The 16 Days of Activism: Media ethics in news reporting of gender-based violence on *News24* and *IOL*

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DECLARATION

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DEDICATION

To South African communities whose struggles and resilience have too often been neglected by the media, may your stories find the recognition they deserve.

To journalists who approach these issues with integrity and compassion, thank you for highlighting truths that demand attention.

And to all scholars who relentlessly pursue the expansion of knowledge and understanding, this work is dedicated to you.

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a profoundly nuanced social phenomenon that demands comprehensive and contextualised media reporting. However, news coverage predominantly adopts an event-based approach, focusing on violent incidents rather than the broader systemic and historical conditions that sustain GBV. As a result, GBV is often misrepresented as an isolated crime, resulting in coverage that runs the risk of not only obscuring the colonial history of violence against women but also reinforcing patriarchal power structures, marginalising especially African women. To promote ethically accountable GBV reporting, this study suggests that the phenomenon be investigated through a theoretical perspective that integrates social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory, and journalism ethics, taking the contextual nuances of GBV into account. The South African Press Council's Code of Ethics and Conduct for SA Print and Online Media (SA Press Code), which is the foundation of journalism ethics in South Africa, includes general guidelines that also pertain to GBV reporting but does not address GBV-specific challenges such as socio-historical contextualisation and authentic community representation. This study aimed to fill the void by developing a proposed framework for ethically accountable GBV reporting through the lens of the integrated theoretical perspective. Using the framework as a measure, news reports on *News24* and *IOL* from 14 October 2023 to 21 January 2024 (the period before, during, and after the 16 Days of Activism) were analysed following a qualitative approach. The analysis revealed significant ethical lapses, including the absence of survivor-centred approaches, exclusion of community voices, and the failure to provide content warnings or prevention measures. The findings point to a gap in journalists' understanding of the nuanced context. The proposed framework in this study could enhance journalists' sensitivity if integrated in the journalism curriculum, and institutional and professional ethical guidelines.

Key terms

16 Days of Activism; ethically accountable gender-based reporting; gender-based violence (GBV); journalism ethics; media ethics; post-colonial critique; qualitative content analysis; social responsibility theory

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CPF	Community Police Forum
CSA	Child sexual assault
CWGL	Center for Women's Global Leadership
DSD	Department of Social Development
DV	Domestic violence
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GBVCC	Gender-based Command Centre
GBVF	Gender-based violence and femicide
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
HSRC	Human Science Research Council
IM	Independent Media
IOL	Independent Online
IPV	Intimate partner violence
JiG	Journalism Initiative on Gender-Based Violence
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MAT	Media Appeals Tribunal
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NPO	Non-profit organisation
NWU	North-West University
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
SA	South Africa
SANEF	South African National Editors' Forum
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SAPS	South African Police Service
SRC	Student Representative Council
STI	Sexually transmitted infection
TEARS	Transform education about rape and sexual abuse
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children Emergency Fund
UWC	University of the Western Cape
VAW	Violence against women
WCED	Western Cape Educational Department
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZUJ	Zimbabwe Union of Journalists

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AND THE NEED FOR ETHICAL JOURNALISM 1

1.1 Introduction, context, and background 1
1.1.1 Journalistic ethics 2
1.1.2 Gender-based violence 3
1.1.3 News24 and IOL 6

1.2 Problem statement 7

1.3 General research question 8
1.3.1 Specific Research Questions 8

1.4 General research aims 8
1.4.1 Specific research aims 8

1.5 Theoretical arguments 9

1.6 Research approach 10

1.7 Research methods 11
1.7.1 Literature study 11
1.7.2 Empirical study 12
1.7.2.1 Sampling 12
1.7.2.2 Qualitative content analysis 12

1.8 Ethical considerations 13

1.9 Limitations of the study 14

1.10 Significance of the study 14

1.11 Chapter layout 15

CHAPTER 2 EXPLORING GENDER AND THE CONTEXT OF GBV REPORTING IN SOUTH AFRICA 17

2.1 Introduction 17

2.2 Defining gender in a post-colonial context 17
2.2.1 Introducing the colonial and postcolonial context of South African women 19
2.2.2 Masculinity and violence 22

2.3 Conceptualising ‘gender-based’ violence 25

2.4 GBV representation in the media: a brief literature review 29

2.5 Conclusion 32

CHAPTER 3 SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THEORY, POSTCOLONIAL MEDIA THEORY, AND THE SA PRESS CODE 34

3.1 Introduction 34

3.2 Journalistic ethics 35
3.2.1 Background of journalistic ethics 36
3.2.1.1 Intersection of postcolonial critique and social responsibility theory 39
3.2.2 Principles of journalistic ethics 40
3.2.2.1 Truthfulness 41

3.2.2.2 Independence 42
3.2.2.3 Minimising harm 42
3.2.2.4 Accountability 42

3.3 Social responsibility theory 43
3.3.1 Serving the public 44
3.3.2 Media regulation 44
3.3.3 Ethical principles 45
3.3.3.1 Theoretical statement 1 49

3.4 Postcolonial critique and the media 49
3.4.1 African approaches to media ethics 50
3.4.2 Ethical principles 53
3.4.2.1 Theoretical statement 2 57

3.5 Converging social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique 57
3.5.1 Ethical standards 57
3.5.1.1 Accuracy and comprehensiveness with deconstructed power 57
3.5.1.2 Contextualisation and respectful listening 58
3.5.1.3 Representation and redefining public interest 59
3.5.1.4 Social watchdog with expanding accountability 60
3.5.1.5 Minimising harm and maintaining social harmony 61
3.5.1.6 Professional ethics and decolonising communication 61
3.5.1.7 Public platform and decolonised media 62
3.5.2 Proposed ethical framework for GBV media reporting 62

3.6 SA Press Code 63
3.6.1 The SA Press Council and Media Regulation 64
3.6.2 Ethical guidelines of GBV reporting in the SA Press Code 66
3.6.2.1 Privacy, dignity, and reputation 67
3.6.2.2 Discrimination and hate speech 68
3.6.2.3 Children 68
3.6.2.4 Violence and Graphic Content 68
3.6.2.5 Headlines, captions, posters, pictures, and video 69
3.6.2.6 Confidential and anonymous sources 69
3.6.3 Theoretical statement 3 70
3.6.4 Independent Media Press Code 70
3.6.4.1 Privacy 73
3.6.4.2 Children 74
3.6.4.3 Victims of crimes 74
3.6.4.4 Discrimination, racism, and hate speech 75
3.6.4.5 Sources and collecting information 75

3.7 Conclusion 75

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO DETERMINE RESPONSIBLE GBV REPORTING 78

4.1 Introduction 78

4.2 Research approach 78

4.3 Research design 79

4.4 Concepts and constructs 79

4.5 Research methods 81
4.5.1 Literature study 81

4.5.2 Empirical research methods 84
4.5.2.1 Qualitative content analysis 84
4.6 Reliability and validity of the study 93
4.7 Ethical considerations 94
4.8 Conclusion 94

CHAPTER 5 ETHICAL GBV REPORTING BY NEWS24 AND IOL: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS 96
5.1 Introduction 96
5.2 Presentation of data 96
5.2.1 Accuracy and comprehensiveness with deconstructed power 97
5.2.1.1 Source selection 97
5.2.1.2 Misrepresentation 101
5.2.1.3 Accuracy 102
5.2.2 Contextualisation and respectful listening 103
5.2.2.1 Event-based reporting 103
5.2.2.2 Contextualisation 105
5.2.3 Representation and redefining public interest 119
5.2.4 Expanding watchdog role 122
5.2.4.1 Watchdog 123
5.2.4.2 Under-reported GBV 126
5.2.5 Minimising harm and maintaining social harmony 133
5.2.5.1 Stereotypes 134
5.2.5.2 Survivor-centred approach 137
5.2.5.3 Glamorising or promoting violence 145
5.2.5.4 Content warnings 146
5.2.6 Professional ethics and decolonising communication 147
5.2.7 Public platform and decolonised media 149
5.2.8 Privacy, dignity and confidentiality 151
5.2.9 Protecting children 154
5.3 Conclusion 155

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 157
6.1 Introduction 157
6.2 Study synopsis and overview: Research aim and objectives 157
6.3 Ethical framework for socially responsible GBV reporting 159
6.4 Discussion 161
6.5 Application of the framework 163
6.6 Research challenges 164
6.7 Recommendations 166
6.8 Concluding remarks 167

REFERENCE LIST 168

ANNEXURES A: 189

ADDENDA A: 199

ADDENDA B: 202

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Proposed ethical standards of GBV reporting in South Africa	63
Table 3.2	Guidelines for ethical GBV reporting in the SA Press Code	66
Table 3.3	Comparing GBV Reporting Guidelines in the IM Press Code and the SA Press Code	72
Table 4.1	Research design	80
Table 4.2	Theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs	81
Table 4.3	Journalistic ethical principles within the proposed ethical framework	89
Table 4.4	Identified elements of ethical GBV reporting and measuring instruments	91
Table 4.5	Datasheet	92
Table 5.1	Type of sources in *IOL* and *News24*	98
Table 5.2	Contextualisation in *IOL* and *News24* within the research period	107
Table 5.3	Forms of GBV identified within *IOL* and *News24* within the research period	128
Table 5.4	Types of violence within *IOL* and *News24*	129
Table 5.5	GBV identified within *IOL* and *News24*	131
Table 6.1	Specific research questions, aims, research methods, and chapters	160
Table 6.2	Theoretical statements and corresponding chapters	161
Table 6.3	Description of ethical standards within the proposed ethical framework	163

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	Examples of framing utilised by *IOL* in the reporting of GBV May 2024	30
Figure 5.1	Daily number of articles published by *IOL* and *News24* during the research period	106
Figure 5.2	Breakdown of environments where women are murdered as presented in N-40	109
Figure 5.3	Stock image used in I-146 *Free State man handed 20 years of direct imprisonment for raping a girl* (IOL: Pexels/RODNAE Productions, 2023)	118
Figure 5.4	Stock image used in I-30 *Gauteng MEC devastated by death of Echibini learner* and I-118 *Family reeling after son 'wrongfully' accused of rape dies* (IOL: Archives, 2023)	119
Figure 5.5	Stereotypes identified in *IOL* and *News24* during the research period	136
Figure 5.6	Survivor-centred approach in *News24* and *IOL*	140

CHAPTER 1 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AND THE NEED FOR ETHICAL JOURNALISM

1.1 Introduction, context, and background

South Africa has among the highest statistical reports of gender-based violence (GBV) worldwide, with reported femicide five times the global average (African Health Organisation, 2021). The prevalence of physical or sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) among women and girls[1] aged 15 and above is approximately 27% globally, with particularly alarming rates ranging from 33% to 50% in South Africa (Brits, 2022). These statistics reflect only a fraction of GBV crimes, as only 7% are reported to authorities (Sahay, 2021). However, given the inherent challenges in measuring unreported crimes, this figure should be interpreted as an approximation rather than an absolute proportion.

GBV is one of the most common yet underrepresented crimes in contemporary South African media primarily due to its private character (Ndlovu, 2014:6). Perpetrators are often close relations or intimate partners (Ndlovu, 2014:6; Amenaghawon & Salawu, 2020:16347; Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021:124), although GBV is not exclusive to the domestic environment (Bhattacharjee, 2021:132; Espinilla, 2021:275). In the media, journalists often focus on violent incidences of GBV, which negates the country's colonial history of violence against women, presenting these incidents as episodes rather than a social condition (Amisi *et al.,* 2022). In the hierarchy of race and gender, specifically African women have continually been diminished and erased (Sithole & Shai, 2016:117; Pagel, 2021:29). In other words, GBV reporting often reinforces patriarchal power structures by presenting it as an isolated event rather than a systemic issue (see Buthelezi, 2006; Brodie, 2020; Bhattacharjee, 2021). This event-based approach perpetuates harmful stereotypes, such as the existence of an 'ideal victim' based on race or class (see 1.1.2), and fails to meet social responsibility standards; thus, a more nuanced and contextualised approach is needed to address the systemic nature of GBV (Ekweonu, 2020:5; Igyuve *et al.*, 2021:28), which aligns with both social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique. Social responsibility theory emphasises the ethical obligations of media and other public institutions to promote social justice and well-being (Ekweonu, 2020:5; Igyuve *et al.,* 2021:28), whilst postcolonial critique highlights how dominant discourses can perpetuate power imbalances and marginalise certain groups, including women and survivors of GBV (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:43; Fourie, 2011:35).

[1] It should be noted that GBV is not exclusive to biological women or exclusively refers to violence against women (VAW) as it can be experienced by persons across the gender spectrum based on their perceived gender identity and corresponding social expectations within the racialised gender hierarchy introduced through colonial ideals (see 2.3).

This study examines whether the South African online news sites *News24* and *Independent Online*[2] (*IOL*) reported ethically on GBV during the research period, including the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children Campaign (16 Days Campaign) in 2023 (see discussed 1.1.2). This will be evaluated within the proposed ethical framework amalgamating social responsibility theory and postcolonial media theory (also postcolonial critique) and utilising the Code of Ethics and Conduct for SA Print and Online Media (SA Press Code) (South African Press Council, 2022).

1.1.1 Journalistic ethics

Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:25) suggest three broad ethical principles (i.e. protonorms) for journalism ethics: "respect for human dignity, truth-telling and nonviolence". Ward (2019:309) states that universal principles of ethical journalism include impartiality, minimising harm, accuracy, confidentiality, authentication, and serving a democratic public. This study will use social responsibility theory, postcolonial critique, and the SA Press Code (2022) to determine what constitutes ethical GBV reporting during the research period.

Social responsibility theory is a normative theory emphasising the media's obligation to serve the public interest (Ward, 2019:311-312), promote democracy (Fourie, 2011:29), and uphold ethical standards (Igyuve *et al*., 2021:26). This entails reporting responsibly on social justice issues like GBV, exposing societal norms that perpetuate it, and providing marginalised voices a platform (Ward, 2015:369; Ekweonu, 2020:5; Igyuve *et al.*, 2021:27-28). Professional ethical codes like the SA Press Code (2022) provide the framework for fulfilling this responsibility (Babran & Ataherian, 2019:3).

Ethical codes play a pivotal role in journalism, particularly within the social responsibility theory framework, which emphasises the media's obligation to provide accurate, unbiased, and representative information to the public, ensuring informed civic participation in a democratic government (Culver, 2017:479; Ward, 2019:312). The South African Press Council (SA Press Council, 2023), an "independent co-regulatory mechanism" set up for print and online media, has adopted the SA Press Code to guide journalists in gathering and distributing news as well as aid the Press Ombud and Appeals Panel to reach decisions on complaints from the public. The SA Press Code (2022) upholds constitutional rights and provides a necessary framework built on normative ethics.

While adherence to the SA Press Code (2022) is voluntary, most South African media outlets uphold its principles and guidelines. Publications like *IOL* supplement the Press Code (2022) with internal journalistic

[2] While most major media outlets in South Africa subscribe to the authority of the SA Press Council, there are exceptions. The Independent Media Group, which includes *IOL*, withdrew from the SA Press Council in 2016, opting for its own press code (Satchwell *et al.,* 2021:280). Their membership was re-established in January 2024 (SANEF, 2024). The group was expelled from the Press Council in October 2024 (SA Press Council, 2024). Given this development within the research timeframe, this study will explore the potential differences between these press codes to understand the varying ethical expectations placed on journalists regarding GBV reporting (see 3.6).

codes to provide more specific ethical guidelines for reporting GBV crimes and address any areas of potential ambiguity in the Press Code. Notably, the Press Code does not explicitly address GBV reporting, highlighting the need for supplementary guidelines to ensure sensitive and ethical coverage of these issues.

Although global media ethics such as social responsibility theory is generally viewed from a Western perspective (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:33; Rao, 2010:103; Fourie, 2011:36-35; Ward, 2015:369), the basic principles of human dignity, truth, and nonviolence are recognised across many different cultures (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004:25: Christians, 2010:16) and can be used as "universal ethical concepts" within a social responsibility framework (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004:21). Wasserman (2010:86) however, highlights the need to interpret these ethical values from a local perspective concerning local histories of cultural, political, and social struggle as well as contemporary power relations. Plaisance *et al.* (2012:15) echo this view by asserting a need for caution with universalising ethics-based claims. Wasserman (2006:87; 2010:86) and Fourie (2011:35) suggest postcolonial theory as a critical mode of inquiry; however, they concur that it is not an exhaustive and comprehensive ethical framework. This is not an attack or rejection of Western theories but the recognition that the universality cannot be assumed (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:43; Rao, 2010:99) as patterns of journalists' ethical outlooks are related to the structural system in which they operate (Plaisance *et al.*, 2012:15).

Postcolonial critique critically examines how media perpetuates and reinforces colonial power structures and cultural hegemony (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:43; Fourie, 2011:35). It argues that the media often reinforces negative stereotypes and marginalises Non-western cultures and voices (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:37; Fourie, 2011:35) which perpetuate power inequalities among genders as enforced and normalised by colonial dependency (Cunha, 2019:103). While social responsibility theory emphasises the media's positive role in promoting democratic values (Fourie, 2011:29; Ward, 2015:369), postcolonial critique emphasises the need for the media to be aware of their own biases and assumptions, actively working to promote diverse voices and perspectives (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:41).

1.1.2 Gender-based violence

As suggested by the United Nations' (UN, 1993) definition of GBV, researchers have found that violence, whether implicit or explicit, seems to fall into four categories: physical, sexual, psychological, or financial (Ndlovu, 2014:6; King & Sifaki, 2019:45; Amenaghawon & Salawu, 2020:16347). This includes related behaviours that may force someone to live in perpetual fear (Ekweonu, 2020:2).

The nature of GBV is rooted in unequal power relations and normative societal role expectations associated with gender identity within a specific society (King & Sifaki, 2019:45; Enaifoghe *et al.,*

2021:125). GBV is thus an extreme manifestation of gender inequality, referring to any form of violence linked to gender identity, corresponding social expectations, and opportunities (Ndlovu, 2014:16; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:2; Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021:125; Pröll & Magin, 2022:118). Likewise, South African media generally draws on traditional notions of 'suitable' gender roles to represent GBV (Ndlovu, 2014:7; Mbandlwa, 2020:6755; Harrison, 2021:16).

For the purpose of this study, GBV is defined as explicit or implicit harm perpetuated against a person based on their gender identity or perceived gender identity corresponding to social expectations and opportunities and encompasses a wide range of behaviours, including physical, sexual, psychological, and financial abuse (King & Sifaki, 2019:45; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:2; Enaifoghe *et al.,* 2021:125; Proll & Magin, 2022:118) (see 2.3 concerning the operational definition).

Globally, GBV affects women in vastly disproportionate terms of frequency, intensity, and brutality compared to men because of their unequal position in society reinforced and perpetuated by structural patriarchy (Ndlovu, 2014:18; King & Sifaki, 2019:44; Nnaemeka & Ezeabasili, 2020:20; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:2). In this gendered hierarchy, specifically African women have continually been diminished and erased (Sithole & Shai, 2016:117; Pagel, 2021:29). The current problem of GBV cannot be adequately analysed without exploring the sexual and gender dimensions introduced by colonialism[3]. Pagel (2021:36) and George (2020:5) argue that the European colonisation of South Africa established patriarchal ideologies in society, which created systemic inequalities for women that persist today. The combination of traditional patriarchy along with the imposed colonial forms of patriarchy resulted in entrenched gender discriminatory practices (Ndlovu, 2014:26; Bagai & Faimau, 2021; Enaifoghe *et al*., 2021:145). These practices are evident in the language and frames utilised by journalists (see Ndlovu, 2014; Carratalá, 2016; Brodie, 2020; Bhattacharjee, 2021; Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021; Harrison, 2021; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021).

