

News of partner femicides: the shift from private issue to public problem

Dolors Comas d'Argemir
Universitat Rovira i Virgili
Tarragona, Spain
dolors.comasdargemir@urv.cat

European Journal of Communication, 30 (2): 121-136 (2015)

DOI: 10.1177/0267323114544865

Abstract

Partner violence against women in Spain is now no longer regarded as an individual issue but a public problem. This article discusses the role of the media in this process. It analyses the news programmes broadcast by different television stations in Catalonia and shows that the news focuses on partner violence against women as a public problem. It argues that the frame of the news is not only a media issue; it is also connected to the social and political context. The feminist movement has played an essential role in the struggle against partner violence against women, but it is argued here that society's intense rejection of this sort of violence and the magnitude of the public policies that have been implemented in Spain could not be explained without the particular involvement of the media.

Keywords

Domestic violence, partner violence against women, social construction of news, frame, gender

Acknowledgment

When drafting this article I was assisted by the Institute for Social Research of Birckbeck College (University of London), where I was an invited researcher between October and November 2012.

Introduction

In Spain the media frames partner violence against women (PVAW) as a broad social problem caused by the structural domination of men over women. This approach to news contrasts with the predominant approach as little as 15 years ago, which portrayed PVAW as isolated incidents and explained these incidents by the deviant behaviour of the aggressor (drugs, alcohol, jealousy, mental disease) or blamed the victim (reprehensible behaviour, infidelity). Research carried out in several countries shows that the media regularly frame PVAW as an individual issue instead of a public concern (Berns, 2009; Boyle, 2004; Bullock and Curbet, 2002; Gallagher, 2001; Gillespie et al., 2013; Guérard and Lavender, 1999; Meyers, 1994; Richards et al., 2011; Taylor, 2009; Tremblay, 1999). In Spain, on the other hand, this is not the case. PVAW has acquired its own identity as a social and public concern and it is presented in the media in the context of political, police, judicial and social actions designed to eliminate the problem (Associació de Dones Periodistes de

Catalunya, 2012; Berganza, 2003; Carballido, 2009; Fagoaga, 1994; Fernández and Noblejas, 2010; López Díez, 2002; Rodríguez, 2003).

In this article, we shall analyse how PVAW is dealt with in the news broadcasts of several different television stations in Catalonia. Television has a considerable impact on public opinion but, despite this, research has focused mainly on the written press. We shall analyse the differences in how news is framed depending on whether the media are financed by public or private funds, and the broadcast range (regional or local). Media organization, journalistic routines and the sources used all affect frame building (van Zoonen, 1994, Vliegthart and van Zoonen, 2011). Public television stations give greater prominence to news and public issues, while private stations respond to commercial requirements (Curran et al., 2013).

Another aim of this article is to show that the frame of the news does not depend only on the media: it is also heavily influenced by the social and political context (Vliegthart and van Zoonen, 2011). We shall try to operationalise how politics, social activism and the media trace the social problem frames for partner violence. We use the term 'framing' to refer to the process of selection, interpretation and evaluation of particular aspects of the reality perceived (Entman, 1993). Goffman's perspective (1974) is also useful for understanding the presence of multiple frames, so that the media can choose which ones they want to predominate, and the audience in turn can construct their own meanings from their experiences and perceptions. In our research, then, we adopt a multicausal and contextualised approach that considers how news is constructed socially. This perspective is essential if it is to be understood why the framing of this issue by the Spanish media has changed from a private to a public problem.

Violence is a social construction. Indeed, violence is not only a series of actions; it also has cultural and social components, with specific meanings for the perpetrators and victims that depend on the social context (Boyle, 2005; Berns, 2009, O'Toole et al. 2007). The violence practised by men on women in the household has been widely tolerated and regarded as normal. One of the goals of feminism has been to make the hidden violence that takes place behind closed doors visible. The reason that it is hidden is that it has been culturally or legally accepted and regarded as a private issue. The shift from PVAW being invisible to its being regarded as a public problem is the result of a long and arduous struggle, which must be understood as a complex interaction between social movements, politics, citizens and media.

Spain has adopted innovative responses and has positioned itself firmly in the vanguard of the legislative and institutional fight against PVAW: A recent study by the Council of Europe (Hagemann-White, 2010) confirms this and stresses the effort made in legislation, the creation of special courts, budgetary resources (€346 million in 2010 versus only €3.6 million in France), infrastructure (2,896 places in shelters for victims), perpetrator programmes (193 in Spain versus two in UK), and awareness-raising campaigns. These policies were established by the Act on Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence, which was unanimously passed in 2004. It was one of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's electoral commitments, and a priority of the Socialist government. Before the Act was passed, local governments had provided some shelters and assistance, but public policies were fragmented and inadequate, and judges were indulgent with aggressors.

