



ENTIDADE REGULADORA
PARA A COMUNICAÇÃO SOCIAL

Representations of Domestic Violence in Prime Time News

Media Analysis Department

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Summary Document

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Title: «**Representations of Domestic Violence in Prime Time News**»

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ISBN: 978-989-99607-7-0

Lisbon, October 2018

REPRESENTATIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN PRIME TIME NEWS

MAIN RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

Context

Violence against women, where domestic violence is included as the most representative form of violence towards women, constitutes a Human Rights violation, and is often based on historical and structural gender inequalities. Currently it is considered a public offense, punished by Law, in accordance to the Article nr.152 of the Portuguese Penal Code.

The importance of media in preventing, awareness-raising and informing about this social problem is recognized both nationally and internationally. The current National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination contemplates, among others, the Plan of Action for Equality between Women and Men and the Plan of Action for the Prevention and Combat of Violence against Women and against Domestic Violence. In these documents it is expressed the need for promoting a media culture free from sexist stereotypes, in which equality between men and women is endorsed.

ERC's action in fighting against gender-based discrimination is oriented by its Statutes which associates it to the protection of rights, freedoms and guarantees, all constitutionally protected. In this domain, the regulator's objectives are "to promote and guarantee the protection of individual personality rights" and also to ensure the "respect for rights, freedoms and guarantees".

The constitutional principle of non-discrimination is the one that generally guides the scope of intervention of ERC. It is also where ERC's Plan of Action for Promoting the Equality between Women and Men and to Fight against Gender Stereotypes relies, having been officially formalized in 2014. This document, alongside with the Regulator's objectives, takes into consideration the recommendations laid down in the Istanbul Convention of the European Council, as well as in the National Plan for Gender Equality, Citizenship and Non-discrimination and also the Plan for Prevention and Fighting Domestic and Gender Violence, updated by the diplomas comprehended in the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination. ERC's Plan is designed taking into account several axis with regard to emphasising and accompanying the work developed by the national media.

The monitoring of news coverage of domestic violence crimes in primetime news broadcasted by public and private service broadcasters is in line with this approach seeking to address to one of the intervention axis stated in the aforementioned plan of action.

The overall purpose of the present study is the creation of a space for joint reflection on the information treatment about gender and domestic violence, namely in intimate marital and dating relationships.

In particular, it aimed to identify trends in the mediatization of domestic violence related to the news formats, its protagonists and the information sources which were used. It also considered the verification of the main obligations of media, specifically in terms of accuracy, diversity and pluralism, and as well as the respect for the presumption of innocence, the right to privacy and the protection of the victims and minors.

For the collection and selection of the body of analysis, it was considered the universe of prime time news from open-air, generalist TV channels, namely: "Telejornal" (RTP1), "Jornal 2" (RTP2), "Jornal da Noite" (SIC) and "Jornal das 8" (TVI), between 2013 and 2015.

In total, 423 news items were selected, and 2014 was the year that had the largest number of news and criminal cases related to domestic violence (75,9%), in particular in newscasts from private channels [specifically, 38,9 % in "Jornal da Noite" (SIC) and 37,0% in "Jornal das 8" (TVI)].