Media coverage tends to disproportionately focus on cases involving white, attractive, heterosexual women from respectable backgrounds, often framing them as ideal victims. In contrast, cases concerning women of colour and those from disadvantaged backgrounds receive less media attention (Hunt & Jaworska, 2019:3). A well-known example is the extensive media attention given to the case of Olympic athlete Oscar Pistorius, who murdered his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp. According to Anders (2023), Steenkamp's death received more news coverage than all other South African femicides that occurred that year combined.

[3] While South Africa is the focus of this study, one should acknowledge that colonialism has had, and continues to have, a global impact. As a result, colonial ideologies have similarly shaped gender constructs in many societies worldwide.

The coverage of the murder of 17-year-old Anene Booysen, 12 days prior to Steenkamp, was notably different. As Boonzaier (2023:87) points out, the media emphasised Steenkamp's glamorous life in photographs and footage, while Booysen was reduced to a "single grainy, unflattering image" and a focus on the "state of her dead body" rather than the brutality of her rape and murder (Boonzaier, 2017 in Boonzaier, 2023:87). Boonzaier further observes that media reports hinted at Booysen's "'complicity' in her own violation" by linking her murder to her allegedly drinking with young men (Boonzaier, 2023:87). Similarly, Boonzaier highlights the story of Karabo Mokoena's case was not framed around her life or aspirations, but rather in a way that suggested her complicity in the crime and emphasised the state of her lifeless body. This reflects broader media tendencies regarding the portrayal of victims, reinforcing the notion that the "ideal victim" conforms to specific racial and socio-economic characteristics (Boonzaier, 2023:86-87). The media's coverage of the cases thus differs markedly, which emphasises the point that crimes against white women, specifically those considered as 'ideal victims', get more attention.

Regarding GBV, two types of contextualisation are used within the news: episodic and thematic (McManus & Dorfman, 2002:6; Carratalá, 2016:43-44; Espinilla, 2021:275; Ali & Pasha, 2022:5). Episodic reporting, or event-based reporting, treats occurrences of GBV as news items, neglecting its structural and socio-historical context (Espinilla, 2021:275; Carratalá, 2016:43). This would often present GBV as crime and court reporting. Episodic reporting discredits and denies that GBV is a structural issue due to a patriarchal society (Bagai & Faimau, 2021:32; Espinilla, 2021:290) and inadvertently perpetuates common misconceptions (Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:13; Harrison, 2021:67) including who is at risk and who is a perpetrator of violence (Brodie, 2020:137; Bhattacharjee, 2021:132). Thematic reporting, however, reveals the more profound social issue of GBV and connections between different cases through contextualisation (Carratalá, 2016:44; Espinilla, 2021:275) such as statistics, social narratives, and causes (McManus & Dorfman, 2002:6; Ali & Pasha, 2022:5). This approach allows a better understanding of GBV as a societal issue (Carratalá, 2016:44). If the media does not include structural or socio-historical background, it can weaken efforts to tackle the problem of GBV (Buthelezi, 2006:502; Pikanegore & Mpofu, 2021:122; Pröll & Magin, 2022:128), which is the purpose of the 16 Days Campaign. The 16 Days Campaign is an annual global initiative running from 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) to 10 December (Human Rights Day) to advocate for the prevention and eradication of gender-based violence (GBV) (UN Women, 2021; CWGL, 2022). Launched in 1991 by the American Centre for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), it has since served as a key organising strategy worldwide. The UN supports it through the UNiTE by 2030 to End Violence Against Women initiative (UN

Women, 2022). In South Africa, the campaign emphasises ending violence against women (VAW) and children, reinforcing the use of GBV as a term closely linked to VAW (South African Government, 2023).

In examining media coverage of GBV, it is essential to consider South Africa's deep-rooted history of colonialism and apartheid, which continues to influence current social power structures. In this study, colonialism refers specifically to the coloniality of power that encompasses control over various aspects of society including authority, gender, sexuality, and knowledge (Chiumbu, 2022:35). Colonialism in South Africa was a period when European powers, especially the Dutch and British, took control of the region, imposing foreign rule, disrupting local communities, and exploiting land and resources for their own benefit (Chiumbu, 2022:35). Apartheid, a regime deeply rooted in the hegemonic European colonisation of the country, refers to the systematic policy of racial segregation and discrimination enforced in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. Though the dawn of democracy in 1994 brought an end to apartheid, violence by the dominant group against the disempowered was legitimised through both cultural and legal practices (George, 2020:3-5; Pagel, 2021:36). Consequently, remnants of this discrimination have taken root in the societal power structures that persist today, evident in the prevalence of GBV across South Africa (George, 2020:3-5; Pagel, 2021:36) (see 2.2.2).

Coetzee and Du Toit (2018:216) argue that the "current problem of sexual violence in South Africa cannot be separated from the sexual dimension of colonial violence." Building on this, the researcher argues that any meaningful analysis of contemporary GBV requires an exploration of the gender and sexual dynamics that colonialism introduced. Like other African countries (see Cunha, 2019:105; Lake & Shockley, 2022:68), South Africa continues to experience colonial aftereffects, particularly in the persistence of dependency relations, gender norms, and unequal wealth distribution. When the media frames GBV as private issues or personal tragedies, it risks reinforcing these power structures and preserving the status quo. This narrative suggests that violence arises from specific circumstances (Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:13; Pröll & Magin, 2022:118) and subtly implies that victims are, to some extent, responsible for their fate (Bhattacharjee, 2021:137; Espinilla, 2021:275).

1.1.3 News24 and *IOL*

To comprehensively examine media reporting on the 16 Days Campaign, two prominent South African online news sites, *News24* and *IOL*, were selected as primary data sources. According to the South African Readership Statistics for online news publications, *News24* (news24.com) and *IOL* (iol.co.za) consistently rank as the country's most frequently visited online news platforms (Letsoalo, 2022). In 2020, *News24* boasted a readership of 12.3 million, while *IOL* had a readership of 7.3 million (MyBroadband, 2020). In May 2023, *News24* remained the most visited news website in South Africa, followed closely by *IOL* (Similarweb, 2023). The purposeful selection of *News24* and *IOL* stems from their widespread readership,

making them representative of the broader South African news landscape on GBV-related coverage. Both platforms cater to a diverse audience reflective of the country's demographic composition.

Online news platforms, with their vast and immediate reach, play a pivotal role in shaping public discourse. Their ability to rapidly disseminate information, foster audience engagement through comment sections and social media shares, and leverage algorithm-driven content visibility amplifies their influence (Williams, 2024). Consequently, they do not merely reflect societal attitudes but actively shape them, reinforcing or challenging dominant narratives, influencing policy debates, and shaping public perceptions of critical social issues (Robertson & Williams, 2024).

Given their substantial reach, these online news sites bear a significant responsibility in shaping public discourse on GBV. With their wide readership, they have the power to inform, educate, and influence (Wake & Farrer, 2016) societal attitudes toward GBV. Therefore, critically evaluating their reporting practices is essential to ensure alignment with ethical standards and to foster a constructive and responsible dialogue on GBV.

1.2 Problem statement

GBV literature and scholarly work on GBV media coverage globally – including in South Africa – point to episodic, event-based journalism, which fails to consider the broader social and historical context of GBV, particularly its roots in the country's colonial history (Amisi *et al.,* 2022). Media narratives often reinforce patriarchal power structures (Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:13; Pröll & Magin, 2022:118), lack the necessary context (Buthelezi, 2006:502), and perpetuate stereotypes about victims/survivors and perpetrators (Brodie, 2020:137; Bhattacharjee, 2021:132). While the South African Press Code includes several guidelines applicable to GBV reporting, it does not include GBV-specific principles, which could be seen as a key factor in ensuring ethical coverage. This study aims to fill the void by developing a focused ethical framework for responsible GBV media coverage that could supplement the Press Code. Through the lens of social responsibility theory, GBV reporting in South Africa often fails to fulfil its ethical obligation, lacking the necessary context to present GBV as a systemic issue rather than an isolated event (Ward, 2015:369; Ekweonu, 2020:5; Igyuve *et al.,* 2021:27-28). Postcolonial critique further suggests that such reporting often reinforces harmful power structures (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:43; Fourie, 2011:35), ultimately undermining the intended impact of initiatives like the 16 Days Campaign. This study explores key ethical shortcomings identified through social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique in GBV coverage and proposes a theoretical framework that encourages contextualised and socially responsible reporting. This framework seeks to address the ethical gaps, offering a guideline for improving GBV reporting in South Africa to foster a more nuanced public understanding of this persistent social issue.

1.3 General research question

From the above problem statement, the following general research question is formulated:

What constitutes ethical journalism in cases of gender-based violence (GBV) within the framework of social responsibility and postcolonial media theory as reported in News24 and IOL during the 16 Days Campaign 2023?

1.3.1 Specific Research Questions

SRQ1: *How do social responsibility- and postcolonial media theories contribute to defining ethical journalism in South Africa regarding GBV?*

SRQ2: *What expectations does the Press Code place on journalists in the context of reporting GBV?*

SRQ3: What key elements should a framework for GBV news reporting include to align with social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory, and the guidelines of the Press Code?

SRQ4: *To what extent did News24 practise ethical journalism in the context of GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024)?*

SRQ5: *To what extent did IOL practise ethical journalism in the context of GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024)?*

1.4 General research aims

To determine what constitutes ethical journalism in gender-based violence (GBV) within the framework of social responsibility and postcolonial media theory during the 16 Days Campaign, as reported in *News24* and *IOL* in 2023.

1.4.1 Specific research aims

SRA1: To determine how social responsibility theory and postcolonial media theory contribute to defining ethical journalism in South Africa regarding GBV through a thorough literature review.

SRA2: To determine what expectations the Press Code places on journalists in the context of reporting GVB through qualitative content analysis of the SA Press Code.

SRA3: To develop an ethical framework for GBV reporting in South Africa by analysing the contributions of social responsibility theory, postcolonial critique, and the SA Press Code to journalistic practice through literature review.

SRA4: To determine the extent to which *News24* practised ethical journalism on GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024) through qualitative content analysis.

SRA5: To determine the extent to which *IOL* practised ethical journalism on GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024) through qualitative content analysis.

1.5 Theoretical arguments

Under the umbrella of journalistic ethics, the study uses social responsibility theory, postcolonial critique, and the SA Press Code as theoretical points of departure to determine what constitutes ethical GBV reporting.

- Social responsibility theory is a normative media theory that prescribes ethical frameworks and professional standards for journalists, emphasising their obligation to serve the public interest (Ekweonu, 2020:5; Igyuve *et al*., 2021:28). Social responsibility theory outlines vital ethical principles for journalists, emphasising their role in serving the public good within a democratic society (Fourie, 2011:29; Ward, 2015:369). Ethical journalism within social responsibility theory requires the following journalistic ethical principles: accuracy and comprehensiveness, contextualisation, representation, public interest, serving as a social watchdog, independence, professional ethics, minimising harm, and journalism as a public platform (see 3.3.3 regarding discussion of social responsibility theory)
- Within postcolonial media theory (also referred to as postcolonial critique) the media should be aware of its biases and actively promote diverse voices (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:41). This perspective emphasises challenging power structures, recognising cultural identities, and the media's role in social change. In South Africa, colonial legacies embedded in media perpetuate gender inequalities. Postcolonial theory suggests the following journalistic ethical principles from postcolonial theory: deconstructing colonial influences and power, expanding the watchdog role, redefining public interest, respectful listening and empowerment, balancing accountability and harmony, and focusing on communal relationships and ethical communication (see 3.4.2 regarding discussion of postcolonial critique)
- Although not explicitly stated, the SA Press Code (2022) provides a clear framework of ethical expectations that can be applied to GBV reporting. Beyond the fundamental tenets of journalism—accuracy, fairness, acting independently, and a variety of perspectives—ethical GBV reporting demands special attention to vulnerable groups such as marginalised communities still experiencing the aftermath of colonial gender hierarchies. Guidelines include ethical standards regarding privacy, dignity and reputation, discrimination and hate speech, children, violence and graphic content, and confidential sources (see discussed 3.6).

1.6 Research approach

Qualitative research (see discussed 4.2), as an interpretive approach (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012:6; McLeod, 2019), seeks to understand meaning within specific contexts (Yilmaz, 2013:318-319; Hill & Wheat, 2019:34-35). It assumes social phenomena are too complex for mere reduction into variables (Yilmaz, 2013:311-312). Unlike quantitative methods, which rely on statistical analysis (Yilmaz, 2013:311), qualitative research provides deeper insights (Rozas & Klein, 2010:397; Yilmaz, 2013:314-315) and can answer questions that quantitative methods cannot (Busetto *et al*., 2021:8). Its rich, descriptive data enhances validity and allows for a nuanced understanding of issues such as GBV reporting (Rozas & Klein, 2010:397; Yilmaz, 2013:314-315; Hill & Wheat, 2019:34). Thus, it is the most suitable approach for this study's theoretical and contextual background.

This study will utilise literature reviews (see 4.4.1) and qualitative content analysis (see 4.4.2), which focus on detail and depth rather than mere quantification, thus forming a deeper understanding of research issues as it provides far more detailed and descriptive data (Rozas & Klein, 2010:397; Yilmaz, 2013:314-315).

A multi-method approach, informed by the concept of triangulation, was implemented as a measure for data monitoring to ensure reliability, validity, and trustworthiness as part of the research design (see 4.5). According to Carter e*t al.*, (2014:545, citing Patton, 1999), triangulation refers to "the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena". The method reduces biases in sampling, procedural bias and researcher bias, thus increasing validity and credibility (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021:3-5). While the study initially framed this approach within the concept of triangulation, it is more accurately described as a multi-method strategy, given the interconnected nature of the selected methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and sources (Carter *et al.*, 2014:545; Natow, 2020:161-162).

- Methodological approach: different, yet complimentary, methods were used to gather information, namely literature reviews and qualitative content analysis.
- Theoretical approach: social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique were combined under the theoretical premise of journalistic ethics; thus, different theories were used to analyse and identify data. Although these perspectives offer distinct analytical insights, they remain aligned within the broader humanities/social sciences paradigm, reinforcing rather than independently verifying findings. This was used in conjunction with the SA Press Code to develop a proposed ethical framework of reporting.
- Source approach: Data was gathered from theoretical and empirical sources, such as academic journals, books, news archives, dissertations, journalistic ethical codes and

guidelines, campaign and advocacy literature, legal and judicial sources, public and academic databases, and online sources.

While this study does not achieve full triangulation in the strictest sense, the multi-method approach ensures a well-rounded and analytically rigorous examination of the topic.

1.7 Research methods

1.7.1 Literature study

A thorough literature study is essential in research as it establishes theoretical frameworks, builds conceptual models, advances knowledge, and guides theory development (Onwuegbuzie *et al.,* 2012:1; Lim *et al.,* 2022:507). According to Paul and Criado (2020:6), a literature study aims to critically analyse existing literature and identify relevant frameworks, contexts, and methodologies while pinpointing gaps leading to new research directions. A literature study goes further than this by examining prior work, challenging assumptions, and stimulating theory development (Post *et al.,* 2020:352; Kraus *et al.,* 2022:2577). This study conducted two literature reviews to establish the contextual and theoretical frameworks for ethical GBV reporting in South Africa. Chapter 2 explores GBV reporting in the postcolonial context, while Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical frameworks of social responsibility theory, postcolonial critique, and the SA Press Code. These frameworks informed the content analysis of GBV reporting by *IOL* and *News24*.

Academic journals, books, databases (i.e. EBSCOhost, WorldCat, Sabinet, NWU library database, Google Scholar), and internet sources were studied from which to develop the theoretical and contextual background. Social responsibility theory is frequently applied in African journalism studies (e.g., Babran & Atatherian, 2019; Rodny-Gumede, 2015; Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022), while postcolonial critiques were explored by Wasserman (2006; 2010) and Rao (2010), emphasising the need to contextualise media ethics in South Africa. Wasserman (2006; 2010), Rao (2010), Fourie (2011), and Ward (2015) argue that social responsibility theory on its own is not sufficient to evaluate and advance media ethics in a South African context and thus introduced postcolonial critique to make the theoretical framework more comprehensive. Although the literature on the postcolonial critique of media ethics seems limited to these researchers, many South African master's and doctoral studies discuss GBV (see De Villiers, 2018; Brodie, 2019; Kabaya, 2021; Ngubane, 2021; Mofokeng, 2021; Braam, 2022; Mbele, 2022) and the media's role in the construction of gender identity (see Isrealstam, 2014; Phiri, 2014; Mpemnyama, 2020; Aguera, 2021) and race (see Naicker, 2021; Sekumana, 2021; Shezi, 2021) within the context of post-colonialism. Informative academic articles for understanding the nature of GBV in South Africa within the postcolonial media context are 'The Life and Death of Anene Booysen: Colonial Discourse, Gender-based Violence and Media Representations' (Boonzaier, 2017) and 'Spectacularising Narratives on Femicide in South Africa: A

decolonial feminist analysis' (Boonzaier, 2023). *Women Journalists in South Africa: Democracy in the Age of Social Media,* edited by Daniels and Skinner (2022), proved instructive book as it analyses race, class, and gender in South African journalism (Rodny-Gumede, 2022:15-29) and women journalists in South Africa reporting on sexual violence and GBV (Chiumbu, 2022:31-47).

Previous studies on GBV in the 16 Days Campaign (Media Monitoring Project, 1998; Harries & Bird, 2005; Buthelezi, 2006) are outdated, use different theoretical frameworks, and have limited scope. Silima (2019) provides a more comprehensive research period but remains within a framing theory approach. These studies all highlight increased media attention during activism periods yet lack critical analysis and context. This creates a gap in research on the Campaign through a media ethics lens. Buthelezi (2006) found that victim narratives disempower survivors. More recent research, like Brodie (2020), advocates for ethical, survivor-centred reporting, linking this to social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique, which examine media's role in reinforcing power imbalances.

Though the above studies aided the understanding of different concepts within the conceptual and theoretical framework relevant to this study, no similar study was identified within the South African context.

1.7.2 Empirical study

1.7.2.1 Sampling

The researcher intentionally selected *News24* and *IOL*, South Africa's two most-read online news outlets, to analyse media coverage of the 16 Days Campaign (see 1.1.3). The study examines news items published between 14 October 2023 and 21 January 2024, encompassing six weeks before, during, and after the campaign. This period was deliberately chosen to assess whether the campaign influences reporting patterns and to evaluate the extent to which coverage remains event-driven rather than engaging with the broader systemic and historical context of GBV.

The inclusion criteria (see 4.5.2.1.1) for articles included in the sample are that they were published on *News24* or *IOL* between 14 October 2023 and 21 January 2024, identified using the keyword 'gender-based violence' on the respective website, adhered to the operational definition of GBV in the study, and aligned with the South African context. A total of 208 articles formed part of the sample—158 published by *IOL* and 50 by *News24*.

1.7.2.2 Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is a "systematic", "rule-guided" (Mayring, 2000:2; Forman & Damschroder, 2007:39) and "theory-based" (Mayring, 2019:11) approach. It is used to compress "mass amounts of text" into content categories based on "explicit coding rules" (Stemler, 2000:1; Forman & Damschroder,

2007:40; Mayring, 2019:7) in an attempt to identify “meanings and patterns” (Patton, 2002:453; Devi Prasad, 2019:7) that guide further interpretation of data (Devi Prasad, 2019:7). The method requires the researcher to looks at the sample in detail without rash quantification (Mayring, 2000:2), which helps form an in-depth understanding of research issues (Forman & Damschroder, 200742) as it provides more detailed and descriptive data (Yilmaz, 2013:314-315; Linström & Marais, 2014:26). The researcher’s extensive engagement with the content allows insight into what is stated, but also what is left out or implied (Linström & Marais, 2014:27).