Spain is organized into autonomous communities, each one of which has its own executive and legislative power. Criminal policies are dictated by the central government, but the provision and organization of social, educational and health services are the responsibility of the autonomous communities. In 2008, when there was a left-wing government in Catalonia, the Act on the Right of

Women to Eradicate Male-Based Violence was passed, aiming to reinforce the detection, care, recovery, and redress of the victims.

Women's organizations and the feminist movement in particular, have made significant progress in Spain in placing men's violence against women on political and legislative agendas, and providing services for victims and survivors: feminism from below, women's organizations, and feminism from above, institutional feminism (Bustelo and Lombardo, 2007; Maquieira, 1990; Valiente, 2008). Feminism has affected how genderised language has been shaped in both the political and media discourse. It has also prompted journalists to make the problem visible and discuss it as a social problem.

Political concern and the role of feminism, then, have been fundamental. Many individuals, however, glean their ideas about partner femicides from the media, not from activists, so we have to understand how the media frame the problem (Berns, 2009: 11). In this article we wish to highlight the role of the media in the process. We argue that the important concern of the media in Spain has helped to make the problem visible, raise citizen awareness and legitimate public policies. Media concern has led to PVAW news being framed in a significantly different way: not as an individual issue but as a public problem. The use of gender-based language by policy-makers and the media is a specific feature of this process.

The way in which a problem is framed suggests which factors it has been generated by and how it can best be solved (Best, 1989). Naming is a way of classifying and identifying. In Spain, as in other countries, PVAW was first called 'domestic violence'. Nowadays it is called 'gender violence' or 'male-based violence' (in Catalonia). The media spread this terminology, make PVAW visible, and encourage society to react against it (Comas-d'Argemir, 2011).

In the academic context, a variety of terms are used: intimate partner violence, domestic violence, and gender-based violence are the most widespread. The drawback of these terms is that it is not clear who is committing the violence. We shall use the terms "partner violence against women" and "partner femicides", because the most common violence against women is committed by their (male) partners or ex-partners in the domestic context and is also the specific subject of this article.

Method

The empirical data used in this article are provided by the reports of the Audiovisual Council of Catalonia (CAC) on the coverage of PVAW. The CAC is an independent regulatory authority for the Catalan media. It aims to ensure that the law is observed by the media. As a member of the CAC the author directed the drafting of the reports for 2007 and 2010, which can to some extent be compared with the reports for 2002 and 2004 that were more limited in scope. We also carried out six in-depth interviews with journalists to discuss their perception of PVAW coverage and journalistic routines.

The CAC reports monitor the news programmes broadcast in October, November and December of 2002, 2004, 2007 and 2010. In total 1,301 hours 55 minutes and 29 seconds of news time was monitored. During this time 303 news items were broadcast about PVAW, for a total duration of 8 hours, 31 minutes and 44 seconds. The television stations we analyse are TV3 (public, covering the catalan autonomous community: 7.5 million people), 8tv (private, covering also the autonomous community), Barcelona TV (local public television, covering Barcelona: 2.2 million people), Localia (local private television, Barcelona), and Penedès TV (local public television in Vilafranca, 0.4 million people). Only TV3 and Barcelona TV can be compared for all four reports. 8tv was created in 2006 and it previously broadcast as City tv. Localia only appeared in the report of 2007 and Penedès TV in 2010.

The methodology used made it possible to calculate the time spent on each news item, its importance, the interviews carried out, the issues dealt with, and the protagonists of the news. The speaking time of those who appeared in the news was also recorded. The speaking time is the result of the sum of the sequences in which someone speaks and measures the presence of the protagonists in the news in terms of their voice and image. This sort of measure is a much more accurate evaluation of media impact than simply counting the number of news items or the number of times a particular person appears.

As well as these quantitative dimensions, the reports also analyse the use of discourse and images. To assess the quality of the information and the frame used, the reference taken was the text *Guidelines on covering news about partner violence against women* (Associació de Dones Periodistes de Catalunya et al. 2004, 2010). These guidelines were based on an idea by the Catalan Association of Journalists, and they were drawn up in collaboration with the media, political institutions, the CAC, and social entities. There was broad consensus about their content. This was a form of coregulation that complemented the ethical codes of the journalists and it was done to improve the quality of the news and to contribute to the struggle against PVAW.

