the two selected cases, denying media spaces to other social issues as GBV. Further, all respondents revealed that both *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* do not have GBV as a specialised beat, with specific reporters assigned. This indicates the lack of prioritization of GBV-related issues by editors and journalists considering the high prevalence rates of 60%, and according to Musasa Project (2008) the increasing incidences of child marriages, physical abuse of women by their intimate partners, and sexual abuse, amongst other types of violence against women and girls. The findings concur with literature, which revealed that editors consider stories on GBV as trivial and this has resulted in many journalists refraining from reporting on GBV issues (Sonke Gender Justice, 2017).

### **Factors hindering journalists from covering GBV issues in the country**

There were three major factors identified by journalists that impede their reporting on gender-based violence, as outlined below:

#### **a) Lack of prioritization of GBV issues by editors**

Six journalists concurred that one of the major factors hindering the coverage of GBV issues is the lack of prioritization of GBV issues by the media with editorial teams placing so much emphasis on political and business issues. Participant 2 said editors force reporters to focus more

on political issues than other social issues that affect society. “They deliberately do that so that we cover more stories on political parties like ZANU PF” (Participant 2, 2021).

Similarly, Participant 3 articulated:

It is difficult to cover GBV stories in that during diary meetings these stories are mostly brushed off as compared to political issues. Sometimes editors send us to political events and gatherings so they tell us what to cover and we do not cover GBV stories. This therefore makes us to focus on stories that will be approved during diary meetings in the process leaving GBV stories for other publications. Also, there are sections in the media; general news, business, entertainment and sport and this makes us to look for stories guided by this and hence GBV stories end up being under covered (2021).

Another responded, Participant 6 said:

Generally, news is collected in order to sell. Covering such subjects as GBV on a regular basis becomes monotonous and it does not sell and the newspaper loses its audiences and then its advertisers and then failure to generate revenue. In short, GBV stories are not covered as they do not attract its audiences and are not profitable. (2021)

Thus Participants 2,3,4,7,8,9 and 10 identified editors as playing a huge role in hindering the coverage of GBV in the country. This corroborates with Mittal and Singh (2020) who argue that editorial team plays a pivotal role in influencing journalists on what to cover. This is also in line with the political economy role of the media which argue that the media reflects the interest of the owners. In directing journalists to cover political stories and not GBV, the media pleases its owners and advertisers. This is evident in both public and private media, that is, editors at the *Chronicle* a pro-government newspaper directs journalists to cover stories to support the government and editors at the *NewsDay* direct their journalists to cover opposition parties. This finding therefore buttresses the powerful influence of media ownership and political economy factors that dictate what can be covered or omitted.

#### **b) Lack of skills and the resources to report on GBV**

Participant 6, an intern was of the view that lack of skills were a hindrance to the coverage of GBV stories and hence the lack of its reporting. He added that GBV stories take much time and resources in that reporters have to go to communities to investigate such stories, thus without

such resources, journalists do not initiate such investigative pieces on social problems affecting communities such as GBV. Participant 4 added “GBV is a sensitive issue and there is need for extreme caution in sourcing or interviewing victims but with the way GBV stories are lacking media coverage, I doubt if there are any reporters trained specifically on how to interview GBV survivors, and generally how to cover GBV related matters. The only time we hear about GBV is when the cases reach the courts and these stories are then classified as court stories” (Participant 4, 2021).

Participant 6 further asserted that audiences do not like such stories as compared to entertainment stories hence their insufficient reporting. Also, he pointed out the fact that editors assign interns to cover court stories and thus the reason why most GBV stories are written by interns as more “serious” stories like politics and economic stories are assigned to senior journalists (Participant 6, 2021).

### **c) A culture of silence on GBV issues in society**

Participant 5 articulated:

... most of the GBV cases are not made public hence it is difficult for journalists to identify such stories. Our African culture somehow condones GBV in that women and girls tend to think it's normal for them to be victimized or violated, and as such do not come out in the open to speak about these issues. This points to the need for public awareness on what gender-based violence constitute so that communities, in particular women and girls are aware and can identify such issues, and bring them to the public domain (2021).

Participant 8 also added that GBV is fueled by the culture of silence in society as most of the perpetrators are close to the victims and they fear to speak about their experiences in public. He pointed out that those who stand up and report the perpetrators are blamed by the society and force silence on victims and shames them for what was done to them. Therefore, socially constructed beliefs of blaming victims play a pivotal role as victims fear to report their perpetrators makes it difficult for journalists to get stories on GBV. As such, there is an intrinsic relationship between religion, culture and GBV.

Participant 2 pointed out:

In most cases society is to blame in the continual existence of GBV in that it gets angry when victims of GBV report their cases. Victims of GBV end up being blamed for the abuse for instance, if someone was raped society ends up labeling the victim a liar or a prostitute who seduced the perpetrator. As the saying goes, ‘you should not wash your dirty laundry in public,’ this ends up being the case with most victims of GBV not reporting their perpetrators encouraging a culture of silence on abuse and hence the continued existence of GBV (Participant 2, 2021).

### **Recommendations to improve GBV reporting**

The majority of participants concurred that there is need for the media to play its Fourth Estate in being a watchdog of society at the same time serving the public interest. Six journalists argue that there is need for the media to be independent from its owners and advertisers so that all issues that affect society like GBV are covered adequately so that the media is able to fight the social ill. Participants 1, 4,6,7,9 and 10 concurred that the media has to serve the public and not its owners or advertisers. Journalists felt that media organizations in Zimbabwe need to train its journalists on how to cover GBV issues. The journalists felt that media organizations need more capital and resource support from the government and that there was need to invest in the training of journalists to cover GBV.

Participant 3 added that “the journalism curriculum in universities and colleges must include courses which train journalism students on how to handle and cover GBV stories”. Participant 7 added that media houses should also train their journalists on how to identify GBV stories. He also pointed out that society must be encouraged particularly women and girls to speak out about GBV so as to break the culture of silence on GBV and increase its coverage.

### **Conclusion**

According to the findings of this study, *NewsDay* and *Chronicle* did not perform their informing roles to change the opinion of the Zimbabwean populace of how they perceive the issue of GBV. The inconsistencies and low coverage of GBV stories and editors considering these stories trivial compared to business and politics, indicate that to both *NewsDay* and *Chronicle* GBV was not an issue worth consideration. As such, the local newspapers, journalists and editors do not prioritise gender-based violence issues, leading to a conclusion that Zimbabwe media fails to play its journalistic agency role that of creating awareness on GBV. In addition, commercial interests

continue to exert pressure on local media, both state and private, to sideline key social issues such as GBV in favour of political and business stories. Thus the research reveals that although *NewsDay* and *Chronicle* are local newspapers, they do not commit themselves to serving the interest of the public since they fail to deal adequately with the very issues that are a problem to the community. This finding buttresses the powerful influence of the media ownership and political economy factors that dictate what can be covered or omitted. Through the use of social construction of reality theory, the research further concludes that *Chronicle* and *NewsDay* reporters are socialised in a cultural system that normalizes violence, therefore fail to understand GBV as a social phenomenon, but as sporadic events.

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