The researcher aims to understand how ethical GBV reporting is practised in this context-bound scenario through deductive (themes identified in the literature study) and inductive (deduced from the material) approaches to methods of thematic content analysis, a form of qualitative content analysis. They will do this by comparing whether news reporting by *News24* and *IOL* adhered to the expectations of the SA Press Code, and the principles in social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique concerning GBV reporting.

During a preliminary search on the individual publication’s websites using the key term ‘gender-based violence,’ *News24* had about 150 articles from 14 October 2022 to 21 January 2023. *IOL* had approximately 280 articles for the exact search term on their website during the search period. For the stated research period, 379 articles were initially identified as part of the population – 299 articles by *IOL* and 80 by *News24*. Based on the adherence to the operational definition of GBV (see 2.3) and the limitation to the South African context, articles were accordingly eliminated to form the sample. A total of 208 articles remained – 158 articles by *IOL* and 50 articles by *News24*.

Utilising the ethical considerations identified within the theoretical framework of social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory and the SA Press Code (South African Press Council, 2022), a thematic coding sheet was composed on which the identified samples will be coded. A coding sheet containing the categories/themes/concepts identified in the literature study as relevant to the ethical dimensions was compiled. Additionally, news items were coded according to the genre, the form of GBV identified, and whether the article was published during the 16 Days Campaign (see 4.5.2.1).

1.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical research aims to cause no harm to participants and contributes to the study and broader field of research. Thus, the researcher should consider whether the chosen research methods will potentially cause harm or gain to the participants of this study (Rid, 2024:191–192). This involves mitigating risks that harm the subjects' reputation, dignity, or privacy (Rid, 2024:193).

It is important to note that the study does not intend to study GBV as a phenomenon, but the reporting thereof. Therefore, the study will not include interviews with gender study experts, individuals mentioned in articles, or other stakeholders, as it is not the aim of the study. Although expert, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with journalists, editors and copytasters were originally part of the study, it was later determined that this would expand the scope beyond what is required for a master's dissertation.

The data collected through content analysis is within the public domain as it is published on publicly accessible platforms, *News24* and *IOL*. Therefore, the researcher did not need to obtain additional informed consent before accessing the content utilised for qualitative content analysis.

The study only resumed empirical research with ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the North-West University, South Africa. The final ethics approval letter was awarded by the NWU Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) on 23 October 2024 following the amendment of the study scope to "no risk" (see Addenda A).

The data will be stored in secure, password-protected cloud storage compliant with data privacy regulations and accessible only to the researcher for five years.

1.9 Limitations of the study

The study will focus on news items published between 14 October 2023 and 21 January 2024, limiting the research period to six weeks before, after, and during the 16 Days Campaign. This period allows for comparing GBV reporting before, during, and after the campaign to assess the extent to which the selected online news sites rely on event-based reporting. It, however, does not allow the researcher to assess GBV reporting over an extended period.

Additionally, the study will focus exclusively on two South African online news sites, *News24* and *IOL*, which may limit the generalisability of the findings. However, the nature and readership of these online news sites ensure that the findings remain authoritative. The study also examines the ethical frameworks in which *IOL* and *News24* function without delving into the independent editorial practices and ethical codes of the constituent publications. A detailed analysis of the intra-outlet differences falls outside the scope of this study; however, the differences should be acknowledged. Notably, while internal practices might differ, journalists are still bound by the overarching editorial policies of the parent company.

1.10 Significance of the study

Previous South African research (Media Monitoring Project, 1998; Harries & Bird, 2005; Buthelezi, 2006) analysing the media's contribution to the 16 Days Campaign is nearly 20 years old, does not use the same theoretical framework, and is limited in the time frame. Additionally, recent studies like Silima's (2019)

which have explored femicide reporting in an expanded research period in the context of the 16 Days Campaign have not applied the chosen theoretical frameworks. The study's significance is, however, not merely academic but could yield insight into how practising journalists could improve GBV reporting within the South African context. By developing a proposed ethical framework for GBV reporting, the study aims to provide valuable resources that can be adopted by organisations such as the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) and inform potential amendments to the SA Press Code, thereby promoting responsible journalism that effectively addresses GBV issues. This, in turn, can bolster collective efforts to address and combat GBV, leading to positive societal change.

1.11 Chapter layout

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background: 16 Days of Activism and the need for ethical journalism

- The chapter introduced the theoretical and contextual background and provided an overview of the study, research questions, problem statements, objectives, main arguments, methodology, and significance.

Chapter 2: Exploring gender and the context of GBV reporting in South Africa

- The chapter will explore existing literature to aid in understanding the portrayal of GBV in South African media through a post-colonial lens. By analysing media representations, the researcher aimed to understand how historical and social power structures influence how GBV is portrayed and the ethical responsibilities of journalists reporting on GBV.

Chapter 3: Social responsibility theory, postcolonial critique, and the SA Press Code

- The chapter will explore existing literature to determine the ethical responsibilities of South African journalists reporting on GBV within the normative framework of the social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory[4] (also postcolonial critique), and the journalistic ethics framework as represented in the South African Press Council's Code of Ethics and Conduct for SA Print and Online Media (SA Press Code, 2022).

Chapter 4: Methodological approach to determine responsible GBV reporting

- The chapter will describe and motivate the research paradigm and methodology, enabling the empirical part of the study. The researcher will explain the chosen research methods, namely

[4] The researcher uses the terms 'postcolonial media theory' and 'postcolonial critique' interchangeably to refer to the application of postcolonial thought to media analysis. While postcolonial critique is a broader analytical approach, within this study the usage specifically pertains to its engagement with media representation, production, and reception. Therefore, within this study it will be used interchangeably based on context.

qualitative content analysis and literature study, and their relevance and applicability to the study. Notably, the researcher offers a detailed explanation of how the data for the qualitative content analysis was gathered.

Chapter 5: Description and analysis of the empirical data: Determining what is ethical

- The chapter will present the empirical data analysis and research findings. The findings will be described, discussed, and placed in the theoretical framework to determine what is considered ethical GBV reporting.

Chapter 6: Conclusions and Recommendations

- The chapter will summarise the study by highlighting the critical issues addressed in each chapter and how these relate to the research objectives. It will indicate how the research questions were answered and whether/how the objectives were reached. It will indicate limitations within the study and provide recommendations for further investigation.

CHAPTER 2 EXPLORING GENDER AND THE CONTEXT OF GBV REPORTING IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 Introduction

In Chapter 2, the researcher delves deeper into how GBV is portrayed in the South African media. By exploring media representations, the researcher aims to understand how historical and social power structures influence how GBV is portrayed, and what the ethical responsibilities of journalists are in the postcolonial context.

To establish a strong foundation, the current chapter first defines gender within the postcolonial context. Following this, it explores the specific meaning of "gender-based violence" in South Africa. This will help inform the development of explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria for the study's empirical analysis. Lastly, the section will address GBV reporting within the South African media landscape, examining how the postcolonial context shapes these representations and what measures the literature recommends for a more ethical and responsible portrayal of GBV in South African media.

2.2 Defining gender in a post-colonial context

In 2007, Gqola (2007:117) argued that unless the truths and histories of gendered violence in South Africa are confronted, the country will remain trapped in the ongoing scourge of GBV. Judged by the work of research more than a decade later, Gqola's argument rings true. Several researchers still highlight the influence of colonial histories on gendered violence. Coetzee and Du Toit (2018:216) assert that sexual violence in South Africa is deeply linked to colonial violence, which imposed rigid gender roles and entrenched systemic inequalities. Cunha (2019:105) further highlights that gendered violence persists in postcolonial societies, reflecting the enduring impact of colonial rule. Violence within postcolonial societies thus still mainly afflicts women (see 1.1.2).

The term 'gender' is often used interchangeably when referring to biological sex and gender identity (Udry, 1994:561; Brands *et al.*, 2022:5). Gender theorists, however, state that "gender is a social construct" humanity uses to organise the "understanding of the social world", and therefore, intrinsically linked to other structures such as ethnicity, religion, nationality, race, class and sexuality (Butler, 1988:526-527; Udry, 1994:561; Oyeˇwùmí, 2005:99; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010:1; Morrell *et al.*, 2012:23; Durrani & Halai, 2020:69; Agbaje, 2021:1281; Brands *et al*., 2022:6; Ntshangase & Matabane, 2022:198-199). Thus, as suggested by Brands *et al*. (2022:32), masculinity and femininity do not necessarily function as discrete, binary categories but as separate dimensions of a spectrum.

Brands *et al.* (2022:6) state that gender schemas construct socially acceptable "gender roles" that consist of shared beliefs about characteristics and behaviours that are assumed typical of and appropriate for 'women' and 'men' and supported by gendered norms. Some researchers, such as Butler (1988:526-527) and Agbaje (2021:1281), equate these gender roles to "acts" or "performances" as they represent the "re-enactment" and "re-experiencing" of a set of meanings already socially established within a cultural space. According to Agbaje (2021:1280), gender is thus a matrix of performed identities, behaviours and power relations associated with a specific sex (male/female). The notion of gender identity, therefore, lies in cultural understanding of what gender is (Oyeˇwùmí, 2005:106) and is constructed and reconstructed over time as cultures change (Oyeˇwùmí, 2005:111).

The strict binary understanding of gender was reinforced through colonial structures (Stratton, 1994:7). Scholars argue that Western societies have historically framed gender as a fundamental organising principle, characterised by a rigid male-female binary often tied to hierarchical power dynamics (Oyeˇwùmí, 2005:99; Aniekwu, 2006:144; Moagi & Mtombeni, 2019:12; Agbaje, 2021:1277; Persard, 2021:128). Oyeˇwùmí (2005:100) states that this distinction created the social constructs of 'woman' and 'man,' deeply rooted in the Western assumption that physical attributes inherently determine social roles and identities. The underlying assumption, often referred to as "body-reasoning" or "bio-logic" (Oyeˇwùmí 2005:100), has fuelled the simplistic notion that gender is a natural and universal organising principle, with male dominance as its inevitable outcome (Samudzi & Mannell, 2016:3; Al-Wazedi, 2021:156; Agbaje, 2021:1282). Although the researcher acknowledges that this construct is often linked to the observable biological and anatomical differences between sexes (Ntshangase & Matabane, 2022:192), they cannot agree with this argument. Rather, the researcher supports the argument by a myriad of researchers who agree that gender is not based on biology but created and maintained through cultural norms and social interaction (Butler, 1988:526-527; Udry, 1994:561; Oyeˇwùmí, 2005:99; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010:1; Morrell *et al.,* 2012:23; Durrani & Halai, 2020:69; Agbaje, 2021:1281; Brands *et al.,* 2022:6; Ntshangase & Matabane 2022:198-199). Based on the above, this study argues that the notion of gender identity lies in cultural understanding of what gender is and cannot be separated from social and historical context.

For simplicity's sake, the study will use the term 'women' to refer to people who identify as female. This includes trans women and femme/feminine-identifying persons. Similarly, 'man' will be used to refer to people who identify as male and would include trans men and masc./masculine-identifying persons. This is due to news media often not acknowledging the fluidity of gender identity, taking an over-simplified approach. The researcher's aim is not to diminish individual gender identity or ignore the nuanced nature

of gender as discussed above, but to simplify language as the focus of the study is GBV reporting in South African media studies and not gender studies.

2.2.1 Introducing the colonial and postcolonial context of South African women

As gender is a social construct (see 2.2.1), it must vary across cultures and periods (Oyeˇwùmí, 2005:111). Thus, there was a specific period in each culture where their concept of gender was constructed (Oyeˇwùmí, 2005:111). A problem, however, arises when attempting to define gender within the pre-colonial context as many historical texts not merely neglect African women (Moagi & Mtombeni, 2019:2), but their existence is often conceptually ignored (Bradford, 1996:352; Zeleza, 2005:207; Agbaje, 2021:1279; Ntshangase & Matabane, 2022:192). These researchers note that historical texts reflect Western stereotypes: men are gender neutral, conceptualised not as men but as people, and women are gendered beings defined by their sexual attributes and familial relationships with men. Historical records of Africans were thus developed based on the actions of African men from the narrative view of the coloniser. Estranged from history, colonised women are consigned to 'tradition' (Hussein & Hussain, 2019:261), their inferiority adopted by their ahistorical identity (Stratton, 1994:35) imprisoning them in gender definitions of a patriarchal society harsher than their own (Stratton, 1994:89).

Zeleza (2005:207) argues that although the representation of women through their absence or misrepresentation in mainstream African history leads to the depiction of them as naturally inferior and subordinate victims of male oppression, the alternative idea that gender roles were equal and harmonious in pre-colonial Africa is a "romantic myth." Zeleza (2007:207) shows rightful concern in romanticising pre-colonial gender equality as researchers indicate that patriarchal societies did exist in pre-colonial Africa (Stratton, 1994:35; Ndlovu, 2014:18; Moagi & Mtombeni, 2019:18; Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021:122). Mbiti (1971) argues that ancestral belief sustains patriarchal norms in African societies. Men dominate as leaders, warriors, and ancestral communicators (Mbiti, 1971:108), while women are confined to domestic and reproductive roles (Mbiti, 1971:133). Though women may exert informal influence, their authority remains restricted by male-centred structures (Mbiti, 1971:142). Agbaje (2021:1287-1288), however, argues that historical accounts of African women are a gross underrepresentation of their appointive and elective positions on a pre-colonial continent. Ntshangase and Matabane (2022:193-198) support this argument by stating that it seems clear through African normative teachings in spirituality that there was no space for gender discriminatory practices in pre-colonial society. Bochow *et al.* (2017:455) caution against accepting this argument without critique, as African normative teachings like Ubuntu (see 3.2.4) lack consistent interpretations. Africa does not represent a homogenous group. As Mbiti (1971:147-148) highlights, certain African societies still enforce, for example, strict customs and regulations around

sexuality and sexual intercourse. He emphasises that African patriarchy predates colonialism, rooted in longstanding cultural, religious, and economic systems (Mbiti, 1971:162).

Although a set definition of pre-colonial gender identity within the African context is made impossible through a lack of unbiased documented history (Agbaje, 2021:1284; Ntshangase & Matabane, 2022:192), researchers tend to agree that women's position to men deteriorated under colonialism as they were subject to interlocking systems of oppression: Indigenous and foreign structures of patriarchy (Stratton, 1994:35; Moagi & Mtombeni, 2019:18). The combination of traditional patriarchy along with the imposed colonial forms of patriarchy finds itself ingrained into several accepted gender discriminatory practices that persist to this day (Ndlovu, 2014:26; Agbaje, 2021:1284; Bagai & Faimau, 2021; Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021:145).

Although the 1994 transition to democracy ended apartheid, a system rooted in European colonial dominance, cultural and legal practices had already legitimised violence by the powerful against the marginalised (see 1.1.2). These entrenched inequalities continue to shape societal power structures, evident in South Africa's widespread GBV (George, 2020:3-5; Pagel, 2021:36). Colonialism not only imposed European gender norms, positioning women as inferior (Stratton, 1994:7; Persard, 2021:128; Lake & Shockley, 2022:69), but also entrenched this patriarchal order within South African society, mirroring the lasting effects of colonialism on dependency, exploitation, wealth distribution, and geopolitics observed across Africa (Cunha, 2019:105; Lake & Shockley, 2022:68).

The South African settler colonial state sustained dominance by displacing and erasing Indigenous populations while also subjecting them to Western legal systems as a means of assimilation (Gouws, 2021:4). The African was not seen as politically significant. Their only perceived value lay in their potential to be modernised and civilised under colonial rule (Gouws, 2021:4). Through religious and educational institutions (Agbaje, 2021:1285), colonial powers imposed a view of women confined to the domestic sphere, erasing the historical role African women played in economic, agricultural, and political life (Agbaje, 2021:1281-1282). For example, the Native Land Act of 1913 denied Black South Africans, particularly women, land ownership, undermining their economic independence and reinforcing patriarchal structures by positioning men as primary land holders (Agbaje, 2021:1281-1282). Colonial education systems further entrenched gender disparities, prioritising male education while girls were taught domestic skills, limiting their opportunities and reinforcing the idea that women belonged in the private sphere (Stratton, 1994; Ntshangase & Matabane, 2022:192; Lake & Shockley, 2022:68). Additionally, manipulated customary laws denied women's rights in marriage, inheritance, and custody, subsuming their legal identities under those of male relatives (Sithole & Shai, 2016). Regulation of women's sexuality, reproduction, marriage, and genealogy was institutionalised and embodied through

sexual violence (Gouws, 2021:4). According to Bertolt (2018:146), colonisation racialised and sexualised people through violence and exploitation to enforce control and social roles, dismantling pre-colonial gender norms in many societies.

Mbembe (2006:147) critiques the way Africa has historically been seen as fundamentally different to the West – foreign, in need of categorisation and of saving. This isolated the content from the rest of the world, reducing its complexity (Mbembe, 2006:147). Furthermore, colonisers viewed Africans as inherently animalistic and driven by primal urges (Agbaje, 2021:66). Boonzaier (2017:471) argues that colonial discourse focused heavily on the physicality of Africans, effectively stripping them of their humanity. This dehumanisation, particularly of African women, positioned them as subhuman and "unrapeable" (Chiumbu, 2022:36). The combined effects of racialisation and gender subordination (Sithole & Shai, 2016:117; Boonzaier, 2017:471) left African women vulnerable. "Exaggerated myths about sexuality" consequently stuck to African women: sexualised, degenerate, and illegitimate (Boonzaier, 2017:471). By assaulting Black women, white men simultaneously attacked Black masculinity and Black women's agency over their own bodies (Mbembe, 2006:169). In *Rape: A South African Nightmare* (Gqola, 2015), the concept of the "unrapeable" woman is critiqued as a socially constructed notion that reinforces rape culture. Gqola argues that no woman is immune to rape and emphasises how societal attitudes often downplay or ignore the experiences of those who do not fit the stereotype of the 'ideal victim'.

In this hierarchy of race and gender, specifically African women have continually been diminished and erased (Sithole & Shai, 2016:117; Pagel, 2021:29). Black women, generally without the means to be economically independent within colonial society, have often been dependent on men and this, together with cultural practices of respect, has promoted passivity and obedience as hallmarks of African femininity (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010:5).

Apartheid exacerbated gender and racial hierarchies through migrant labour policies, forced removals and resettlements, and harassment, detention, and imprisonment for those who opposed the State (Vetten, 2014:49; Mathews *et al.,* 2015:107). Additionally, Black women only gained full legal recognition with the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act of 1988 (Vetten, 2014:49).