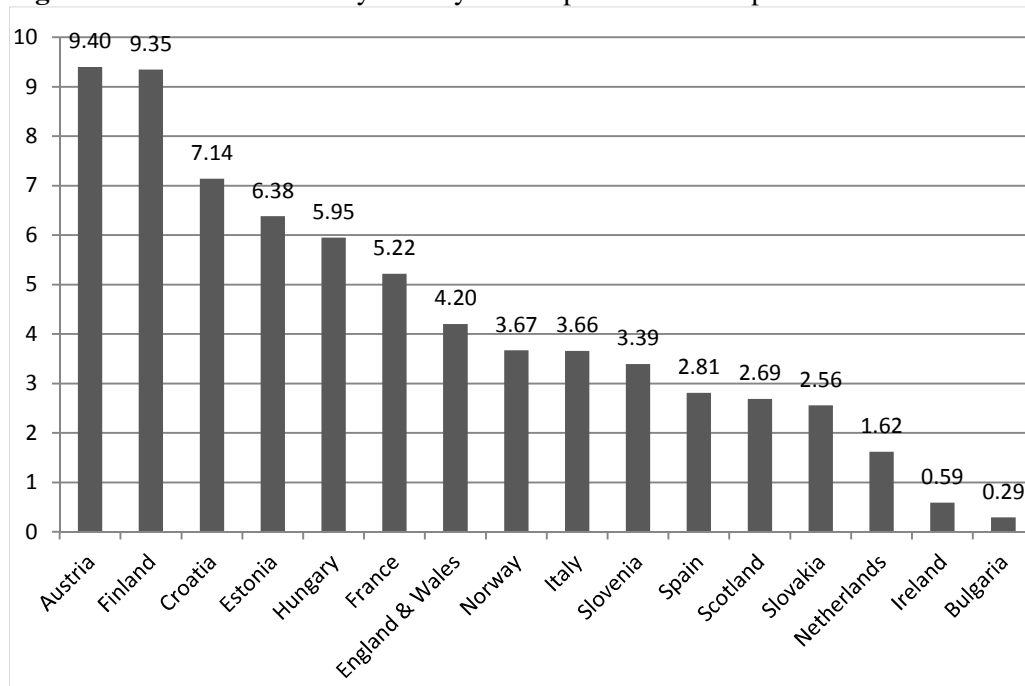
The in-depth interviews with journalists were carried out as a qualitative complement to the CAC reports and made no claim to be representative. They provided an understanding of journalistic routines, and revealed some of the ways in which public and private media work differently. They made it possible to assess the degree of knowledge and sensitivity about the issue, the difficulties involved in understanding the changing terms for PVAW, and the concern about the possible effect of saturation.

Partner violence against women. What are we talking about?

PVAW is one of the most serious problems in Spain. The figures are eloquent: in the 10 years between 2003 and the end of 2012 there were 658 partner femicides. According to data provided by the Spanish government, on 31 May 2013 there were 5,722 men in prison for crimes of PVAW and 15,960 women actively being protected by the police. In only one year –2012– a total of 128,477 men were reported for gender violence. A macro-survey carried out in 2011 shows that 10.9% of women say that they have suffered partner violence at some time in their lives (equivalent to 2,154,705 women) (Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, 2012). The persistence of patriarchal attitudes in Spanish society, which contrasts with the autonomy and liberty that women now enjoy, can be argued to explain this situation (García and Casado, 2010; Gil, 2008; Lorente, 2001).

It is interesting to compare the figures of partner femicides with those of other countries. Only 35 countries in the world provide data on how many women are killed by their partners. Recognising the fact that there is a problem is a prerequisite for action. And the action taken is not necessarily proportional to the magnitude of the problem because it depends on whether it is regarded as a social problem or not.

Figure 1. Partner femicides by country in Europe. 2006. Rates per million women over 14 years



Source: Sanmartín-Esplugues et al. (2007: 91). Figure constructed by the author.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the rate of partner femicides (per million women) in Spain is lower than in most Northern European countries, France, England and Wales, and Italy. Between 2000 and 2006, three women per million died at the hands of their partners or ex-partners in Spain; in Europe five, and on the American continent eight (Sanmartín-Esplugues et al., 2007:10). Spain occupies one of the last places in the international ranking of partner femicides, but it has developed much more important political and social measures than other countries. PVAW in Spain has become a public problem, a question of State.

We would like to stress that recent policies and strategies to tackle violence against women have been implemented on the basis that it is a gender issue, rooted in structural inequalities between men and women. The 2004 Act introduced gender-based definitions. Gender violence is not just a matter between a man and ‘his’ wife; it is a blight on society, as the Preamble points out:

Gender violence is not a problem confined to a private sphere. On the contrary, it stands as the most brutal symbol of inequality persisting in our society. It is violence directed against women for the mere fact of being women; considered by their aggressors as lacking the most basic rights of freedom, respect and power of decision.

The term gender, which has been taken from feminism and academic language, has been resignified in its political use. Despite the broad definition that is given in the Preamble, the Gender Violence Act does not consider the many and varied forms of violence against women: it only specifically mentions the violence practiced by a woman’s partner or former partner. It can be applied to heterosexual and homosexual couples (Larrauri, 2009). In Spain, gender violence means PVAW. This is another example of violence as a social construction.

The 2008 Catalan Act uses the term ‘male-based violence’ to show that the roots of the problem lie in men’s dominance, control and abuse of women. It recognises different forms of violence in the public and private spheres: between couples, in the family, at work, in society and in the community. This Act also has a gender-based discourse, but it uses a new paradigm: male violence.