MAIN RESULTS

- In the period analysed, between 2013 and 2015, three out of four broadcasted news segments relate the act of gender violence in intimate relationships as an isolated event (*incident-based* report). A more contextualized approach to the information occurs only in a quarter of the analysed segments (*thematic-based* report).
- Two out of three news items about gender violence don't have any form of *highlight* in the broadcasts. The highlighted items refer to cases which have a vaster media impact and which have a news-worth value, usually associated to the suicide of the aggressor and if there were minors involved in the case.
- When the news are *incident-based* they tend to stress the police activities, particularly *police investigation* (65,9 %) and *justice cases* (32,8 %). The *thematic-based* reporting address mainly the *institutional* issue, discussing public and political measures to support domestic violence victims (62,4 %).
- The vast majority of news reports cases about domestic violence inflicted on women (94,2 %).
- Most of the news items, namely those which are *incident-based* tend to report concrete cases of domestic violence between partners or ex-partners, and they usually refer to *homicides* (79,7 %),
- In over half of the news segments, the TV operators opted for generic designations to classify the crimes of domestic violence, such as *homicide*, *crime*, *murder* and *death*, terms out of context from intimate relationships and gender relationships (54,2 %).
- In over half of the news items, it is not identified the presence of any indicators in terms of *awareness raising and informing* about domestic violence; this is verified in both the public opinion domain and in the subjects which were directly involved (56,0 %).
- When analysing the *graphic headlines*, these are mostly indicative or explanative (69,2 %) and are associated to newscasts which analyze the legal disclosure of criminal cases. *Graphic headlines* with a more appealing or expressive tendency, have usually the existence of details with no informative value.
- Aggressors are for the most part, the protagonists of *graphic headlines* (56,9 %).
- The social-demographic characterization of the involved parts is almost absent in the journalist coverage. In most of the newscasts it is not made any reference to *age*, *occupation* and *nationality* of both the victim and the aggressor. When *occupations* are highlighted in newscasts, it is usually given emphasis to high-qualified occupations, being these references slightly superior in the case of the aggressors and not the victims.
- In some newscasts where social-demographic elements were present, these emerge combined with *nationality*, *age*, the *occupation or job* of the involved parties. The combinations of these features can contribute to establish ambiguous social and cultural associations, drawing the attention of the viewers to collateral aspects not related to the problem of domestic violence.
- In the newscasts in which there is an explicit remark to the type of relationship of the victim and the aggressor, *marriage* stands out as the prevalent one (33,2 %).
- The newscasts which narrate cases of domestic violence do not reflect the distribution of the incidence rate of complaints in Portugal, yet mostly occurrences in the main cities of the country are visible (Lisbon, Oporto and Setúbal).
- In some newscasts where victims are present some elements are highlighted, such as their social conduct and behaviour (. Ex. alcoholism, a lover, a recent boyfriend), which partially assign responsibility for the transgression committed against them
- The adjectives associated to the victim, when present, contribute to reinforce their vulnerability and fragility.

- Generally the aggressor is portrayed as an alleged *murderer* or *aggressor*, though in some moments the presumption of innocence may be infringed.
- The reference to certain behaviours and personality traits such as a violent character, jealousy, drug addiction and depression might contribute to exempt the aggressors from their criminal responsibility.
- In a substantial part of the newscasts (41,7 %) broadcasters explain or attempt to identify the motivation underlying the aggressor actions in particular in *incident-based* news.
- *The end of a relationship* and *ongoing conflictive relationships*, represent the majority of the reasons invoked (65,0 %). Even if less representative, it is also mentioned the existence of *crimes of passion, jealousy* and *infidelity*.
- *Public opinion* is the most common and used source to what the mediatisation of the crime of domestic violence is concerned, in particular: *common citizens, neighbours* and *witnesses* (29,9%), being these more common in *incident-based* news items followed up by sources related to the *authorities* and *justice* (20,3%).
- Specialists and NGO's representatives are the sources of information in 10,8 %, in particular in thematic news items.
- Yet, observing its distribution, *male* gender sources are present in a larger number when referring to the *authorities*, such as *firemen, police forces* and *lawyers who represent either the aggressor or the victim*, whilst *women* are usually the *victims* or *NGO's representatives*.
- A considerable percentage of the newscasts compromise the informative rigueur of the news segment about domestic violence, due to the existence of a partial identification of the sources or the total absence of these (45,6 %).
- In over half of the items, sensationalist resources were identified in the treatment of information (52,5 %) namely: the use of violent words and detailed descriptions which add no informative value, being these more frequent *incident-based* reports.
- In the majority of the newscasts about domestic violence between partners and ex-partners the right to the intimacy and private life of the involved parties is respected.

CONCLUSIONS AND GOOD PRACTICES

Considering the aforementioned, several elements in the treatment of journalist contents regarding domestic violence presented in prime time news, were identified, which are indicative of a lack of investment in the framing and in the accuracy of broadcasted information, which in turn directly affects the representations on this thematic.

It was also found the absence of an approach to domestic violence as a social problem that violates human rights, and in which should be considered the rights to non-discrimination, dignity and equality.

Simultaneously, the journalistic narratives about this crime and the subjects involved, explore secondary issues which contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes in both intimate relationships as well as in the explanation of gender violence.

Considering the conclusions of the present study, it is suggested the following orientations regarding the coverage of these crimes:

- To invest in the framing and contextualization which informs about the reality of domestic violence;
- To broadcast other forms of domestic violence beside homicides;
- To avoid causality relations between the occurred crime and the characteristics of the involved parties;
- To reject the references to eventual reasons that may appear to justify the aggression and simplify the social phenomenon;
- To diversify the information sources, hence contributing to the development of an informed public opinion;
- To reject sensationalist framing in the news about domestic violence;
- To respect the right to the intimacy and private life of the involved parties and the presumption of innocence of the aggressors.

The complete Portuguese version of the Report is available at the [Portuguese Regulatory Authority for the Media \(ERC\)](#) website.