This problem persists in the modern day as the challenges linked to gender issues in South Africa are still developing (Orgeret, 2018:350). Economic dependency and prevailing social norms prevent rural women from combating social discrimination (Sithole & Shai, 2016:113). Patriarchal norms, irrespective of the current legislature on gender equality, still deny women the right to make decisions, thereby leaving them vulnerable to violence (Manomano, 2023:241). Women constitute most of the people living below the

poverty line and have the highest HIV[5] infection rates, highest unemployment rates and lowest literacy rates (Orgeret, 2018:350). Teenage pregnancies, often the outcome of sexual abuse, result in curtailment of secondary education, continuing the vicious cycle of poverty and dependency (Karim & Baxter, 2016:1151). Additionally, young women often do not have control over their own HIV status as partnerships with older men, who are frequently more controlling, prevent them from negotiating condom use, insisting on mutual monogamy, or refusing unwanted sex (Karim & Baxter, 2016:1151). While HIV/AIDS is not the primary focus of this study, it forms a significant factor linked to sexual violence in South Africa and warrants mention. In South Africa, the prevalence of HIV among adolescent girls and young women is considerably higher than among their male peers (Karim & Baxter, 2016:1151). The Human Science Research Council (2023) found that, in comparison to males within the same age groups, HIV prevalence was approximately two-fold in females aged 15–19 years (5.6% and 3% respectively) and 20–24 years (8% and 4% respectively). Females aged 25–29 have approximately three times higher HIV prevalence than their male peers (20% and 6% respectively) (HSRC, 2023). Studies by Strebel *et al.* (2006:517) and Jewkes and Morrell (2010:2) show that women who experience sexual assault or intimate partner violence (IPV) have a higher risk of HIV infection.

In summary, South Africa's history with colonialism irrefutably influenced gender power relations as it created a racialised gender hierarchies which persists in the modern day. In this hierarchy of race and gender, specifically African women have continually been diminished and erased (Sithole & Shai, 2016:117; Pagel, 2021:29). Socialised obedience, dependency, and silence along with poverty, patriarchy and GBV create conditions where abuse can occur with few repercussions (Sithole & Shai, 2016:115-116).

2.2.2 Masculinity and violence

As gender is a social construct (see 2.2.1), the standards and norms for masculine behaviour are culturally informed (Morrell *et al.,* 2012:24) and thus created and maintained through cultural norms and social interactions which vary across cultures and periods (Oyeˇwùmí, 2005:111). Chiumbu (2022:40) warns of the dangers of thinking of men in gender binaries as this fails to acknowledge that they are also victims of coloniality. Vetten and Ratele (2013:4-11) explain that masculinity and violence are shaped by intersecting inequalities, including race, class, age, sexuality, and gender. These factors influence societal responses to and interactions with violence (Vetten & Ratele, 2013:4-11).

Colonialism and apartheid allowed for distinct racialised gender ideals and implemented measures such as making it difficult for Black men to vest their masculinity in material and professional achievement (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010:4; Bertolt, 2018:10; Ngocobo *et al*., 2023:8). As African men were seen as having

[5] Human Immunodeficiency Virus

ravenous sexual appetites (see 2.2.2); they posed a risk to European women (Gouws, 2021:5). Black men were thus not simply dehumanised. They were made invisible and found their only way to exert their power and social dominance was over their wives and children (Bertolt, 2018:10; Ngocobo *et al*., 2023:7). Gouws (2021:5) argues that the violence of Black men was to counteract infantilisation and emasculation that emerged within the racialised and gendered hierarchy imposed through colonialism. The anger, alternatively frustration, towards their colonial masters resulted in them exerting their power and masculinity through violence. Manomano (2023:244) adds that white women were also vulnerable to being victimised by Black men as a way of expressing this anger. This, in turn, fuelled the concept of African men as primal and animalistic.

Notably, historical legacies of colonisation and apartheid in South Africa have focused on the marginalisation of Black South African men, which has consequently limited the perceived scope of perpetrators of rape (Moffett, 2006:135). Moffett (2006:135) argues, "The truth is that the majority of rapists in South Africa are Black only because the majority of the South African population is black." She challenges the notion of a historical lack of agency by highlighting that, under colonial and apartheid rule, social hierarchies were defined by race, with white people at the top and Black people at the bottom. In contrast, Moffett (2006) asserts that in the post-1994 "new South Africa," these hierarchies have shifted, with gender now playing a more prominent role, positioning men at the top and women at the bottom. Thus, the understanding of postcolonial gender identity becomes increasingly important in the discussion on GBV.

Jewkes and Morrell (2010:3, based on Connell, 1987) describe the existence of multiple configurations of masculinity, and thus male dominance, which are hierarchically organised in terms of men over women, powerful men over less powerful men, and adult men over younger men (Morrell *et al.,* 2012:23). Stereotypic and conventional forms of masculinity are at times referred to as "hegemonic masculinity" (Morrell *et al*., 2012:24; Samudzi & Mannell, 2016:3). Hegemonic masculinities, rooted in heteronormative male domination, is an integral element of patriarchy as it legitimates objectification and control of women through normalising violence and the devaluation of women's autonomy (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010:3; Morrell *et al.,* 2012:23; Samudzi & Mannell, 2016:3). Men who conform to dominant ideals of masculinity are often validated and rewarded within institutions where hegemonic masculinity "is deeply entrenched" (Beasly, 2005 in Samudzi & Mannell, 2016:3). Consequently, researchers argue that these major institutions, such as criminal justice, academia, the military, healthcare, religion and the media, upholds patriarchal values that perpetuate and normalise systemic GBV (Russo & Pirlott, 2006:183; Ndlovu, 2014:26; Bagai & Faimau, 2021; Enaifoghe *et al.,* 2021:145).

Patriarchal societies, such as South Africa (Morrell et al., 2012:25; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010:3; Moagi & Mtombeni, 2019:12), are characterised by heteronormativity, which dictates that individuals express gender through adherence to heterosexual norms (Butler, 1988:528; Jewkes & Morrell, 2010:3). Ndlovu (2014:26) argues that GBV, or the fear thereof, is a key mechanism through which structural patriarchy sustains itself, reinforcing male dominance and subordinating women (Bertolt, 2018:11). Similarly, Moffett (2006:137) contends that sexual violence in post-apartheid South Africa functions as a socially sanctioned tool for maintaining patriarchal order, with men using rape to inscribe subordination onto women. In a patriarchal society, women are thus often portrayed as helpless victims of men, who are victims of their natural sex drive (Harrison, 2021:16). Forms of femininity that align with the dominant masculine ideal are often considered culturally desirable and rewarded, whilst those that resist or challenge these norms face marginalisation or disapproval that may result in severe violence (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010:3; Orgeret, 2018:350).

Sexual violence is still used, particularly in impoverished areas, for men to restore or affirm their masculinity (Manomano, 2023:246; Ngocobo *et al*., 2023:7). Specifically, rape is used as a measure of control to demonstrate power over women and girls (Manomano, 2023:246). Baaz and Stern (2013:28) and Gouws (2021:5) state that the act of rape is used to prove masculinity yet symbolises the ultimate inability to prove it; hence the act of rape needs to be repeated. Therefore, the idea originated that rape is not necessarily a crime of sex but of power. The 2022 fiscal year statistics on domestic violence-related crimes reveal that 24% of women in South Africa (approximately 925,000 women) experience sexual and/or physical intimate partner violence (IPV) (Zungu *et al*., 2022:8-9). Reports indicate that a woman is raped or sexually abused every 25 seconds in South Africa, emphasising the pervasive nature of sexual violence (The Cradle of Hope, 2023). Many incidents of sexual violence go unreported, suggesting that the numbers are likely much higher than official statistics indicate. Abrahams *et al*. (2020:1) emphasises this issue, quoting a 2009 study which found only 1 in 25 women who experienced rape, had reported the incident to the police.

Within South African racialised and gendered hierarchies' Black lesbians are disproportionately victims of rape (Gouws, 2021:7). Similarly, Samudzi and Mannell (2016:10) argue that trans femininities and sexually non-conforming masculinities are perceived as "failed masculinities" and "illegitimate femininities" and thus become the target of violence from those that perceive them as outliers. Corrective rape is performed by men as a corrective function in service of heteropatriarchal policing of gender and sexuality against lesbians or other non-conforming sexualities (Judge, 2018:68; Orgeret, 2018:350; Gouws, 2021:7). Not conforming to the racialised gender hierarchy built by normative social ideas of gender, thus may result in severe violence.

2.2.4 Summary

The current problem of GBV in South Africa cannot properly be analysed without exploring the sexual and gender dimensions introduced by violence through colonialism and apartheid. Gender, a social construct, reflects cultural norms for masculine and feminine behaviour, which vary across cultures and times. However, colonial ideologies imposed a rigid binary view of gender. In the present study, gender is understood as socially constructed identities, behaviours, and power relations that organise our understanding of the social world, often linked to a specific sex. Gender power relations within the South African context created a racialised gender hierarchy favouring dominant cis-gendered[6] heterosexual[7] (i.e. cishet) masculine ideals. Deviation from this hierarchy often results in severe violence.

2.3 Conceptualising 'gender-based' violence

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (VAW) (1993) defines GBV as any act "that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life." The UN's definition (1993) represents an international consensus on how to conceptualise the dynamics of GBV and encompasses acts such as child sexual abuse[8] (CSA), domestic violence[9] (DV), coercive sex[10], rape[11] (including marital rape), sexual slavery[12], female genital mutilation[13] (FGM), stalking, and intimate partner violence[14] (IPV) (Russo & Pirlott, 2006:181, Ndlovu, 2014:17; Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021:5; Pagel, 2021:5). These are not the only acts constituting gendered violence as GBV is not inherently sexual. IPV, for example, may include emotional manipulation, physical assault and withholding economic or medical necessities. Various examples come to mind, such as the brutal assault of a 26-year-old Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) student, who was reportedly stabbed 20 times by her husband whilst onlookers strolled by and took video footage (see page 123).

[6] A cis-gendered person equates their gender-identity with the sex they were assigned at birth.
[7] A heterosexual person is attracted to people of the opposite sex.
[8] Child sexual abuse is defined as "(a) sexually assaulting a child or allowing a child to be sexually assaulted; (b) encouraging, inducing or forcing a child to be used for the sexual gratification of another person; (c) using a child in or deliberately exposing a child to sexual activities or pornography; or (d) procuring or allowing a child to be procured for commercial sexual exploitation or in any way participating or assisting in the commercial sexual exploitation of a child" (Children's Act, 2005).
[9] Domestic violence is defined as any "physical or sexual abuse, harassment, stalking, or any other controlling or abusive behaviour taking place in domestic relationships" (Domestic Violence Act, 1998)
[10] Coercive sex is defined as the act of being physically, financially, or emotionally forced or tricked into engaging in sexual activity (Rao *et al.,* 2013:211).
[11] Rape is defined as the "unlawful and intentional sexual penetration of a person by another without consent". 'Sexual penetration' includes the oral, anal, or vaginal penetration of a person with a genital organ, object, or body part of an animal (Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2007).
[12] Sexual slavery is defined as the involuntary loss of bodily autonomy for the sexual gratification of another person (Woolman & Bishop, 2006:393-394).
[13] Female genital mutilation is defined as the "partial or total" removal or injury of the external female genitalia whether for cultural or non-therapeutic reasons (Obiora *et al.,* 2020:1).
[14] Intimate partner violence refers to behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes "physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours" (WHO, 2022). This definition covers violence by both "current and former" spouses and partners.

Nnaemeka and Ezeabasili (2020:20) identify three main categories of GBV: violence related to family, violence occurring in the general community and structural violence condoned by the state and institutions. They argue that the primary forms of GBV function within these categories (Nnaemeka & Ezeabasili, 2020:20). Researchers have identified four primary forms of GBV based on the UN's (1993) definition: psychological (emotional), sexual, physical, and financial (Ndlovu, 2014:6; Amenaghawon & Salawu, 2020:16347; Ekweonu, 2020:2). These forms of GBV encompass a wide range of behaviours that can cause harm or suffering to individuals, including forcing them to live in constant fear (Ekweonu, 2020:2). In the empirical part of this study, the researcher will utilise the framework by Nnaemeka and Ezeabasili (2020) as part of the coding scheme to analyse portrayals of GBV in media content (see 4.5.2.1.3). The categorisation of GBV into three main categories (family, community, and structural violence) and four primary forms (physical, sexual, financial, and psychological harm) will serve as a coding scheme for identifying and analysing instances of GBV in the media data (see 4.5.2.1.3).

While the UN's definition (1993) is comprehensive and allows researchers to identify categories, forms and acts that define GBV, it does not explicitly address the fundamental nature of GBV, which is rooted in unequal power relations and societal expectations that reinforce traditional gender roles (King & Sifaki, 2019:45). 'Traditional,' in this context, refers to the strict gender binary within the racialised power-gender hierarchy that favours the cishet, often white, masculine ideal introduced through colonialism (see 2.2). This inherent imbalance of power plays a crucial role in perpetuating GBV and maintaining a culture of gender inequality.

The South African Government's National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (2020:10) recognises this concept by defining GBV as a "general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of normative role expectations associated with the gender associated with the sex assigned to a person at birth, as well as the unequal power relations between genders, within the context of a specific society." The definition incorporates and expands on the UN's definition (1993) by including abuse, coercion and harm that may result from gender inequality based on normative social gender expectations.

Researchers state that the term 'gender-based' is used because the inherent nature of the violence is rooted in unequal power relations and normative societal role expectations associated with gender identity within a specific society (Russo & Pirlott, 2006:181; King & Sifaki, 2019:45; Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021:125). Leach and Humphreys (2007:108) note that the conflation of 'women' with 'gender' in the UN's definition (1993) of GBV is problematic and displays a narrow understanding of what GBV entails. The definition by the South African Government (2020:10) seems more encompassing in this regard. Still, it falters as later in the document, it also limits this definition to women (South African Government, 2020:20), mainly focusing on the act of femicide.

Pagel (2021:5) argues that because women are more often victims of GBV than men, the terms ‘GBV’ and ‘VAW’ are frequently used interchangeably. However, like Leach and Humphreys’ (2007:108) critique, Graaff (2021:5) argues that one significant problem with conflating VAW and GBV is its emphasis on “traditional gender roles and gender binaries”. This approach centres on violence perpetrated by cishet men against cishet women, presenting ‘woman’ as a “monolithic” category, which implies that all women are exposed to “equal risk and experience” of violence. Vetten (2014:52) notes that while "gender-based violence" gained traction for its inclusivity and focus on systemic causes, its use is met with hesitation as it acknowledges male victimisation, a reality some are reluctant to accept.

Previously, within this study (see 2.2), it was determined that gender power relations within the South African context created a racialised gender hierarchy favouring dominant cishet masculine ideals. That deviation from this hierarchy often results in severe violence. It can thus not be argued that all South African women are exposed to equal risk and experience of violence, as gender, class, and race have a significant bearing on risk. Consequently, the researcher can thus not conclude that GBV exclusively refers to VAW as it can be experienced by persons across the gender spectrum based on their perceived gender identity and social expectations within the racialised gender hierarchy. For example,

Ndlovu (2014:17), however, states that the equation of ‘women’ to ‘gender’ in the UN’s definition (1993) may be because the definition resulted from a movement fighting for the cause of women. Based on this observation, Leach and Humphreys (2007) and Graaff (2021) rightfully criticise the UN’s (1993) definition, for it was written to define VAW and not the general term ‘GBV,’ which includes VAW.

Similarly to the context in which the UN’s definition of GBV was constructed, the International 16 Days Campaign was started as a movement fighting for the cause of women (UN Women, 2021; CWGL, 2022). In South Africa, like many other countries, the 16 Days Campaign specifically focuses on no violence against ‘women and children,’ from 25 November (International Day for No Violence Against Women) to 10 December (International Human Rights Day) (South African Government, 2023). Thus, the term GBV is again used when specifically focusing on VAW.

According to Oyeˇwùmí (2005:99); GBV is the result of continuous discrimination with its origin in the social structure of patriarchal nature. Nnaemeka and Ezeabasili (2020:20) similarly state that the root causes of GBV lie in a society’s attitudes towards and practices of gender discrimination – placing the masculine counterpart as dominant figure (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010:3; Morrell e*t al.,* 2012:23). Thus, being gendered as a ‘man’ or ‘woman,’ or perceived as such, is rather significant as the relations between these supposed genders create a space for potential violence based on normative social expectations (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010:3; Ndlovu, 2014:17-18; Samudzi & Mannell, 2016:10). Espinilla (2021:275) asserts that

GBV is not the result of antagonism between sexes, nor does it bear any relationship to biological or physical characteristics associated with the people involved. Instead, GBV results from society's understanding of what it means to be masculine or feminine (Espinilla, 2021:275) (see 2.2.1). Nnaemeka and Ezeabasili (2020:19) echo this by stating that most acts of GBV against boys and men are committed by men who view the other as violating the masculine gender norm. Samudzi and Mannell (2016) similarly found that gender nonconformity is a factor contributing to violence. Their study (2016:10) finds that individuals expressing trans femininities or sexually non-conforming masculinities are targeted for embodying identities perceived as "failed masculinities" and "illegitimate femininities," respectively. This highlights the social enforcement of gender norms through violence.

However, it cannot be ignored that in South Africa and globally, GBV does affect women in vastly disproportionate terms of frequency, intensity and brutality compared to men (Ndlovu, 2014:18; King & Sifaki, 2019:44; Nnaemeka & Ezeabasili, 2020:20; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:2; Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021:124-125; Chiumbu, 2022:31) (see 1.1). The statistics on crimes related to domestic violence during the 2022 fiscal year show that 24% of women in South Africa (approximately 925,000 women) experience sexual and/or physical intimate partner violence (IPV) (Zungu et al., 2022:8-9). Reports indicate that a woman is raped or sexually abused every 25 seconds in South Africa, emphasising the pervasive nature of sexual violence (The Cradle of Hope, 2023). Many incidents of sexual violence go unreported, suggesting that the numbers are much higher than official statistics indicate. Abrahams et al. (2020:1) emphasises this issue, quoting a 2009 study which found only one in 25 women who experienced rape, had reported the incident to the police. GBV affects women disproportionately. This is because of women's unequal position in society due to normative role expectations reinforced and perpetuated by structural patriarchy and deeply entrenched in African traditions of female subordination (Ndlovu, 2014:18; Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021:122). However, attributing GBV solely to power imbalances is inadequate, as it also arises from a racialised and gendered worldview linked to colonial legacies (Chiumbu, 2022:31). The combination of traditional patriarchy along with the imposed colonial forms of patriarchy finds itself ingrained into several accepted gender discriminatory practices (Ndlovu, 2014:26; Bagai & Faimau, 2021; Enaifoghe *et al*., 2021:145). Major institutions, including criminal justice, scientific, academic, military, health, and religious institutions, are seen as reinforcing patriarchal values that encourage and maintain systemic GBV (Russo & Pirlott, 2006:183; Ndlovu, 2014:26; Bagai & Faimau, 2021; Enaifoghe *et al.*, 2021:145). The phenomenon is also visible in the media.

2.3.1 Summary

GBV is an extreme manifestation of gender inequality, referring to any form of physical, sexual, psychological, or financial violence or abuse linked to gender identity, corresponding social expectations, and opportunities (King & Sifaki, 2019:45; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:2; Enaifoghe *et al*., 2021:125; Proll &

Magin, 2022:118) related to the family, general community, or structural violence (Nnaemeka & Ezeabasili, 2020:20). The researcher can therefore not agree that GBV exclusively refers to VAW as it can be experienced by persons across the gender spectrum based on their perceived gender identity and corresponding social expectations within the racialised gender hierarchy introduced through colonial ideals. GBV can thus be organised as violence against women, violence against children and violence against men (as defined within this study).

2.4 GBV representation in the media: a brief literature review

Bhattarjee (2021:134) and Ali and Pasha (2022:3) observed that news reporting patterns are often based on predetermined social norms on conventional representation of gender identities. South African media draws on 'traditional' notions of suitable gender roles (see 2.2) to represent GBV (Ndlovu, 2014:7; Mbandlwa, 2020:6755). When a woman deviates from these norms, the media is more likely to portray her as deserving of the violence (Meyers, 1997:19 in McManus & Dorfling, 2005:43-6). Studies have shown these socially constructed gender norms or ideals cypher through into how the news is presented (see Ndlovu, 2014; Carratalá, 2016; Brodie, 2020; Bhattacharjee, 2021; Enaifoghe *et al.,* 2021; Harrison, 2021; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021). These journalistic choices influence how GBV is perceived by society – either as an isolated event, a social norm, an infringement of human rights or a crucial social concern (Ali & Pasha, 2022:4). Thus, media representation influences public perception, and in turn the steps society takes to prevent GBV.