The commitment of the media

The media are the main source of information on gender violence. This was one of the results revealed by a survey of 1,200 people. A total of 87.9% believes that gender violence in Spain is widespread, and 90.6% regard this as totally unacceptable. The majority are aware of the issue because of television (69.7%) and the written press (37.3%) (Martínez, 2010: 34-5).

The media –including the cinema– have had a proactive attitude in the struggle against PVAW (Grut, 2011). The selection of events and the way in which they are presented aim to achieve certain objectives: to make the problem visible and society more sensitive. A survey of 945 journalists reveals this commitment: a total of 90.95% believe that the media should be used to prevent PVAW because this is part of its social function. Many journalists are also self-critical of the quality of news items, largely because of sensationalism and the lack of conceptual clarity created by the use of different terminologies (Martínez 2010: 25). This occurs despite the existence of several voluntary codes of self-regulation, drawn up by journalists with institutional support, about how the problem should be covered in the news.

This proactive attitude of the media has led to quantitative and qualitative changes in the news (Carballido, 2009: 159). At the end of the 1980s there was a progressive increase in news about PVAW. In the newspaper *El País*, for example, 50 news items were published in 1976-77, and 229 in 1982-83. In 1988-89, this figure rose to 377 and in 1997-98 it reached 754 (Berganza, 2003). This trend was consolidated in the subsequent years. The sections below reveal that there is also a considerable presence of this type of news on television.

Domestic violence was first recognised as a social problem because of a key event in 1997: the murder of Ana Orantes. This murder helped to break down the last barriers not only of public awareness but also of awareness among some politicians and civil servants. Ana Orantes was an ordinary housewife who appeared on television to talk about her experience of partner violence. A few days later, she was beaten and burned alive by her husband. When she had divorced her husband she had been forced by a judicial ruling to live on the ground floor in her abusive husband's house. The brutality of her killing shocked the country and mobilised women to demand that they be afforded legal protection. Ana was not just a statistic: she was a real human being.

The case of Ana Orantes not only increased the number of news items on PVAW, but also led to a qualitative change in how the problem was framed. As a key event it changed journalistic criteria and the perception of the problem (Kepplinger and Habermeier, 1995). The news no longer dealt with each case as just one more in a long line of similar events but as an indicator of a social problem.

Presence of partner violence against women in television news broadcasts

The presence of items addressing the issue of PVAW and the rank they are given is an indicator of the new importance this sort of news has acquired. There was a shift from invisibility to visibility, from an event to a social problem, from a women's issue to a public matter that affects the whole of society.

These changes led to a considerable number of news items about PVAW. The media informed about practically all instances of partner femicides. This was the case for the Catalan television stations: in the years analysed the interest of the media remained constant but in 2004 there was a sharp rise in the amount of news provided because of the considerable social and political debate arising out of the legislative activity of the Spanish parliament.

Table 1. Partner violence against women in television news broadcasts (October-December 2002, 2004, 2007 and 2010)

Television station	News time				Number of news items			
	2002	2004	2007	2010	2002	2004	2007	2010
TV3	0:51:44	1:32:12	0:45:23	1:23:25	26	51	30	38
8tv / City tv	-	0:03:40	0:23:05	0:09:45	-	15	21	9
Barcelona TV	0:53:57	1:35:39	0:23:55	0:20:26	23	56	14	15
Penedès TV	-	-	-	0:04:05	-	-	-	2
Localia	-	-	0:04:28	-	-	-	3	-
TOTAL	1:45:41	3:11:31	1:36:51	1:57:41	49	122	68	64

Source: CAC (2003, 2005, 2008, 2011). Table constructed by the author.

The differences between public and private media are significant if we compare television stations with similar broadcast ranges. 8tv (private) generally spends much less time on news programmes than TV3, the public television of Catalonia (in 2010, for example, the news programmes broadcast by TV3 during the term analysed had a total duration of 220 hours, while the 8tv news programmes lasted for a total of less than 13 hours). The difference is considerable, and this affects the number of news items on PVAW (38 in TV3, 9 in 8tv), as can be seen in table 1. The same difference can be observed between local television stations: in 2007, Barcelona TV (public) broadcast 14 news items on PVAW, while Localia (private) only broadcast 3. Penedès TV is a public television station but very small. It only broadcasts local news, which explains the low presence of news related to PVAW.

One indicator of the importance given to news items on PVAW is their presence in headlines and summaries, because this means they deserve to have a high rank. In this respect, there are no differences between public and private television stations. In 2010 cases of PVAW were included in the headline summaries in 42.1%, and in 2007 in 21.7%. The fact that specific cases of aggression appear in the headlines would explain this difference because in 2010 the amount of news time was much greater.

Constructing the topics: acts of aggression and actions

It is significant that news about violence within the family that is not related to PVAW focuses almost entirely on acts of aggression (96.9% of the news in 2010), but in the case of PVAW this percentage is considerably lower (only 49.8%). This difference is an indicator that this type of violence is regarded as a social problem and, therefore, the news also contains information about political action, social programmes, awareness raising, debates and reports on trials. In the years analysed the central topics are very similar, as can be seen in table 2, which shows the weight of the information dedicated to the fight against this social and public problem.