Event-driven journalism (see 1.1.2) presents GBV as isolated incidents, overlooking the structural factors that drive the violence and failing to situate it within its broader socio-historical context. In 2002, McManus and Dorfman found that two-thirds of news coverage on youth crime was reported episodically, a trend that shifted after the Columbine school shooting, when thematic reporting increased significantly. African studies by Brodie (2019) and Chiumbu (2022) similarly illustrate this point. Brodie (2019:264) found that media coverage is dominated by 'mega cases,' sensationalising specific incidents without broader context. Similarly, Chiumbu (2022:37) found a focus on singular or extraordinary events of sexual violence, neglecting its connection to the larger social reality. Brodie (2020) highlights that GBV-related reports are often presented under general crime categories. Critics argue that episodic reporting undermines journalists' social accountability (Malila, 2018:17) as it fails to acknowledge GBV as a systemic issue rooted in patriarchy (Bagai & Faimau, 2021:32; Espinilla, 2021:290) and perpetuates misconceptions about victims and perpetrators (Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:13; Harrison, 2021:67; Brodie, 2020:137; Bhattacharjee, 2021:132). This can be seen in the language and frames utilised by journalists.

Döring (2020:32) states that media reporting of CSA is often lurid, uses wrong terms, picks out spectacular cases and privileges sensationalism over accuracy and public interest. As seen by the arguments above,

this can also be applied to the media coverage of GBV. Chiumbu (2022:37-41) found that South African media focused on extraordinary events, gave gruesome and explicit details, victimised and blamed survivors of sexual violence and used sensationalist headlines. This argument is supported by several other South African scholars (see Boonzaier, 2017; Brodie, 2019; Gouws, 2021). As illustrated in Figure 2.1, through articles 'Eastern Cape rapist sentenced to two life terms', 'Man who stabbed girlfriend to death in front of her son sentenced', 'Bolt blocks driver accused of stabbing two women in Cape Town', the media often echo preconceived notions of who should be considered a perpetrator of violence (aggressive African lower-class men and usually strangers) and imply the survivor's complicities in the crime committed against them (a less provocative photo could have been used). Additionally, elements of sensationalism can be seen in the almost click-bait[15] language used in headlines such as 'Mom killed execution-style while breast-feeding (see Figure 2.1).

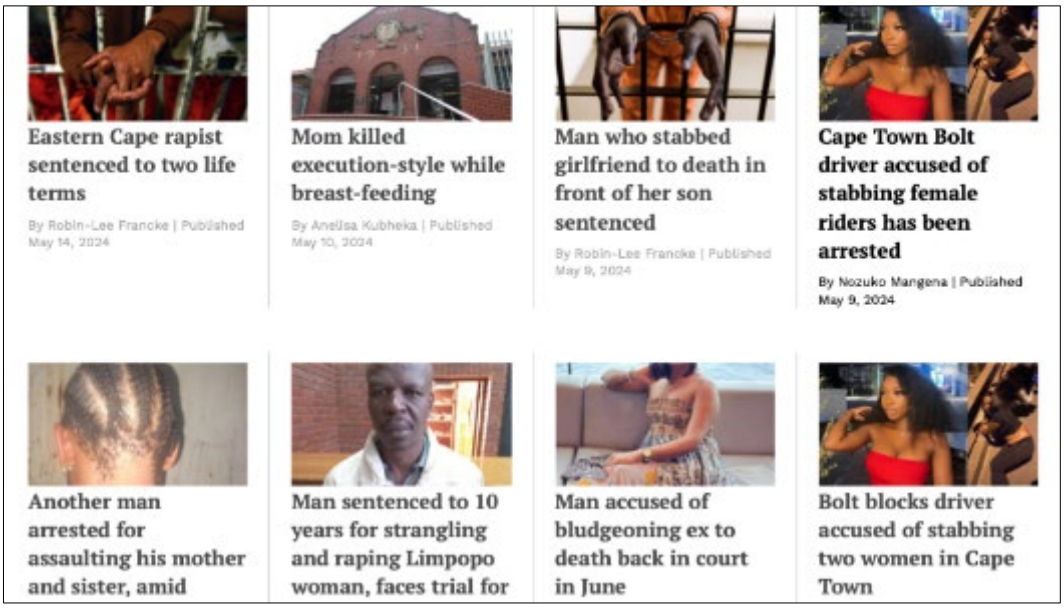

Figure 2.1: Examples of framing utilised by *IOL* in the reporting of GBV May 2024

A solution to this problem is thematic reporting. This approach delves deeper, revealing the social roots of GBV and connections between seemingly isolated cases (McManus & Dorfman, 2002:6; Carratalá, 2016:44; Espinilla, 2021:275). Thematic reporting incorporates contextual elements like statistics, social narratives, and root causes (McManus & Dorfman, 2002:6; Ali & Pasha, 2022:5). This approach fosters a more comprehensive understanding of GBV as a societal issue (Carratalá, 2016:44), such as highlighting how GBV in South Africa stems from intersecting inequalities and the country's colonial history (Chiumbu, 2022:44).

[15] "Clickbait" refers to attention-grabbing headlines designed to entice readers into clicking through to an article, often leading to exaggerated or misleading content (Kuashal & Vemuri, 2021:146-147).

However, media coverage often prioritises sensationalised incidents of violence. Nkoala (2022:176) argues that pervasive crimes like GBV are reduced to specific incidents receiving disproportionate news coverage, with court outcomes presented as symbolic victories. Boonzaier (2017:477) and Gouws (2021:2) suggest this is due to the normalisation of violence in South African society. Only the most brutal incidents, like intimate femicide, are deemed newsworthy (Boonzaier, 2017:477; Brodie, 2019:260). Research by Brodie (2019:258, 260) indicates that media coverage is not representative of actual femicide rates, with less than 20% of cases reported. This skewed coverage creates an inaccurate perception of GBV, including who is vulnerable and who perpetrates such violence. Focusing solely on isolated cases ignores the broader societal issues contributing to GBV (Buiten, 2007:119).

As determined above, media coverage of crime actively distorts the incidence of crime (Boonzaier, 2017:477; Brodie, 2019:260; Gouws, 2021:2; Nkoala, 2022:176). GBV reporting tends to excessively focus on sexually driven homicides of "innocent" and "undeserving" (Boonzaier, 2017:476) white, attractive, cishet women from respectable backgrounds, while cases against women of colour and those from disadvantaged backgrounds are under-reported (Hunt & Jaworska, 2019:3; Brodie, 2019:260; Boonzaier, 2023:86-87). Those who do not conform to the ideal thus receive less media attention. Thus, South African media content, especially GBV content, has remained racialised, gendered, and classed (Chiumbu, 2022:43). Boonzaier (2017:477-478) argues that the hypervisibility of the bodies of African women and the gruesome details of their deaths, through vivid description of the state of their bodies in an almost clinical dissection, highlights that our media is still influenced by colonial thought.

Media bias in GBV reporting is evident in the disproportionate coverage afforded to certain victims over others. As previously discussed, (see 1.1.2), Reeva Steenkamp's femicide dominated media narratives, while cases such as those of Anene Booysen and Karabo Mokoena received significantly less attention (Boonzaier, 2023:86-87). This selective coverage reinforces problematic notions of victimhood, where factors such as race, class, and perceived 'respectability' shape whose stories are amplified and whose are marginalised (Anders, 2023; Boonzaier, 2023:86-87). Thus, reinforcing the notion that the 'ideal victim' conforms to specific societal expectations (Boonzaier, 2023:86-87).

The over-reliance on a narrow range of sources is another issue. Simons and Morgan (2018:1204-1205) note the reliance on police sources in reporting intimate partner violence, arguing that this practice frames GBV as a series of isolated criminal incidents rather than a systemic social issue. Brodie (2019:263) notes that individual voices and personal narratives are often unheard, journalists instead opting for professional, frequently male, sources. Researchers highlight that journalists often use "white, middle-class, middle-aged professional males" as their primary sources (Meyers, 1997:9 in McManus & Dorfman, 2005:43; Ross & Carter, 2011:1150). This narrow focus obscures the gendered dimensions of such

violence and distorts the broader societal context in which it occurs (Taylor, 2009:27 in Simons & Morgan, 2018:1205). Researchers such as Orgeret (2018:353) and Rao and Taboada (2021:15) state that women are mainly used in accounts where they talk about personal experience and rarely as experts or spokespersons. This may contribute to inaccurate language, clinical details, and victim-blaming (Chiumbu, 2022:41), obscuring the role of perpetrators and ignoring the violence and abuse of power (Buiten, 2007:118). In the articles in Figure 2.1, most sources were authoritative male voices such as lawyers or police. Rarely the voices of GBV survivors or female experts were centred.

Suppose GBV is represented inappropriately within the media. In that case, it can undermine efforts to address the problem (Ali & Pasha, 2022:4). For example, a lack of awareness of the structural background of GBV can weaken efforts to tackle the problem and even condone violence (Buthelezi, 2006:502; Pikanegore & Mpofu, 2021:122; Pröll & Magin, 2022:128). Buiten (2007:117) argues that creating visibility and accountability on GBV issues constitutes part of the responsibility of the press (see 3.3). Minwalla and Foster (2021:14) suggest a survivor-centred approach to GBV reporting. In a media context, a survivor-centred approach involves avoiding harmful reporting practices and prioritising solutions and long-term care (Minwalla & Foster, 2021:14). Further, this would place a more significant emphasis on thematic reporting, contextualisation, and refraining from practices such as vivid descriptions of injuries, sensationalism, victim-blaming and victimising, and lack of female voices. When discussing sexual violence, this would thus entail providing context and addressing the enduring repercussions of such violence, including forced displacement and the impact on children born from rape (Minwalla & Foster, 2021:14).

2.4.1 Summary

South African media draws upon socially constructed gender norms originating from the racial-gender hierarchy introduced by colonial thought. This is seen in the way the media reports on GBV. GBV is often reduced to rare or sensationalist events that distort the audience's conception of public crime incidents and generally focus on what Boonzaier (2023:86-87) calls the ideal victim. Other occurrences within GBV reporting in South African media include episodic reporting, vivid descriptions of injuries, sensationalism, victim-blaming and victimising, and lack of female voices. This does not align with a survivor-centred approach.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter laid the context for GBV reporting within the South African media landscape. Firstly, a nuanced understanding of gender within the post-colonial context of South Africa was established by examining the concept of gender, introducing the colonial and postcolonial context, and analysing masculinity and violence within this context. Following this, a detailed exploration of GBV within

the South African context, which will serve as the foundation for developing explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria for the empirical analysis. Lastly, the chapter delved specifically into GBV reporting practices in South African media, exploring what measures could be implemented to promote a more ethical and responsible portrayal of GBV in South African media, as existing literature recommends.

From the literature study, the following operational definition of GBV was formulated (see 2.3): GBV is an extreme manifestation of gender inequality, referring to any form of physical, sexual, psychological, or financial violence or abuse linked to gender identity, corresponding social expectations, and opportunities (King & Sifaki, 2019:45; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:2; Enaifoghe *et al*., 2021:125; Proll & Magin, 2022:118) related to the family, general community, or structural violence (Nnaemeka & Ezeabasili, 2020:20). GBV can be categorised as violence against women, violence against children and violence against others.

Building on this contextual foundation, the following chapter will investigate the responsibilities of South African journalists reporting on GBV within the journalistic ethics framework of social responsibility theory and postcolonial media theory, as well as the South African Press Council's Code of Ethics and Conduct for SA Print and Online Media (SA Press Code).

CHAPTER 3 SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THEORY, POSTCOLONIAL MEDIA THEORY, AND THE SA PRESS CODE

3.1 Introduction

Building on the foundation of Chapter 2, where the researcher gives an overview of the contextual background of gender-based violence (GBV) reporting in South African media, this literature study seeks to determine the responsibilities of South African journalists who report on GBV. These responsibilities will be defined within the normative framework of the social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory (also postcolonial critique), as well as the journalistic ethics framework as represented in the South African Press Council's Code of Ethics and Conduct for SA Print and Online Media (SA Press Code, 2022).

The operational definition of GBV presented in Section 2.3 guides the study's understanding of GBV.

As theoretical points of departure, this chapter will build on the guiding theoretical arguments (see 1.5) in Chapter 1 concerning social responsibility theory, postcolonial critique, and the SA Press Code to determine ethical GBV reporting. The theoretical arguments are as follows:

- Social responsibility theory (see 3.3) is a normative media theory that emphasises the media's role in advocating for social justice (Fourie, 2011:29; Ward, 2015:369), which includes issues such as GBV through identifying its causes, challenging societal constructs, and adhering to ethical principles (Babran & Ataherian, 2019:3), thereby fulfilling its responsibility to the public interest in a democratic society (Ekweonu, 2020:5; Igyuve *et al.*, 2021:28).
- Postcolonial critique (see 3.4) is concerned with social change and the disruption of patterns of colonial power; thus, it emphasises the need for the media to be aware of their own biases and assumptions and actively works to promote diverse voices and perspectives (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:41). Wasserman (2006:87; 2010:86) and Fourie (2011:35) suggest postcolonial theory as a critical mode of inquiry; however, they concur that it is not an exhaustive and comprehensive ethical framework by itself. Therefore, this study will use the theoretical framework of postcolonial critique within the more prominent social responsibility theory.
- The SA Press Code (South African Press Council, 2022) (see 3.6) upholds constitutional rights and provides a necessary ethical guideline in constructing news. It aims to maintain professional journalistic standards by motivating journalists to pursue maximum truth, minimise harm, amplify diverse perspectives, prioritise the welfare of children and vulnerable populations, demonstrate cultural sensitivity, and act independently (South African Press Council, 2022).

This chapter, therefore, explores and analyses theoretical arguments regarding the responsibility of journalists reporting on GBV within these theoretical frameworks. This literature study will answer the following specific research questions (see 1.3.1):

- SRQ1: *How do social responsibility- and postcolonial media theories contribute to defining ethical journalism in South Africa regarding GBV?*
- SRQ2: *What expectations does the Press Code place on journalists in the context of reporting GBV? and*
- *SRQ3: What key elements should a framework for GBV news reporting include to align with social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory, and the guidelines of the Press Code?*

Firstly, the chapter explored journalistic ethics (see 3.2), examining its history (see 3.2.1) and core principles (see 3.2.2). Secondly, it delved into social responsibility theory (see 3.3), focusing on the emphasis on serving the public (see 3.3.1), media regulation (see 3.3.2), and ethical guidelines (see 3.3.3). Thirdly, the researcher explored postcolonial media theory, specifically postcolonial critique (see 3.4), comparing it to other approaches to African journalism ethics. Based on these theoretical foundations, the researcher set out to develop a set of journalistic principles for ethical GBV reporting which will be utilised in a proposed ethical framework for ethically responsible GBV reporting (see 3.5). Subsequently, the SA Press Code and Independent Media Press Code were analysed to supplement any gaps in the proposed ethical guidelines (see 3.6). Finally, a proposed ethical framework for responsible GBV reporting is presented.

3.2 Journalistic ethics

Several decades of in-depth analysis, interpretation, and modification in the study of moral philosophy have resulted in a modern understanding of what ethics and professional ethics entail (Ward, 2008a:295-296; Elliot & Ozar, 2010:19). Media ethics is seen as a system of "moral values, opinions, judgements, regulations, norms, and obligations" (Merrill, 1997:9 in Mathe, 2020:22) that concern decision-making during the "production, distribution and reception of content provided by the mass media" (Donev, 2016:158 in Mathe, 2020:22). Retief (2013a:50) states that as a social science, media ethics is a conscious, reasoned, and methodological exercise about principles (i.e. correct/wrong) and consequences (i.e. good/harmful) and comes to conclusions based on the result of this reasoning. Similarly, Ward (2008b:139; 2015:295-296) argues that ethics is the analysis of what the "correct" conduct and responsible practice consists of within the best available principles. Thus, ethics are abstract principles guiding moral decision-making, socially constructed by specific localised societal situations and contexts (Bochow *et al.*, 2017:455). Therefore, ethics is constantly evolving as social norms and institutional structures define it.

Journalistic ethics is a moral subject within the field of applied media ethics (Ward, 2008a:296; Ward, 2008b:139; Mathe, 2020:22). Journalists must make a conscious effort to abide by the socially constructed and localised ethical frameworks (Retief, 2013a:51). Underlying ethical principles of journalism such as accuracy, truthfulness and impartiality are affected by "political, social, ideological, and cultural" influences (Mutsvairo *et al.*, 2021:997). The main issues in journalistic ethics include limits to free speech, fairness and privacy, the use of graphic material, conflicts of interest, accuracy and bias, the representation of minorities and journalism's role in a democratic society (Ward, 2008b:139).

Within this study, it is understood that journalistic ethics provide socially constructed and localised ethical frameworks (Bochow *et al.*, 2017:455) through moral values, regulations, norms, and obligations (Merrill, 1997:9 in Mathe, 2020:22). Journalists consciously must abide by these frameworks when creating and disseminating content (Retief, 2013a:51; Donev, 2016:158 in Mathe, 2020:22) for responsible and ethical reporting (Ward, 2008b:139; Ward, 2015:295-296). Ethical frameworks in postcolonial countries, such as South Africa, still draw on Western paradigms (Garman, 2015:17; Yusha'u, 2018:465). For example, South African media still draws upon socially constructed gender norms originating from the racial-gender hierarchy introduced by colonial thought (see 2.2.2). This is seen in how the media reports on GBV (see 2.4).

To define ethical GBV reporting in the South African media, one must first grasp the concept of journalistic ethics. The below subsections will broadly discuss the background of journalistic ethics (see 3.2.1) and principles of journalistic ethics (see 3.2.2) to provide the necessary context for the theoretical framework of social responsibility theory (see 3.3) and postcolonial critique (see 3.4).

3.2.1 Background of journalistic ethics

Normative media theories, also known as media models, were propounded by Western theorists Siebert, Paterson, and Schramm in their book *Four Theories of the Press* (1956) (Fourie, 2017:110). They express how the media can be expected to operate under a prevailing set of political or economic conditions and values (Fourie, 2017:110). Based on this, the history of journalistic ethics can be identified in roughly five stages: authoritarianism-utopian, libertarian, liberal-democratic, objectivity-social responsibility, and interpretive-advocational (Ward, 2008a:297; Ward, 2008b:139; Babran & Ataherian, 2019:3; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:29). Historically, the aims of journalism form a continuum from propaganda to factual reporting to interpretive analysis to social activism based on the dominant theoretical approach to journalistic ethics (Ward, 2008b:139).

In the 16th and 17th centuries, media ethics were in its authoritarianism-utopian stage – the newly discovered news press was under state control and thus the ethical aim of journalism was to support and

promote “authorities in power” irrespective of what these authorities reinforced (Ward, 2008a:297; Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3). The press, despite ensuring they served the impartial truth, was a servant of the state (Ward, 2008a:297; Ward, 2008b:139). Thus, through strict censorship, the media served as messengers of the authorities that owned them by mindlessly publishing propaganda. The authoritarian theoretical framework directly opposes ideas of press freedom and objectivity developed in the 19th century, as seen in the social responsibility theoretical framework (Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:30).

The 18th century marked the movement towards the libertarian stage of media ethics in which the ethical aim of journalism was to provide “the information necessary” for a free, self-governing, liberal society (Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3). Journalists claimed to be tribunes of the public and advocated reform, and eventually revolution, by “protecting” civil liberties (Ward, 2008a:297; Ward, 2008b:139). By the end of the century, the press was a recognised social institution with guaranteed freedoms in post-revolutionary constitutions of America and France, setting the basis for the idea of the Fourth Estate – the press as a governing institution of society (Ward, 2005:89-173; Ward, 2008a:297; Ward, 2008b:139; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:29).

In the late 18th century, the concept of the Fourth Estate became integrated into liberal theory, believing that journalism and a free press were necessary to protect civil liberties, such as the right to freedom of speech, from the government (Ward, 2008b:139-140; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:29). The liberal-democratic view thus became the ideal, in which the ethical aim of journalists was to serve a self-governing society through the necessary information they need to remain free from tyranny (Ward, 2008b:149). Within the libertarian framework, the news media plays a crucial role in “building a democratic society” through voicing a multicity of opinions, informing citizens of rights and responsibilities, and increasing knowledge on government participation (Chiumbu, 2022:43). Although the liberal-democratic view has since been both modified and critiqued even within the modern paradigm (Ward, 2008b:140; Retief, 2013b:63; Chiumbu, 2022:43), scholars such as Christians (2004:236) and Borgmann (2012:5) question its viability in a postcolonial context as the rights of the individual are ontologically above those of the community, a concept which is challenged by African ethical approaches such as in the moral philosophy of Ubuntu (Christians, 2004:236; Borgmann, 2012:5).

In the late 19th century, journalists emphasised objectivity and balance, striving to uncover and report the truth through ethical practices (Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:30). Social responsibility theory, emerging in the United States during the 1940s, responded to concerns about press power (Ward, 2008b:140). In this objectivity-social responsibility era of media ethics, the aim of journalism was much like the libertarian theory as journalists prioritised press freedom and acting as

watchdogs over the government to protect democracy (Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:29; Igyuve *et al*., 2021:25). However, in a clear and important distinction from the liberal theory, the freedom to publish should be restrained by norms of objectivity and the social responsibilities of the media which includes the publication of a diversity of views (Ward, 2008b:140; Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:30). Rooted in Western democracy and media professionalism, social responsibility theory underpins global media ethics (Nerone, 1995:99–100; Rao & Wasserman, 2007:33), advocating for self-regulation and ethical standards (Diaz-Campo & Segado-Boj, 2015:3). Thus, encouraging the idea of press freedom and self-regulation through ethical codes of conduct, which define minimal expectations of ethical practice, ideal standards of conduct and accepted behavioural conventions (Diaz-Campo & Segado-Boj, 2015:3). Social responsibility theory continues to provide a basis for new ethical approaches, such as feminist.[16] and communitarian[17] theories, while providing standards by which media performance can be evaluated (Ward, 2008a:299).

The 20th century introduced an interpretive-advocational stage of journalistic ethics, which is sceptical about impartiality, neutrality, and objectivity (Ward, 2008a:297; Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3). The ethical aim of journalists is not merely to inform but to interpret the world for citizens, advocate for social reform and social causes, and to bring about a more equitable society (Ward, 2008b:140; Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3). Challenging even further the concept of objective ethics, was the introduction of increased numbers of non-professional citizen journalists and bloggers engaging in multi-media multi-platform reporting by the late 1900s (Ward, 2008a:297; Ward, 2008b:140). The role of a journalist was re-defined as a facilitator of conversation and social networking (Ward, 2008b:140). However, the researcher agrees that objectivity grants scepticism (see 3.3.3); the study aims to evaluate professional journalism in South Africa, which does not subscribe to the interpretive-advocational framework (as discussed below).

It is worth noting that all the above theories are significantly, if not entirely, built on normative Western ideas, which are commonly applied with an 'underlying assumption of universality', neglecting the specificity of the contexts in which they were conceived (Plaisance *et al*., 2012:15; Moyo & Mutsvairo, 2018:20; Mutsvairo *et al*., 2021:1001). It cannot be assumed that ethical norms are the same across different settings. For example, in South Africa, journalism is hybridised to balance competing imperatives, whilst sticking to normative journalistic principles such as objectivity (Zirugo, 2021:863). Present normative media theory underpins the symbiotic relationship between media and democracy (Fourie, 2017:110). Oosthuizen (2014:36) and Mokwena (2018:9) argue that, by contributing to democracy, the South African press subscribes to social responsibility theory. However, Rodny-Gumede

[16] Feminism is defined as equality and justice between the variety of genders (Daniels & Skinner, 2022:7). Feminist theories thus actively promote minority genders to enhance equality.
[17] Communitarian theory emphasises the importance of community and social bonds in shaping individual identity and moral reasoning (Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3). It encourages a balance between individual rights and communal obligations.

(2017:10) and Zirugo (2021:863) say the media's devotion to democracy suggests a libertarian normative journalism paradigm. Within this study, the researcher argues that the existence of media regulatory bodies such as the South African Press Council, and thus the SA Press Code (2022) (see 3.6), aligns with social responsibility theory (Obagwu & Idris, 2019:29), albeit an adjusted version thereof. The preamble of the SA Press Code emphasises that the press exists to serve society, which Retief (2013b:62) believes is inherently linked to the principle of accountability. Additionally, social responsibility theory continues to provide a basis for new ethical approaches while providing standards by which press councils and the public can evaluate media performance (Ward, 2008a:299). It thus provides the standards and norms by which one can determine the ethical framework set by the SA Press Code (see 3.6).

3.2.1.1 Intersection of postcolonial critique and social responsibility theory

The argument raised by Christians (2004:236) and Borgmann (2012:5), however, still applies as one can question social responsibility theory's viability in a postcolonial context where African ethical approaches, such as in the moral philosophy of Ubuntu, question the concept of individual rights taking precedence over those of the community. However, researchers warn that essentialising African ethical approaches runs the risk of viewing African society as untouched by the influence of colonialism and modern globalism (Wasserman, 2011:794; Mutsvairo *et al.*, 2021:1002-1003; Chasi & Rodny-Gumede 2022:1633) (see 3.4). In postcolonial societies such as South Africa, it is thus essential to consider how historical transformations still influence ethical assumptions (Bochow *et al.*, 2017:447). Wasserman (2006:87; 2010b:86) and Fourie (2011:35) highlight postcolonial theory (see 3.4) as a valuable perspective for analysing journalistic ethics, but they also recognise its limitations as a standalone ethical framework. Therefore, the study incorporates social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique to create a comprehensive framework of journalistic ethical principles required when reporting on GBV in South Africa (see 3.5). While social responsibility theory emphasises the media's positive role in promoting democratic values (Fourie, 2011:29; Ward, 2015:369), postcolonial theory critiques the media's potential to sustain colonial power dynamics and cultural dominance (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:41-43; Fourie, 2011:35). Both the normative ethical framework of social responsibility as well as critique on colonial ideas embedded in journalistic reporting is necessary for ethical GBV reporting.

3.2.1.1.1 Summary

While outlining ideal media functions within specific contexts, normative media theories are often critiqued for their Western bias and lack of contextual nuance (Plaisance *et al*., 2012:15; Mutsvairo *et al*., 2021:1001). The South African media's role in fostering democracy aligns with social responsibility theory (Mokwena, 2018:9), though some argue for a libertarian approach due to the emphasis on free press (Rodny-Gumede, 2017:10; Zirugo, 2021:863). This study argues that the presence of regulatory bodies like

the South African Press Council aligns with social responsibility theory. However, acknowledging postcolonial critiques is equally essential. Social responsibility theory emphasises the media's positive role in a democracy, but postcolonial critiques highlight the potential for perpetuating colonial power structures. This study proposes a framework incorporating both perspectives, aiming for a comprehensive ethical approach to reporting GBV in South Africa.

3.2.2 Principles of journalistic ethics

In journalism, ethics often resort to the arguments of classical philosophers such as Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, John Rawls, and John Stuart Mill and frequently present their arguments as adversaries (Elliot & Ozar, 2010:20; Meyers, 2016:201-202). However, Elliot and Ozar (2010:20-21) argue that these philosophers agree on critical points: respect for human dignity, impartiality and promoting the aggregate good. The argument is strikingly similar to the broad ethical principles or protonorms[18] of journalistic ethics suggested by Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:25), namely respect for human dignity, truth, and nonviolence. These arguments look identical. However, subtle differences exist, such as between truth and impartiality. Additionally, it can be argued that promoting the aggregate good does not necessarily necessitate nonviolence. A news publication can promote the aggregate good of its relatively homogeneous audience while harming that of minorities. A more accurate expectation would be to minimise unnecessary harm (Elliot & Ozar, 2010:18).

Several other researchers present diverse perspectives on ethical journalism; however, their principles seem to converge on a core set of values: truthfulness, independence, minimising harm (Black *et al.*, 1999:17; Retief, 2013c:114) and accountability (Krüger, 2004:12; Claasen, 2005:136; Ward, 2008a:298-300; Borgmann, 2012:5; Harcup, 2020:78; Mutsvairo *et al*., 2021:997). These values are widely quoted in media ethics and journalism guidelines (Borgmann, 2012:5; Mutsvairo *et al*., 2021:997). Although global media ethics is generally viewed from a Western perspective (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:33; Rao, 2010:103; Fourie, 2011:36-35; Ward, 2015:369), the basic principles are recognised across cultures (Christians, 2010:16) and can be used as universal ethical concepts (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004:21). Notably, the core set of moral values do not explicitly focus on respect for human dignity as suggested by Christians and Nordenstreng (2004:25) and Elliot and Ozar (2010:20-21). Instead, respect for human dignity is implied as deviation from the core principles of journalism that will inevitably lead to some form of violation of human dignity and reputation.

Rao and Wasserman (2007:46) and Mutsvairo *et al*. (2021:997) highlight that though these underlying principles are unified globally, they are affected by political, social, cultural, and ideological influences.

[18] Protonorms are basic humanitarian values which are embedded and interpreted according to the contexts they are applied in (Christians *et al.*, 2008:136; Borgmann, 2012:4).

Thus, ethical values must be examined and re-interpreted depending on context and culture (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:46; Mutsvairo *et al.*, 2021:997). This is echoed by Babran and Ataherian (2019:3), who state that ethics originate from local values, norms, and practices that govern the media in a community or culture. Thus, these ethical principles should be re-interpreted and evaluated within the South African journalistic and societal context.

The following section will broadly discuss the core journalistic ethical principles as identified above, namely truthfulness (see 3.2.2.1), independence (see 3.2.2.2), minimising harm (see 3.2.2.3) and accountability (see 3.2.2.4). The researcher argues that these journalistic principles form the cornerstone of journalistic ethics and, consequently, are fundamental to developing an ethical framework for GBV reporting.

3.2.2.1 Truthfulness

Truth is considered crucial to journalism (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004:22). Researchers such as Murphy *et al*. (2006:325) and Ward (2008a:302) consider truth as the central journalistic ethical principle that should not be compromised. Retief (2013a:46) considers journalism's primary purpose is not to do either good or bad but rather to report news "truthfully, accurately, and fairly". The concepts of 'truth,' 'accuracy' and 'fairness' are interconnected (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014:99-100). It is worth noting that the SA Press Code (2022) states that journalists should "strive for truth." The use of the word 'strive' implies that truth has many facets and, a journalist cannot determine the absolute truth (Retief, 2013b:68). McQuail (2013:57) and Oso *et al.* (2024:4) argue that the truth in journalism is found with the practice of 'objectivity' (see 3.4.2) which emphasises neutrality and fairness, and limits reporting to verifiable facts. Thus, journalists should opt for 'truthfulness,' also truth-telling, which consists of accuracy through thorough research and fairness in representation (Krüger, 2004:13; Murphy *et al.*, 2006:323; Borgmann, 2012:5; Retief, 2013b:74-75). Harcup (2020:76) calls these principles the "bedrocks" of journalistic ethics.

Truth, however, is not always easy to detect and consists of a lengthy process of verification (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014:58) as it requires the journalist to separate fact from fiction and rumour from evidence (Murphy *et al*., 2006:325; Ward, 2008a:302). According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014:58), verifying facts is thus the "central function" of journalism, as neither truth, accuracy, nor fairness can be accomplished without proper fact verification. Journalists are not only truth-seekers but truth-presenters and thus must be transparent in how they receive the information they present to their audiences (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014:136). Truthfulness, therefore, requires accuracy, fairness, and transparency. In a democratic society, journalists must be dedicated to truth as a first principle so that citizens can utilise the news to make informed decisions (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014:136).

3.2.2.2 Independence

Independence requires the journalist to protect the role of a free press in a democratic society (Black *et al*., 1999:17; Ward, 2008b:139-140; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:29). This means that the media should act free from coercion or influence by the government (Fengler *et al.*, 2015:261) and commercial considerations (Ward, 2008a:298).

In a democratic South Africa, freedom of expression and press freedom are constitutionally protected under section 16 of the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution. The contemporary South African press is set heavily against government intervention in the media as the Apartheid government has historically[19] abused this influence, and the country's democracy is too young and fragile to entrust journalism to politicians (Retief, 2013:56; Malila, 2018:22). The SA Press Council and its code of ethics are built on the view that government involvement in press regulation is incompatible with the constitutional value of press freedom (Wasserman, 2011:799; Thloloe, 2012:110). This does, however, not prevent politicians from influencing the media. Additionally, commercial considerations persist. Oso *et al.* (2024:8) boldly state that freedom of the press is only guaranteed for those who own the media as they can control the agenda from which the news media creates a narrative. This holds especially true in a digital age where sensationalism is often prioritised for advertising revenue (Oso *et al.*, 2024:8).

3.2.2.3 Minimising harm

Minimising harm reminds journalists to avoid causing unjustified harm (Krüger, 2004:13). 'Harm' in this context refers to the least amount of potential emotional, financial, physical, or reputational damage or grief to fulfil the journalistic role-related responsibility towards the public (Elliot & Ozar, 2010:18) and may take several forms such as intrusion of privacy and misrepresentation (Harcup, 2020:7). Unnecessary harm can also be caused through one-sided reporting, failure to verify information, depending on secondary sources, disregarding context and being influenced by outside influences (Retief, 2013b:68). Harm cannot always be avoided (Retief, 2013b:68), however, it is the journalist's responsibility to prevent unnecessary and unjustifiable harm to a person's dignity (Christians & Nordenstreng, 2004:21).

3.2.2.4 Accountability

Accountability requires the journalist to be ethically and legally held liable for the consequences of their reporting (Obagwu & Idris, 2019:27) and thus stresses strong cooperation with self-regulatory bodies, explanation of journalistic work and building trust with audiences (Krüger, 2004:13; Borgmann, 2012:5).

[19] During apartheid the media was judiciously restricted to limit freedom and access to information (Malila, 2018:22). The press, despite ensuring they served the impartial truth, was explicitly (laws) and implicitly (self-censorship) controlled by the apartheid government (Retief, 2013a:55-57). They could thus not serve the best interest of the nation.

Regulation[20][21] of the press does not equal censorship; it recognises that the press needs to be held accountable and requires a mechanism to rectify matters where it has neglected its social responsibilities (Retief, 2013a:54). Culver (2017:480) argues that this includes participatory approaches such as encouraging feedback and interactivity.

Summary

Although the Western perspective often dominates global media ethics, the basic principles—truthfulness, independence, minimising harm, and accountability—can be used as universal ethical concepts. These principles should be reinterpreted and evaluated within the South African context.

In the following section, the researcher will identify the journalistic ethical principles within the social responsibility theory, specifically focusing on the reporting of GBV. This will be followed by a postcolonial critique of the social responsibility theory and an identification of the ethical principles of GBV journalism within the postcolonial media theory. This requires a thorough analysis of the theoretical framework of social responsibility theory (see 3.3) and postcolonial critique (see 3.4).

3.3 Social responsibility theory

Social responsibility theory is a normative media theory that guides media practice and performance, the media and democracy relationship and media regulation (Fourie, 2017:110). The theory is premised on the concept that democratic freedom requires a responsible and independent press (Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:30; Igyuve *et al*., 2021:26). Responsibility, within this context, is the acknowledged obligation of journalistic reporting to follow ethical frameworks and setting professional standards (Igyuve *et al.*, 2021:26).

Important to note is that current interpretations of social responsibility theory, such as that seen within the South African media landscape, only partially reflect the ideals set out by the Commission on Freedom of the Press in 1947. In the nearly 80 years since the theory's adoption, it has been adapted numerous times within different societal contexts, thus re-interpreting core ethical principles such as public interest, the watchdog function, and media regulation. In the following section, the theoretical framework of social responsibility theory will be discussed by analysing journalists' duty to serve the public (3.3.1), media regulation (3.3.2), and journalistic ethical principles within the social responsibility theory (3.3.3). The discussion focuses on analysing African (e.g. Chan-Meetoo, 2012; Babran & Atatherian, 2019; Obagwu & Idris, 2019; Igyuve *et al*., 2021) and South African interpretations of the theory (e.g. Ward, 2008a; Retief, 2013b; Rodny-Gumede, 2015; Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022).

[20] See 3.3.2 for discussion on media regulation.
[21] See 3.6.1 for discussion of SA Press Council and media regulation in South Africa.

3.3.1 Serving the public

Social responsibility theory encourages the media to act as a watchdog and advocate for social justice (Fourie, 2011:29; Ward, 2015:369; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:29) to fulfil their responsibility of serving the public interest in a democratic society (Fourie, 2011:29; Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:30-32; Igyuve *et al.*, 2021:25). The journalist needs to be a conduit of reliable information, and independently and freely "scrutinise" and "curtail" unbridled power and abuse (Retief 2013b:63; Reid *et al.*, 2020:3). Through press freedom the media enables informed decision-making, which is intrinsic to a democratic society (Retief 2013b:63). The guarantee of press freedom is constitutionally protected (3.2.2.2), as far as this can be balanced and weighed against the need for not causing undue harm (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022:1626). The press is not above society as its right to freedom of expression is built upon the public's right to freedom of expression (Retief 2013b:63). Freedom of the press is thus not absolute as it does not include hate speech, propaganda, or incitement of violence (Retief 2013b:64).

According to Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2022:1625-1626), whilst there is "no single definition of public interest", the common understanding is that it represents something of benefit to the public. This normative conception of public interest is based on the idea of the public good of a nation or group (Rodny-Gumede, 2015:123). Retief (2013b:66) clarifies that public interest can be understood as something of legitimate interest or importance to citizens. This means that the more deeply people are affected by an issue, the more it is within society's interest to know (Retief, 2013b:66). Journalists are thus expected to detect or expose wrongful or damaging behaviour, protect public safety, and reveal corruption (Harcup, 2020:83) as this poses a threat to the good of the public. The public interest is the sole justification for deviating from the highest journalistic standards, as outlined in the SA Press Code (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022:1626).

Based on this argument, it is thus the journalist's duty within social responsibility theory to report on GBV as a threat to the public good. South Africa has among the highest GBV rates globally, with femicide five times the global average (African Health Organisation, 2021) (see 1.1). Sexual intimate partner violence affects 33–50% of women over 15 (Brits, 2022), though actual cases likely exceed reported figures (see 1.1). GBV profoundly impacts society by affecting most of the South African population; thus, reporting on GBV lies within the public interest.