Table 2. Percentage of news time on PVAW per topic. October-December 2002, 2004, 2007, 2010

Topic	2002	2004	2007	2010
Acts of aggression	41.1	33.7	29.7	49.8
Social and awareness-raising programmes	32.9	23.8	21.6	40.2
Political activity	10.8	13.9	15.4	4.5
Ideological debate	-	14.1	11.0	3.3
Trial reports	5.2	14.5	22.4	2.2
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: CAC (2003, 2005, 2008, 2011). Table constructed by the author

It should be pointed out that the newsworthy aggressions are partner femicides and attempted murders. In 69.7% of news time, women appear as the only victim and in 30.3% the victims are both women and children (CAC, 2011).

The focus on acts of aggressions had been progressively decreasing after 2002 but in 2010 it reached a new peak, the highest percentage of the whole cycle. This may indicate that journalists were getting tired of including political and social actions in their reports because, despite their forcefulness and scope, they did not put an end to the problem of the abuse of women and they were perceived to be repetitive. This is the perception of the journalists interviewed. All the crimes are covered but the topic is no longer such a novelty and the reports on partner femicides are often not accompanied with contextualised analyses.

The difference between public and private television stations can also be seen in the construction of the topics. The private media, which have less news time than the public media, focus more on particular cases. This is the case of 8tv, which in 2010 gave much more weight to acts of aggression than the average (59.7%), or City tv (58.6% in 2004). Barcelona TV (a public local television), on the other hand, focused on acts of aggression for 21.7% of news time in 2010 and only 2.9% in 2007.

In the media analysed, none of the news items blamed the victim or justified the murders because the aggressor had a pathology. None of the news offers an implicit justification of the violence. Neither did they use stereotypes or clichés to minimise the violence against women. And in no case were images of the victims shown without previous consent. All these points have to be mentioned because they express the change in framing the news and the awareness that this is a public problem.

Let's take a look at an example of how news on PVAW is constructed. In the CAC report for 2010 there were six news items on the murder of a woman and her two children in Tarragona: the discovery of the woman's body by the police; the discovery of the two dead children; the search for the alleged murderer; the arrest of the husband and father of the victims; the evidence given by the perpetrator to the judge; and the perpetrator's remand in custody. The news reported statements by the mayor of the city of Tarragona, the delegate of the Catalan government, the police, the chairwoman of the Catalan United Platform Against Gender-Based Violence and neighbours of the victims. The minute of silence that took place in the Town Hall Square was also filmed and broadcast. The news, then, did not focus only on the act of violence itself but also on the social and political rejection, the legal and police action taken, and the assailant's punishment.

Another way of constructing the news is by themes. In the same report in 2010 there are four news items on the problems suffered by children who have witnessed PVAW: one deals with mental disorders; another reports the stories of a small boy and the father who had physically abused his mother, with comments by an expert; the third evaluates the number of children who live in situations of PVAW; and the fourth focuses on the demand for a register that brings this reality to the fore. The news includes statements from people belonging to the world of politics or associations, specialists, and those directly affected. The message clearly aims to generate a reaction against PVAW because of the consequences it has not only on women but also on their children. There are many other news items that could be grouped by theme: various reports and studies on PVAW; the activities and requests of associations; political activity and the mobilization of citizens.

Diversity in the protagonists of the news, diversity of sources

In their research on North Carolina, Richards et al. (2011) show that the predominant frame blames the victim, and they relate this to the use of sources from the legal or police system, and the lack of

contextualisation of the cases. In Spain, where PVAW is regarded as a public problem, the sources are more diverse: institutions, experts, judges and organisations play a fundamental role (Berganza, 2003: 10).

In the television stations analysed, the number of qualified sources exceeds the non-qualified ones, with results that oscillate between 55.6% for 8tv and 91.3% for Barcelona TV in 2010. There are several categories of qualified sources: members of government (ministers, mayors and those public officers), civil servants from different administrations; experts (women's or feminist organizations, specialists, and professionals), and members of courts of justice. Table 3 shows who intervenes in the news items.

Table 3. Sources of information on partner violence against women. October-December 2010

Groupings	Speaking time	Number of items	% of speaking time	% Women	% Men
Experts (women's groups, specialists and professionals)	0:09:36	54	37.6	57.5	42.5
Members of governments (central, autonomous and local)	0:08:16	26	24.3	54.7	45.3
Witnesses	0:04:53	27	14.4	46.6	53.4
Administration (central, autonomous and local)	0:03:43	16	10.9	80.2	19.8
Victims and relations	0:03:31	20	10.4	65.2	34.8
Aggressors	0:00:26	2	1.2	-	100.0
Justice and courts	0:00:25	3	1.2	100.0	-
Total	0:34:03	148	100.0	61.6	38.4

Source: CAC (2011). Table constructed by the author

In the news on PVAW there are more women than men (61.6% v 38.4%). It should be pointed out that this greater presence of women contrasts with what happens in other news items in which women are underrepresented (22.4% of women v 77.6% of men in 2010 according to the CAC reports).