3.3.2 Media regulation

Social responsibility theory serves as a framework for statutes and codes of conduct in many Western and non-western countries (Rodny-Gumede, 2017:13). In a democratic society, the media is expected to regulate its practice voluntarily, guided by its code of ethics devoid of external influence, while upholding its social obligation of serving the public interest (Obagwu & Idris, 2019:35). Self-regulation through codes

of conduct defines the minimal expectations of ethical practice, ideal standards of conduct and accepted behavioural conventions expected from journalists (Ward, 2008a:298; Diaz-Campo & Segado-Boj, 2015:3). The proposed ethical code should ideally be adopted after consulting with relevant stakeholders, and it should be updated regularly (Chan-Meetoo, 2012:4). The ethical responsibility of the journalist thus lies in independent moral decision making (Ward, 2008b:298-299; Mathe, 2020:22) informed by norms and regulations of professional ethics (Ward, 2008b:299; Borgmann, 2012:3; Donev, 2016:159). Retief (2013b:61) considers an ethical code the "first and most important way of regulating the press".

Ethical codes receive a range of responses from journalists; some regard them as a means of professionalisation, a deliberate attempt to regulate media and ward off governmental restrictions, whilst others see codes as inherently restricting press freedom, camouflaging hypocrisy and preserving special privileges (Keeble, 2001:13). This seems to be a global phenomenon (e.g., Fengler *et al.*, 2015; Chan-Meetoo, 2012; Harcup, 2020). Harcup (2020:75) found that most journalists globally dislike ethical codes as they perceive them as being out of touch with the realities they face. Despite increases in the number of media institutions, UN agencies and non-governmental organisations offering professional guidelines[22] for GBV reporting, these too often remain inaccessible, difficult to identify, and frequently ignored (JiG, 2021:165). Additionally, Bochow *et al.* (2017:458) rightfully note that the ideals of practice can always be different in how they are practised. Thus, Press Codes reflect all the ideals of ethical GBV reporting, and journalists can still make unethical decisions based on their interpretation of these principles. Alternatively, lapses in ethical judgement could result from needing to familiarise yourself with ethical codes or be made aware of their existence. Chan-Meetoo (2012:34) found that only some African journalists know the content of ethical codes or refer to them in daily practice.

In South Africa, media regulation is firstly governed by the country's constitution and laws and then by regulatory bodies such as the SA Press Council (2023), an independent co-regulatory mechanism set up by the print and online media (Thloloe, 2012:109; Satchwell *et al.*, 2021:280). The existence of the SA Press Code (2022) (see 3.6[23]) and its allegiance to a democratic and informed public aligns with social responsibility theory (Obagwu & Idris, 2019:29), albeit an adjusted version thereof, as journalism is hybridised to balance normative journalistic principles with social and cultural realities (Zirugo, 2021:863).

3.3.3 Ethical principles

Social responsibility theory outlines key principles for journalists. The Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947) determined that within the social responsibility framework, reporting should be "a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events," supply contextual meaning, provide a

[22] See for example, professional ethical guidelines on GBV reporting created by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Sonke Gender Justice (2017), Journalism Initiative on Gender-based Violence (JiG, 2021).
[23] See 3.6 for the in-depth discussion and analysis of the SA Press Code.

"representative picture" of the constituent groups in society, assist in clarifying societal goals and values and provide "full access to the day's intelligence" (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947:21-28; Ward, 2008a:299; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:31; Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022:1626). The theory emphasises the media's responsibility to the public in a democratic society (Fourie, 2011:29) by acting in the public interest (see 3.3.1), informed by norms and regulations of professional ethics (see 3.3.2).

As noted (see 3.3.1), GBV significantly affects South African society, making its reporting a matter of public interest. Ethical reporting helps ensure that laws and policies protect citizens' rights and dignity (Upreti, 2021:80). Journalists have a duty to provide accurate, comprehensive truth on public issues, empowering audiences to form informed opinions and enhancing reporting integrity (Ward, 2008a:299; Abagwu & Idris, 2019:27). In essence, journalists are expected to uphold the core ethical values of truthfulness (see discussion, 3.2.2.1).

Social responsibility theory requires journalism to strive for truth through the practice of objectivity (Oosthuizen, 2002:37; Ward, 2008a:298; Mokwena, 2018:9; Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:30; Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022:1626). However, this concept is contested. Critics argue that achieving complete objectivity is impossible due to inherent biases in journalists (Obilade, 1997:57; Retief, 2013b:68; Oso *et al.*, 2024:4) and its potential to neglect African realities (Nyamnjoh, 2013:22). Even in contexts like South Africa, where journalists defend objectivity as a crucial norm of professional journalism, concerns remain about its adequacy (Zirugo, 2021:873). Political and commercial pressures (Zirugo, 2021:873; Oso *et al.*, 2024:8) and personal biases (Oso *et al*., 2024:4) can influence reporting. For instance, relying on expertise or authoritative sources can amplify elite interests and concerns at the expense of public concerns (see 2.4). Brodie (2019:263) notes that individual voices and personal narratives are often unheard, journalists instead opting for 'professional,' frequently male, sources. The Journalism Initiative on Gender-based Violence (2021:45) warns that when journalists equate expertise with maleness, they have already committed an act of gender inequality. This may contribute to inaccurate language, clinical details, and victim-blaming (Chiumbu, 2022:41), obscuring the role of perpetrators and ignoring the violence and abuse of power (Buiten, 2007:118).

Additionally, objectivity may conflict with the notion of a "survivor[24]-centred approach" suggested by several ethical guidelines (see UNICEF, 2016; Sonke Gender Justice & Health-E News, 2017; JiG, 2021.) Here, a misunderstanding may occur on the part of the journalist that 'survivor-centred' should focus on the narrative of one individual and exclude vital contextual and verifiable information. The Journalism Initiative on Gender-based Violence (JiG, 2021:15-40) suggests that this approach requires balanced

[24] Survivor-centred approach also referred to as victim-centre or victim-based approach, for the purpose of this study the researcher prefers the the term survivor-centred approach.

portrayals, providing necessary context, protecting the dignity of trauma survivors, taking precautions when reporting on minors, and obtaining meaningful consent. The approach does thus not mean deviating from the core journalistic principle of truthfulness but requires journalists to tell the truth by minimising harm and speaking about the crime rather than the gore (Moore, 2021:40). Consequently, within this study, 'objectivity' will be understood as emphasising neutrality, balance, and limitation to verifiable facts (McQuail, 2013:57; Oso *et al.* 2024:4).

Beyond these core principles of truthfulness and objectivity, social responsibility theory encourages journalists to play a more active role in society by acting as a watchdog (Fourie, 2011:29; Ward, 2015:369; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:29). Journalists are thus expected to detect or expose wrongful or damaging behaviour, protect public safety, and reveal corruption (Harcup, 2020:83) as this poses a threat to the public good. In contemporary society, the watchdog has, however, been forced to adapt due to technological advancements. Wilding and Fray (2018:40) argue that the growing dominance of digital platforms and reliance on them for news consumption has pressured media companies to compromise their cultural products, undermining journalists' unique authority as watchdogs. The focus has primarily shifted to cater to audience consumption demands to accumulate cultural capital within the journalistic field (Wilding & Fray, 2018:40). Thus, within contemporary society, social media platforms and internet innovations have led to an interventionist orientation where journalists serve as detached watchdogs who intervene only episodically (Schwinges *et al*., 2024:1085-1086) and may not negatively impact consumer interests (Wilding & Fray, 2018:73). Despite concerns about quality, some believe digitisation has spurred innovation in journalistic standards and ethics, driven by the rise of media watch blogs and criticism on social media platforms (Eberwein & Porlezza, 2016 in Wilding & Fray, 2018:76). However, Wischnowski (2011:336) highlights that while some blogs take on watchdog roles, the blogosphere, for example, lacks the transparency of traditional media, which is held accountable through multiple layers of editorial review (Wilding & Fray, 2018:76).

Within the study, it is acknowledged, although the media's watchdog role is contested due to technological development, that within social responsibility theory, the media's role remains to serve democracy by exposing what harms the public good. Ideally, social responsibility theory encourages journalists, beyond reporting the news, to become advocates for social good. This translates to giving voice to marginalised communities (Ward, 2008b:140; Fourie, 2010:155) and actively challenging societal inequalities (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947:21-28; Ward, 2008a:299; Ward, 2015:369). Retief (2002:44-45) and Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2022:1626) highlight that the media should paint a representative picture of society and refrain from social stereotypes. Fulfilling this role requires publishing a diversity of content from a multiplicity of viewpoints (Ward, 2008b:140; Fourie 2017:112; Mokwena, 2018:9; Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:29-30). Some scholars, like Fourie (2010:155)

and Igyuve *et al.* (2021:30-31), have a view that aligns more with postcolonial critique (discussed 3.4.2), arguing that this responsibility extends even further – journalists should not just challenge but actively work to counteract social inequalities, while also expanding the range of voices heard and raising public awareness. This fulfils their responsibility to serve the public interest in a democracy (Fourie, 2011:29; Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:30-32; Igyuve *et al*., 2021:25). Such media must be accessible to as many as possible in a society (Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947:21-28; Ward, 2008a:299; Fourie, 2017:112; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:31).

As a watchdog, the journalist must expose what perpetuates GBV within South African society as it harms the public good. Following the above arguments, the journalist should ensure that survivors from marginalised communities are represented within the media's portrayal of GBV, that frames do not support stereotypes as to who should be considered a victim or perpetrator of violence, that a multiplicity of diverse sources are used, and that contextualisation pays particular attention to multiple intersecting vulnerabilities (Sonke Gender Justice & Health-E News, 2017:20; JiG, 2021:103, 162) (see 2.4).

McQuail (2010:205) states that journalists must observe social norms to avoid grave cultural offences. This aligns with Retief's (2002:44-45) emphasis that journalists should be socially responsible in the reporting of indecency, obscenity, violence, brutality, blasphemy, and sex. To Oosthuizen (2014:36-37) and Mokwena (2018:9), this equates to journalists not publishing content that could incite violence or social unrest. This argument could be misinterpreted to mean journalists should not write about anything that could offend the public, including GBV. However, Fourie (2017:112) argues that while upholding social norms and values is essential, journalists should also engage in critical discussions about societal issues and expose threats to social order, even if such threats involve violence, indecency, or brutality. Thus, journalists should not avoid publishing such content but do so in a socially conscious way along with the necessary social context for the audience to be informed and empowered. Accordingly, articles deemed upsetting should use content warnings to prevent survivors' re-traumatisation and avoid grave cultural offences. Additionally, it should be stressed that if the broader context of the article is excluded, it may lack any real purpose other than sensationalising crime (JiG, 2021:104). Such reporting offers little understanding of GBV as a societal issue (JiG, 2021:162), pushes away audiences and marginalises survivors (JiG, 2021:104).

As seen above, social responsibility theory emphasises the media's role as a public platform. Journalists are expected to preserve and protect agreed-upon social and cultural norms and values (Fourie, 2017:112), and avoid harmful content that could incite violence or social unrest (Mokwena, 2018:9; McQuail, 2010:205), provide relevant social context (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022:1626; Ekweonu,

2020:5; Igyuve *et al.*, 2021:28), and facilitate the exchange of information, comments, and criticism (Ward, 2008a:299; Obagwu & Idris, 2019:31; Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022:1626).

Additionally, journalists are expected to adhere to professional, ethical principles (Babran & Atatherian, 2019:3). Other than the ethical elements discussed above, this includes distinguishing between news and opinion (Ward, 2008a:298), respecting the confidentiality of sources and avoiding intrusion into private matters, which provides for not intruding into private grief and distress (Retief, 2002:44-45). The term 'gender-based violence is not explicitly addressed in the SA Press Code (2022). However, the code does have several clauses (Section 3.4, 5.1, 8 and 9) that directly or indirectly apply to GBV (see 3.6.2). For this study, the emphasis will fall on the identified ethical principles, whilst professional ethical principles will be discussed in the section discussing the SA Press Code (see 3.6).

3.3.3.1 Theoretical statement 1

Social responsibility theory is a normative media theory that prescribes ethical frameworks and professional standards for journalists (Babran & Ataherian, 2019:3; Igyuve *et al.*, 2021:26), emphasising their obligation to serve the public interest (Ekweonu, 2020:5; Igyuve *et al*., 2021:28). Social responsibility theory outlines key ethical principles for journalists, emphasising their role in serving the public good within a democratic society. Ethical journalism within social responsibility theory requires the following journalistic ethical principles: accuracy and comprehensiveness, contextualisation, representation, public interest, serving as a social watchdog, independence, professional ethics, minimising harm, and journalism as a public platform.

3.4 Postcolonial critique and the media

While social responsibility theory emphasises the media's positive role in promoting democratic values such as press freedom and objectivity, postcolonial theory can be used to critique how media can perpetuate and reinforce colonial power structures and cultural hegemony (see 1.1.3). Postcolonial critique on the media argues that the media often reinforces negative stereotypes and marginalised non-western cultures and voices (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:37; Fourie, 2011:35), perpetuating the power inequalities among genders as enforced and normalised by colonial dependency (Cunha, 2019:103).

As determined in Chapter 2, South Africa's history of racial prejudice and colonialism has created a racialised patriarchal hierarchy that governs society, often punishing those who do not conform to this norm with violence. Media coverage of GBV frequently reinforces these inequalities by focusing on violence against the 'ideal victim' while neglecting the suffering of women of colour and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (see 2.4). Thus, South African media content, especially GBV content, has remained racialised, gendered, and classed (Chiumbu, 2022:43).

The following section will discuss the theoretical framework of postcolonial theory by analysing African approaches to media ethics (see 3.4.1) and ethical principles (see 3.4.2) derived from postcolonial critique.

3.4.1 African approaches to media ethics

Contemporary research on media ethics in Africa is heavily influenced and fundamentally entrenched in Western theories and methodologies (Wasserman, 2006:86; Rao & Wasserman, 2007:33; Rao, 2010:103; Fourie, 2011:36-35; Ward, 2015:369) as Western theorists formed the continent's media models. Consequently, these theories and methodologies are ambiguous with histories of colonial power (Garman, 2015:17; Yusha'u, 2018:465). Colonialism embedded liberal ideals (Epstein, 2017:297). Govenden (2013:24) argues that the very concept of democracy[25] is based on "Western knowledge systems", and thus, it should not be assumed that the role of the media is to strengthen democracy. Similarly, Nyamnjoh (2013:22) states that overemphasising individual rights and freedoms can hinder our understanding of how societies are interconnected. This suggests that focusing solely on individual liberties might neglect the broader social and cultural context.

Theories of journalism, such as the social responsibility theory, are commonly applied with an underlying assumption of universality (Mutsvairo *et al*., 2021:1001). However, several researchers agree that universality within media ethics cannot be assumed (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:43; Rao, 2010:99; Mutsvairo *et al*., 2021:1001). Plaisance *et al.* (2012:15) echo this view by asserting a need for caution when universalising ethics-based claims due to possible Eurocentric, Christian or imperialistic assumptions. Similarly, Wasserman (2006:86) and Mutsvairo *et al.* (2021:997) state that the belief that there is a universal way of approaching ethical journalism fails to reflect the unique histories and culture of specifically the Global South. This aligns with a postmodernist perspective, which posits that all knowledge claims are partial, local, and specific rather than universal and ahistorical (Usher & Edwards, 1994:10). Conversely, Meyers (2016:199) argues against rejecting universal ethical principles solely because they conflict with cultural beliefs or experiences.

Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2022:1632) highlight how African scholars are still thoroughly rooted in and produce and reproduce colonial and apartheid norms. Western media models are not always sufficient for African media realities (Bosch, 2018:414), as journalism is intrinsically influenced by local conditions that challenge the hegemony of Western professional ideologies, particularly the generic ideals of objectivity (see 3.3.3) (Plaisance *et al.,* 2012:15; Mutsvairo *et al.*, 2021:1001). Additionally, the African experience has been omitted from evolving normative media theories (Govenden, 2013:5). Hence, there is increasing emphasis on African journalism and media studies research to find answers to media ethics

[25] This study does not aim to analyse the state of South African political structures such as democracy. The researcher wants to emphasise that normative perceptions of journalism are built on Western theories.

and normative theory questions from an African epistemological perspective (Fourie, 2010:151; Wasserman, 2011:796). Thus, several researchers have explored media ethics that better represent the African narratives in which they operate.

In his Afri-ethics, Kasoma (1996:85) regards Western standards of professionalism, such as the theory of social responsibility, as wholly unsuitable for the African context. He argues that Africans should be protected from "insidious influences of the foreign culture and alien genres of reporting" (Kasoma, 2000:85). Kasoma (1996:104) further notes that journalists should be society-orientated with a greater responsibility to African communal values. His argument has, however, invited criticism due to its romantic notions of an African society untouched by the influence of colonialism and modern globalism (Nyamnjoh, 2005:91; Banda, 2009:236; Wasserman, 2011:794; Mutsvairo *et al.*, 2021:1002-1003). Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2022:1633) perhaps word it best by arguing that Afri-ethics does not adequately capture the idea that moral thought evolves in societies.

Regarding developing indigenous normative media theory in South Africa, the focus fell on the concept of Ubuntu (Fourie, 2017:113). The meaning of Ubuntu is often explained concerning the isiZulu saying '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu,'* which is frequently translated to "a person is a person through other people" (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022:1627-1631). The concept is understood as the ethical affirmation of one's humanity through recognising commonality and community with others in their uniqueness and difference (Bochow *et al.,* 2017:454; Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018:391). Personhood is accomplished and defined by how a person is incorporated into the community (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022:1631). In the context of this study, Ubuntu is viewed as an ethical ideal rather than in its historical or anthropological sense (Tavernaro-Haidarian, 2018:391).

While Ubuntuism offers a compelling ethical framework, it receives justified criticism. Researchers have noted that attempts to indigenise ethics often treat Africa as a monolith by ignoring intricate sociocultural differences – presenting African culture in romantic, idealised terms, with little acknowledgement of how cultures have been altered through historical processes such as colonialism, nationalism, and globalisation (Banda, 2009:236; Tomaselli, 2009:13; Wasserman, 2011:795; Govenden, 2013:11; Mutsvairo *et al.*, 2021:1002). Scholars like Bochow *et al.* (2017:455) and Mutsvairo *et al.* (2021:1003) point out the lack of a universally agreed-upon definition for Ubuntu. Its diverse interpretations across different cultures create ambiguity in its application and to whom it applies. Bochow *et al.* (2017:455) express concern that this places undue expectations on Black Africans to embody its ideals by default, as it overlooks the diverse social and historical contexts that shape individual experiences (Mutsvairo *et al*., 2021:1001; Bochow *et al.*, 2017:455-457). Additionally, the selective application of Ubuntu, often excluding groups like criminals

and immigrants, creates a hierarchy of ethical responsibility and reinforces stereotypes about acceptable behaviour (Bochow *et al.*, 2017:455-457). Such expectations ignore the complexities of identity and the situational nature of ethics. This raises questions about potential cultural essentialism.[26] Through oversimplification and ignoring historical evolution (Mutsvairo *et al.*, 2021:1002). Adding to these concerns, Rodny-Gmede's (2015:123) research found that South African journalists only had vague ideas of what Ubuntu might entail and thus struggled to translate the broad concept of Ubuntu into concrete journalistic practices and principles. Their limited understanding hindered its adoption as a guiding ethical framework for the profession (Rodny-Gumede, 2015:123).

Researchers such as Metz (2015:83) and Rodny-Gumede (2017:18) criticise normative interpretations of African ethics, specifically Ubuntu, for potentially prioritising harmony over truth-telling in ethical dilemmas. Accountability is thus often seen as secondary to public harmony, which is the ultimate public good. Focusing on public harmony may lead journalists to reduce social accountability for GBV, perpetuate stereotypes of violence, and marginalise victims by silencing their narratives.