The interventions by politicians and administrative staff express the public nature of the problem, and reveal the implication of governments and institutions in the fight to prevent violence against women. The experts describe the problem as a structural reality and not merely as an anecdotal or temporary event. In this respect too there are differences between public and private media, since 8tv is the only television station analysed that does not reflect the opinions of experts.

Only TV3 screens interviews with women who have been abused and who describe their experience. They explain how they managed to get over it, how they help others who are being abused and how the aggressors can be reported to the authorities. This sort of intervention aims to reinforce confidence in institutions and show that women are capable of overcoming the problem.

One of the resources that is most widely used by television stations is the use of neighbours, relatives or circumstantial witnesses (these witnesses occupy 14.4% of speaking time and are the third most important group of sources). This practice rarely helps to understand the problem, it often provides mere anecdotal evidence and it focuses on the news of particular cases of abuse.

Contextual information

Most of the news items include contextual information, which shows that the cases of abuse are not anecdotal but reflect structural causes related to forms of domination and the power of men over women. Some news items also deal with the issue of PVAW more generically, thus shifting from episodic to thematic news items.

As far as news on acts of aggression is concerned, all the television stations analysed give details of the background to the situation that is being described so that it is clear which factors coincide: whether the aggressor has previously been reported, whether there is a background of abuse, whether a restraining order has been issued, whether the couple are living together, etc. The television stations also often monitor the cases. This monitoring shows that the aggressors do not go unpunished, that violence has negative consequences for them and is rejected by society at large. These features are detected in 60% of the news items broadcast by Barcelona TV, 49.1% by TV3 and 40% by 8tv (CAC, 2011). They are items that focus on the arrest and imprisonment of the aggressors, trials, sentences, criminal legal reforms, restraining measures, etc. The social and political manifestations of rejection are also screened: demonstrations, minutes of silence, public acts, public manifestos and statements, days of mourning and other public responses.

Some news items approach PVAW in a more general fashion and provide data on partner femicides and acts of aggression, the number of formal complaints lodged, statistics and surveys. They also inform on political and criminal measures, victim assistance programmes, and awareness-raising campaigns. We find data of this type in 70% of the news items on 8tv, in 52.6% on TV3 and 40% on Barcelona TV. This type of news item is fully in line with the framing of PVAW as a public problem.

Another aspect that should be highlighted is that the media use gender-based approach, even though journalists may not be aware that they are doing so, as we found in the interviews. In fact, the news reproduces the concepts and the structures of meaning present in the laws and political discourse that were shaped by the feminist movement. The concept of gender violence is the most widespread concept in media reporting.

Problems, confusions, debates

The framing of PVAW as a public problem has improved the quality of the news, but some problems and shortcomings persist in the form of routines that are difficult to change. One of the most obvious is how television dramatizes events. Frequent use is made of close ups, detailed shots and zooms that show blood, wounds, coffins or covered bodies on both public and private television stations (40.3% of the news items on TV3 and 40% on 8tv, respectively) and these percentages from 2010 are higher than those of 2007. The lexis used can also be dramatic, giving details about the act of aggression or the state of the victim's body ("brutally battered", "in an advanced state of decomposition", "multiple stab wounds", etc.). Unlike pictures, the use of dramatic lexis has tended to decrease. And some news items provide data and pictures that make it possible to identify particular people, which generates labels of victim, sons and daughters, and relatives.

In the television stations analysed, the terms that refer to the acts of violence are used appropriately, in accordance with the current socio-political context: "domestic violence" (violence that takes place in the household and the victim can be anybody), "gender violence" (violence against the woman by her partner or former partner) and "male-based violence" (violence practised by a man against a woman anywhere). Nevertheless, the journalists interviewed stated that they were unsure and confused by these different terms that overlapped with others such as "violence against women"

or “sexist violence”. They suggest that here is a need for conceptual clarification and greater concordance between the terms used by the laws, the authorities and the media (see also the research group Equipo de Investigación Género y Medios de Comunicación, 2003: 19-25; Martínez, 2010: 29).

Finally we would like to mention a recurrent debate about the role of the media. The journalists interviewed believe that they should give information about PVAW because it encourages society to reject it. They do not agree that this information may have a copycat effect, because it can give ideas to potential murderers when they see the damage and the despair caused to the family and friends of victims. Vives-Cases et al. (2009) show that a small copycat effect has been observed in the relationship between femicide and television coverage of the topic. However, they also show a protective effect when information has been broadcast about measures. The key, then, is in how the news is constructed. The guidelines drawn up by various institutions insist on the need to inform appropriately, avoid sensationalism, not use justificatory explanations, rely on experts to explain causes, make it clear that the aggressors will not go unpunished and a wide range of other considerations that stress the importance of making such a serious and current problem visible.

Conclusions

In this article we have tried to show how the television stations that broadcast in Catalonia focus on PVAW as a public problem. However, we should make some comments on the initial objectives.

Public and private television stations do not frame the news differently, but news programmes have greater importance in the public channels. The type of programme should also be taken into account. News programmes have generally improved the quality of the news items on PVAW, because the discourse of the sources and the vision of the population have also changed. It is now necessary for an analysis to be made of how entertainment programmes deal with violence against women because the conclusion that television stations have framed PVAW as a public problem have been drawn exclusively on the basis of news broadcasts and can not be extrapolated to the whole of the schedule.

Another point worthy of consideration is the social construction of violence against women and of the news. In Spain, political and social activism is currently adopting a firm stand against PVAW, and reporting on this sort of violence as a public problem has become a part of the journalistic routines of the media. Fifteen years ago publishing a report on PVAW as a news headline or on the front page of a newspaper would have been unthinkable, but these same items are now selected as important news. Given the increase of news items on acts of aggression in the 2010 report, we will have to take note of future reports to determine whether a reframing is under way or this is only a blip.

Finally, it should be pointed out that little attention has been paid to other types of violence directed against women (at work or in the community, for example). What is more, television has not eradicated stereotypes and representations of women that reproduce and naturalise unconscious patriarchal perceptions. News is not only a media product: it is also a social construction that expresses the contradictions, conflicts and power relations existing in society.

References

Associació de Dones Periodistes de Catalunya (2012) *Impacte de les Recomanacions sobre el Tractament de la Violència Masclista als Mitjans de Comunicació*. Barcelona: Author.

- Associació de Dones Periodistes de Catalunya et al. (2004) *Recomanacions sobre el tractament de la violència de gènere als programes informatius i d'entreteniment als mitjans de comunicació*. Barcelona: Authors.
- Associació de Dones Periodistes de Catalunya et al. (2010) *Recomanacions sobre el tractament de la violència masclista als mitjans de comunicació*. Barcelona: Authors. Available at: www20.gencat.cat/docs/icdones/temes/docs/recomanacions_tractament_violencia_mitjans.pdf (accessed 4 February 2014).
- Berganza, Rosa (2003) 'La construcción mediática de la violencia contra las mujeres desde la teoría del enfoque'. *Communication and Society/Comunicación y Sociedad*, XVI(2): 9-32.
- Berns, Nancy (2004) *Framing the Victim: Domestic Violence, Media, and Social Problems*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Best, Joel (1989) *Images of Issues: Typifying Contemporary Social Problems*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Boyle, Karen (2004) *Media and Violence: Gendering the Debates*. London: Sage.
- Bullock, Cathy Ferrand and Jason Cubert (2002) 'Coverage of Domestic Violence Fatalities by Newspapers in Washington State'. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 17(5): 475-99.
- Bustelo, María and Emanuela Lombardo (eds) (2007) *Políticas de igualdad en España y en Europa*. Valencia: Cátedra.
- Carballido González, Paula (2009) 'Medios de comunicación social y violencia de género. Una revisión desde la teoría del framing', pp. 157-73 in J.M. Bernardo, E. Martínez and G. Montiel (eds) *Retos de la comunicación ante la violencia de género. Marco jurídico, discurso mediático y compromiso social*. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch.
- Comas-d'Argemir, Dolores (2011) 'La violencia sobre las mujeres en la agenda política, en la sociedad y en los medios de comunicación'. *Ankulegi* 15: 175-90.
- Consell de l'Audiovisual de Catalunya (2003, 2005, 2008, 2011) *El tractament de les informacions sobre violència domèstica en els teletinformatius d'àmbit català*. Octubre-deseembre de 2002, 2004, 2007, 2010. Barcelona: Author. Available at: www.cat.cat (accessed 4 February 2014).
- Curran, James, Shanto Iyengar, Anker Brink Lund, and Inka Salovaara-Moring (2009) 'Media System, Public Knowledge and Democracy. A Comparative Study'. *European Journal of Communication* 24(1): 5-26.
- Entman, Robert M. (1993) 'Framing: Towards Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm'. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4): 51-8.
- Equipo de Investigación Género y Medios de Comunicación (2003) *Tratamiento de la violència de género en la prensa vasca*. San Sebastián: Universidad de Deusto.
- Fagoaga, Concha (1994) 'Comunicando violencia contra las mujeres'. *Revista de estudios sobre el mensaje periodístico*, 1: 67-90.
- Fernández-Arribas, Javier and Myriam Noblejas (eds) (2010) *Cómo informar sobre violencia contra la mujer en las relaciones de pareja*. Valencia: Centro Reina Sofía.
- Gallagher, Margaret (2001) *Gender Setting: New Agendas for Media Monitoring and Advocacy*. London: Zed Books.
- García-Selgas, Fernando and Elena Casado-Aparicio (2010), *Violencia en la pareja: género y vínculo*. Madrid. Talasa.
- Gil-Ambroña, Antonio (2008) *Historia de la violencia contra las mujeres. Misoginia y conflicto matrimonial en España*. Valencia: Cátedra.
- Gillespie, Lane Kirkland, Tara N. Richards, Eugena M. Givens, and M. Dwayne Smith (2013) 'Framing Deadly Domestic Violence. Why the Media's Spin Matters in Newspaper Coverage of Femicide'. *Violence Against Women* 19(2): 222-45.
- Goffman, Erving (1974) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Grut, Barbara (2011) *Representations of Domestic Violence on the Spanish Screen: Moving on from the Myths*. MA dissertation, Birckbeck College, London.

- Guérard, Ghislaine and Anne Lavender (1999) 'Le fémicide conjugal, un phénomène ignoré: Une analyse de la couverture journalistique de trois quotidiens montréalais'. *Recherches Féministes* 12(2): 159-77.
- Hagemann-White, Carol (2010) *Protecting women against violence: Analytical study of the results of the second round of monitoring the implementation of Recommendation Rec (2002) 5 on the protection of women against violence in Council of Europe member states*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs.
- Kepplinger, Hans Mathias and Johanna Habermeier (1995) 'The Impact of Key Events on the Presentation of Reality'. *European Journal of Communication* 10(3): 371-90.
- Larrauri, Elena (2009) 'Desigualdades sonoras, silenciosas y olvidadas: género y derecho penal'. *AFDUAM* 13: 37-55.
- López Díez, Pilar (2002) 'La violencia contra las mujeres en los medios de comunicación' I Foro Nacional Mujer, violencia y medios de comunicación, Madrid: Instituto de la Mujer e Instituto Oficial de Radio y Televisión (RTVE).
- Lorente Acosta, Miguel (2001) *Mi marido me pega lo normal. Agresión a la mujer: realidades y mitos*. Barcelona: Planeta.
- Maquieira, Virginia and Cristina Sánchez (eds) (1990) *Violencia y sociedad patriarcal*. Madrid. Editorial Pablo Iglesias.
- Martínez Sánchez, Pilar (2010), 'Encuestas', pp. 21-40 in J. Fernández Arribas and M. Noblejas (eds) *Cómo informar sobre violencia contra la mujer en las relaciones de pareja*. Valencia: Centro Reina Sofía.
- Meyers, Marian (1994) 'News of Battering'. *Journal of Communication* 44(2): 47-63.
- Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad (2012) *Macroencuesta de violencia de género 2011. Principales resultados*. Madrid: Author.
- O'Toole, Laura L., Jessica R. Shiffman and Margie L. Kitters (eds) (2007) *Gender violence. Interdisciplinary perspectives*. New York: New York University Press.
- Richards, Tara N., Lane Kirkland Gillespie, and M. Dwayne Smith (2011) 'Exploring News Coverage of Femicide: Does Reporting the News Add Insult to Injury?' *Feminist Criminology* 6(3): 178-202.
- Rodríguez, Maria Pilar (2003) 'Periodismo de opinión: hacia las buenas prácticas en el tratamiento de la violencia de género', pp. 115-50 in Equipo de Investigación Género y Medios de Comunicación. *Tratamiento de la violència de genero en la prensa vasca*. San Sebastián: Universidad de Deusto.
- Sanmartín-Esplugues, José, Isabel Iborra-Marmolejo, Yolanda García-Esteve, and Pilar Martínez-Sánchez (2007) *3rd International Report. PVAW. Statistics and Legislation*. Valencia: Centro Reina Sofía. Available at: www.fundacionluisvives.org/upload/88/18/informe.pdf (accessed 4 February 2014).
- Taylor, Rae (2009) 'Slain and Slandered. A Content Analysis of the Portrayal of Femicide in Crime News'. *Homicide Studies* 13(1): 21-49.
- Tremblay, Daniel (1999) 'La problématisation de la violence en milieux de vie conjugal et familial: la part du secret et celle du spectacle'. *Déviance et Société* 23(3): 275-89.
- Valiente, Celia (2008) 'Spain at the Vanguard in European Gender Equality Policies' pp. 101-19 in Sylke Roth (ed) *Gender Politics in the Expanding European Union: Mobilization, Inclusion, Exclusion*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Van Zoonen, Liesbet (1994) *Feminist Media Studies*. London: Sage.
- Vives-Cases, C., J. Torrubiano-Dominguez, and C. Alvarez-Dardet (2009) 'The effect of television news items on intimate partner violence murders', *European Journal of Public Health*, 19(6): 592-6.
- Vliementhart, Rens and Liesbet van Zoonen (2011) 'Power to the Frame: Bringing Sociology Back to Frame Analysis'. *European Journal of Communication* 26(2): 101-15.