Metz (2015:78) nuances the understanding of African ethics by moving away from the emphasis on collectivism in normative interpretations. Instead, he suggests treating individuals by their capacity to enter relationships of solidarity. The focus thus falls on honouring communal relationships rather than maximising general welfare or abiding by social norms. Additionally, a "misused capacity" to commune with others would permit journalists to be "discordant" towards an individual (Metz, 2015:82). Therefore, failure to exhibit identity and solidarity with the community warrants reporting that might otherwise be considered "unfavourable" (Metz, 2015:81). Metz (2015:83-86) suggests a framework for journalistic ethics which entails transparency on how choices affect the community through truth and opinion so that they can make informed choices, facilitating communal relationships, accurate and valuable information, diversity in views, protecting reputations and prohibiting speech that is harmful and invoke violence. This interpretation of African ethics seems to align more with the central journalistic principles of normative approaches to journalism, such as social responsibility theory (see 3.3.3). However, there is a clear emphasis on communal relationships as a guideline rather than professional ethical codes.

A recent development within African communications studies is the movement towards a decolonial perspective (Chiumbu, 2013:66). Decoloniality is not concerned with the more minor problems of disciplinary knowledge (Moyo & Mutsvairo, 2018:25). Unlike postcolonial theory, which critiques the colonial continued influence on production of knowledge and identity, decoloniality is a broader

[26] Cultural essentialism refers to the belief that a culture is homogeneous and defined by a set of fixed, inherent characteristics shared by all members (Yalcinkaya *et al.,* 2017). This perspective overlooks the internal diversity of cultures and the influence of historical, social, and political factors on cultural practices and beliefs.

framework, challenging the very foundations of Western knowledge production and power structures (Chiumbu, 2013:66-68). This idealistically translates to media practices that are representative of diversity and intersectionality[27] of the society (Govenden, 2013:18).

Although it can be agreed that modernity can be seen as a product of colonialism (Chiumbu, 2013:66; Moyo & Mutsvairo, 2018:25), this study adopts a cautious approach to a purely decolonial perspective. The researcher believes that a postcolonial conversation should first be initiated for a decolonial perspective to function within the South African media context. Decolonial theory, while valuable, risks oversimplification and cultural essentialism, like potential shortcomings of normative African ethical frameworks. The researcher argues that the influence of colonialism and modern globalism cannot be ignored within normative approaches to media ethics – existing theoretical frameworks cannot simply be discarded and replaced. Thus far, academics have, however, failed to consider this perspective, either opting for alternative interpretations of African ethics (e.g. Kasoma, 1996; Metz, 2015) or a purely decolonial approach (e.g. Chiumbu, 2013; Govenden, 2013; Moyo & Mutsvairo, 2018). Postcolonial theory provides a historical understanding of the legacies of colonialism (Wasserman, 2010:86), which are a key target for dismantling in decolonial approaches. However, a complete deconstruction of knowledge production and power structures requires a more comprehensive analysis beyond the scope of this master's dissertation.

This study argues for initiating a postcolonial conversation within the existing framework. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the influence of colonialism on media ethics in Africa while acknowledging the strengths of existing frameworks and avoiding potential pitfalls of oversimplification. This is not an attack or rejection of Western theories or universal ethical principles but the recognition that the universality cannot be assumed (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:43; Rao, 2010:99; Mutsvairo *et al*., 2021:1001) as patterns of journalists' ethical outlooks are related to the structural system in which they operate. For this study, I agree with Bosch (2018:416) that engaging with African ethical frameworks does not necessitate rejecting Western media theory. Instead, it is an opportunity to enrich the field by offering new perspectives and challenging dominating Western ideas (Bosch, 2018:416) (see 3.4.2).

3.4.2 Ethical principles

Postcolonial media theory critically examines how media perpetuates and reinforces colonial power structures and cultural hegemony (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:43; Fourie, 2011:35). Wasserman (2006:87; 2010b:86) and Fourie (2011:35) suggest postcolonial theory as a critical mode of inquiry; however, they

[27] Intersectionality refers to the overlap of different social identities related to systems of oppression or privilege, that, when intersecting, create a whole with multiple social identities, privileges, and experiences of oppression (Sonke Gender Justice, 2017:6). These social identities may include race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and disability.

realise that it is not an exhaustive and comprehensive ethical framework by itself. Utilising postcolonial critique involves incorporating African value systems and highlighting dominant cultural assumptions (Wasserman, 2006:86). Hence, this research will base its conception of ethical GBV reporting on amalgamating the theories of social responsibility and postcolonial critique. While postcolonial theory does not have a single, codified set of ethical principles, it offers a framework for ethical considerations that challenge traditional Western perspectives. Wasserman (2006:83) identifies three central norms: surveillance of power, affirmation and recognition of cultural identity, and the media's role in transforming society.

Within the social responsibility framework, journalists act as watchdogs for society, uncovering corruption, threats to public safety, and societal inequalities that need to be addressed (see 3.3.3), specifically focusing on the power wielded by the government. The traditional watchdog role is reconfigured under postcolonial theory. Wasserman (2006:85-86) argues for a broader focus on all forms of power inequality, not just governmental. Journalists, thus, should give voice to the marginalised and critically examine issues of class, race, and power dynamics (Wasserman, 2006:86-87). Boonzaier (2017:477-478) argues that the hypervisibility and clinical dissection of crimes committed against African women highlight that our media is still influenced by colonial thought. Thus, according to postcolonial critique, journalists are required to re-examine their own biases and whether they perpetuate violence through silencing survivors' narratives that do not align with 'the ideal victim.'

A primary concern within postcolonial media critique regards the media's tendency to reinforce negative stereotypes and marginalise non-western cultures and voices (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:37; Fourie, 2011:35), perpetuating the power inequalities among genders as enforced and normalised by colonial dependency (Cunha, 2019:103). Scholars have found that GBV reporting still excessively focuses on violence affecting white, attractive, cishet women from respectable backgrounds, often ignoring violence against women of colour or disadvantaged backgrounds (see 2.4) (Hunt & Jaworska, 2019:3; Brodie, 2019:260; Boonzaier, 2023:86-87). Thus, postcolonial theory emphasises giving voice to those historically silenced or marginalised by colonialism and apartheid (Govenden, 2013:18). Postcolonial media critique is concerned with social change and the disruption of patterns of colonial power; thus, it emphasises the need for media to be aware of their own biases and assumptions, actively working to promote diverse voices and perspectives (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:41). This is especially necessary in GBV reporting where stereotypes persist regarding who could be a survivor or perpetrator of violence (see 2.4). GBV reporting should represent the nation and reflect all communities, irrespective of whether survivors fit the concept of the 'ideal victim.'

Additionally, the media should determine and address new forms of marginalisation and power inequality emerging in the postcolonial era, such as racial essentialism (Wasserman, 2006:86). While overt racism in media audience representation might be less visible in contemporary South Africa, socio-economic factors still dictate access to information and influence public interest narratives (Rodny-Gumede, 2017:14). Journalists need to be aware of these ongoing inequalities and strive for a broader range of perspectives in their reporting (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022:1634). Thus, journalists should not solely rely on the narratives of 'professional' sources such as the police or judicial system (Sonke Gender Justice & Health-E News, 2017:20) that may contribute to victim-blaming, clinical details, inaccurate language, obscuring the role of perpetrators and ignoring the abuse of power (Buiten, 2007:118; Chiumbu, 2022:41). Journalists should focus on including the voices of minority communities, women expert sources and GBV survivors.

Through postcolonial critique, media researchers aim to redefine the concept of public interest. Within social responsibility theory, journalists act in the public's best interest, exposing wrongdoing and holding powerful institutions accountable (see 3.3.3). This normative conception of public interest is based on the idea of the public good of a nation or group (Rodny-Gumede, 2015:123) (see 3.3.1). It is often narrowly defined by excluding diverse voices (Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022:1626). Rao and Wasserman (2007:34) argue that media ethics should empower Indigenous people and enlighten the community it serves instead of being bound to universal, Western-centric principles. The media should empower previously colonised communities by elevating marginalised narratives of GBV, reporting in a language the community can understand, and providing local support services for survivors of similar violence. This aligns with Govenden's (2013:18) call for media to move beyond Western ideals and address local needs, ensuring a more accurate and inclusive representation of society. Postcolonial theory encourages a broader definition of public interest representing the nation, including marginalised communities excluded based on race, ethnicity, and socio-economic factors (Rodny-Gumede, 2017:13).

Wasserman (2006:86) and Mutsvairo *et al.* (2021:997) state that the assumption of a universal way of approaching ethical journalism fails to reflect the unique histories and culture of specifically the Global South. Similarly, Fourie (2017:121) suggests that traditional notions of media ethics, such as those proposed by social responsibility theory, might not fully apply in postcolonial contexts. Postcolonial theory suggests media ethics should focus on "ethical communication," which fosters human interaction and virtues like truthfulness, fairness, and respect (Fourie, 2017:122), rather than 'media ethics. Thus, postcolonial theory places less emphasis on codes of conduct and stresses social relationships. This aligns with Metz's (2015:78) interpretation of African ethics, which suggests that individuals should be treated under their capacity to enter relationships of solidarity (see 3.4.1). This, however, may negatively

influence how journalists report on GBV due to variations in interpreting this concept. As mentioned earlier (see 3.4.1), focus on the community may lead to reduced social accountability for GBV and subjectivity, perpetuating stereotypes of violence and marginalising victims by silencing their narratives to protect social relationships. Although these issues arise as pitfalls, the focus on ethical communication does reveal an emphasis on minimising unnecessary harm in GBV reporting.

A primary ethical principle within postcolonial theory can thus be identified as respect for human dignity. Unlike Western theoretical frameworks where respect for human dignity is implied (see 3.2.2), postcolonial theory explicitly emphasises marginalised groups' humanity. From this ethical principle, Wasserman (2013 in Govenden, 2013:10) emphasises the “ethics of listening,” which Harcup (2020:81) calls "political listening.” This means giving voice to formerly colonised peoples “on their terms” and avoiding paternalistic approaches – instead, emphasising the agency of marginalised groups (Wasserman, 2006:86; Govenden, 2013:10; Harcup, 2020:81). The journalist’s responsibility is to expose colonial and patriarchal structures that perpetuate GBV. Thus, the topic should be approached within the context of patriarchal gender norms, intersectionality, and the more significant societal problem of GBV (Sonke Gender Justice & Health-E News, 2017:20). Wasserman (2021) argues that this requires a fundamental revision of the relationship between journalists and their various audiences, one in which power relations are radically altered and suggests a more reciprocal relationship which would require journalists to “let go of their desire to control the narrative, or tendency to listen only to obtain answers to questions already formulated.” This entails journalists stepping away from the notion of simply exposing the truth, and revealing the truth, allowing marginalised communities to voice their experiences.

Within normative ethical frameworks, specifically social responsibility theory, journalists are expected to be held ethically and legally liable for the consequences of their reporting (see 3.2.2.3). Accountability is often secondary to public harmony in normative interpretations of African ethics, specifically Ubuntu (see 3.4.1). Wasserman (2010:83) argues that while holding power accountable remains essential, postcolonial theory emphasises sensitivity to the social context (Wasserman, 2010:83). Thus, striking a balance between accountability and social harmony is crucial. However, if it is to be understood that the journalist is obligated to critically examine issues of class, race, and power dynamics (Wasserman, 2006:86-87; Rao & Wasserman, 2007:43; Fourie, 2011:35), social harmony cannot be guaranteed. While social cohesion is essential, within the postcolonial framework, journalists should also engage in critical discussions about societal issues, expose threats to social order, be aware of their own biases and assumptions, especially regarding the frames used in contextualising GBV (see 2.4), and actively work to promote diverse voices and perspectives (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:41). Thus, journalists should not avoid content but be socially conscious of the implications of their actions and provide the necessary social context for the audience to be informed and empowered. This aligns with Retief’s (2002:44-45) emphasis that journalists should be

socially responsible in the reporting of obscenity, violence, brutality, and sex. Within GBV reporting, journalists should thus refrain from explicit details, clinically dissecting the crime scene, victimising and blaming survivors, and using sensationalism (see 2.4). Accordingly, articles deemed upsetting should use content warnings to prevent cultural offences.

Although journalists are not explicitly required to adhere to professional ethical principles, Metz's (2015:83-86) suggested framework for journalistic ethics serves as a very encompassing guideline. This entails diversity in views, facilitating communal relationships, transparency, accurate and valuable information, and respect for human dignity (Metz, 2015:83-86).

Bridge sentence please…

3.4.2.1 Theoretical statement 2

A postcolonial critique argues that the media should be aware of its biases and actively promote diverse voices (Rao & Wasserman, 2007). This perspective emphasises challenging power structures, recognising cultural identities, and the media's role in social change. In South Africa, colonial legacies embedded in media perpetuate gender inequalities (Cunha, 2019). Postcolonial media theory suggests the following journalistic ethical principles from postcolonial theory: deconstructing colonial influences and power, expanding the watchdog role, redefining public interest, respectful listening and empowerment, balancing accountability and harmony, and focusing on communal relationships and ethical communication.

3.5 Converging social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique

By analysing the ethical principles identified within social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique (see 3.3.3 and 3.4.2), the next section answers SRQ1: *How do social responsibility- and postcolonial media theories contribute to defining ethical journalism in South Africa regarding GBV?*

3.5.1 Ethical standards

3.5.1.1 Accuracy and comprehensiveness with deconstructed power

The ethical principle of accuracy and comprehensiveness is built on truthfulness (see 3.2.2.1) and objectivity (see 3.3.3). While essential truth may be elusive (Retief, 2013b:68), journalists aim for truthfulness through accuracy by verification, fairness in representation, transparency about sources of information (see 3.2.2.1) and comprehensiveness in their reporting. Beyond these essential tasks, the deconstruction of power requires journalists to challenge colonial biases to pursue truthfulness. Journalists should consider alternative research methods involving affected communities and explore how colonialism's legacy shapes social structures, economic inequalities, and cultural norms contributing to

GBV (see 2.2.2). For example, reporting on domestic violence (DV) might consider how colonial resource exploitation led to economic hardships that contributed to the issue.

Additionally, journalists should open their processes of verification and fact-checking to Western ideals of objectivity. Relying on authoritative sources, often male, can amplify elite interests and concerns at the expense of public realities (see 2.4). Brodie (2019:263) and Chiumbu (2022:41) note that the dominance of male voices in media coverage may contribute to several issues, including the use of insensitive language, excessive focus on clinical details, and victim-blaming narratives. This focus, as Buiten (2007) argues, obscures the culpability of perpetrators and overlooks the underlying power dynamics at play in GBV incidents (Buiten, 2007:118). Postcolonial theory suggests elevating survivors' narratives and avoiding sensationalising their experiences (see 3.4.2). Minwalla and Foster (2021:17) state that "without a clear purpose, trauma journalism becomes sensationalism," thus providing the necessary context is vital regarding accuracy and comprehensiveness.

Accuracy and comprehensiveness thus go beyond the fundamental task of ensuring truthfulness through using authoritative sources for verification. They require journalists to deconstruct power in the pursuit and production of news. Deconstructing power requires engaging with marginalised communities as sources of information, abandoning stereotypical narratives that do not accurately represent GBV within the South African context, and being mindful of language and frames utilised in depicting marginalised communities.

3.5.1.2 Contextualisation and respectful listening

Studies show media coverage of GBV is often focused on 'mega cases' (Brodie, 2019; Chiumbu, 2022) without broader context, neglecting the systemic nature of the issue (Malila, 2018:17). As discussed in Chapter 2, critics argue this event-driven journalism (see 2.3) fails to address the root causes of GBV like colonial patriarchy (Bagai & Faimau, 2021:32; Espinilla, 2021:290) and reinforces stereotypes about victims and perpetrators (Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:13; Harrison, 2021:67; Bhattacharjee, 2021:132) by highlighting characteristics like race, class, or location (Brodie, 2020:137).

Within postcolonial theory, the journalist is expected to evaluate how media perpetuates colonial power structures and cultural dominance (see 3.4). Thus, a solution to the problem of event-driven journalism is thematic reporting – a more comprehensive understanding of GBV as a societal issue (Carratalá, 2016:44). This would entail highlighting how GBV in South Africa stems from intersecting inequalities and the country's colonial history (Chiumbu, 2022:44) which continues to influence gender roles, economic disparities, and cultural norms that perpetuate violence (see 2.2). Thematic reporting incorporates contextual elements such as statistics, social narratives, and root causes (Ali & Pasha, 2022:5).

Unlike Western theoretical frameworks where respect for human dignity is implied (see 3.2.2), postcolonial theory explicitly emphasises marginalised groups' humanity. From this ethical principle, respectful listening and empowerment emerge (Wasserman, 2013 in Govenden, 2013:10; Harcup, 2020:81), from which a more survivor-centred approach can be derived (see UNICEF, 2016; Sonke Gender Justice & Health-E News, 2017; JiG, 2021). Contextualisation involves actively listening to the experiences of marginalised communities and ensuring their narratives are told authentically, avoiding victim-blaming or stereotypical portrayals. Respectful listening does not equate a deviation from truthfulness as the most important ethical principle but requires journalists to tell the truth by minimising harm. Journalists, thus, still need to verify information. Journalists evolve from exposing the truth to revealing it by allowing marginalised communities to voice their experiences.

As mentioned previously, this approach requires balanced portrayals, providing necessary context, protecting the dignity of trauma survivors, taking precautions when reporting on minors and obtaining meaningful consent (JiG, 2021:15-40). This does not equate deviating from the core journalistic principle of truthfulness but requires journalists to tell the truth by minimising harm (see 3.3.3). The balance between providing necessary context and minimising harm requires the journalist to approach sources with sensitivity to the trauma of survivors. Döring (2020:45) states that the identities of GBV survivors need to be protected. However, other sources within local marginalised communities must be precisely named and critically questioned.

Thus, the journalist's role includes providing individual stories with the contextual background of GBV as a societal issue by incorporating contextual elements such as statistics, social narratives, and root causes. This process of contextualisation should authentically reflect the realities of marginalised people; however, it should also be sensitive to protecting the dignity of trauma survivors.

3.5.1.3 Representation and redefining public interest

Postcolonial theory calls for a broader definition of the nation's public interest, including marginalised communities often excluded based on race, ethnicity, and socio-economic factors. Redefining public interest in GBV reporting means understanding that all forms of GBV are a societal concern. Resources should be dedicated to reporting on the experiences of those facing less visibility (see 2.2.2 and 2.2.3) rather than prioritising sensationalised cases or ‘mega cases’ (Brodie, 2019; Chiumbu, 2022). This broader definition ensures that the media serves the public good by highlighting the reality of the problem and advocating for change that benefits society irrespective of race, ethnicity, or socio-economic class.

Representation, an ethical principle within social responsibility theory, aligns with the idea of redefining the public interest as presented within the postcolonial theory. Fulfilling this role requires publishing

diverse content from a diversity of views to represent society (see 3.4.2) accurately. Chasi and Rodny-Gumede (2022:1633) argue that online news media creates a capacity for in-depth reporting and news text that allows broader views. This means journalists can go beyond covering just high-profile cases and should include stories from marginalised communities most affected by GBV (see 2.2.2 and 2.2.3). Also, journalists should utilise the languages these communities speak and seek experts from diverse backgrounds who can offer nuanced perspectives.

3.5.1.4 Social watchdog with expanding accountability

Postcolonial theory builds upon the watchdog role, determined in social responsibility theory (see 3.3.3), to encompass all forms of power inequality (see 3.4.2). Journalists must act as watchdogs for all institutions and power structures contributing to GBV. This includes investigating gendered abuse within government, corporations, religious organisations, and even traditional leadership structures (see 2.2.3). For example, journalists should investigate companies with discriminatory workplace practices, lack of sexual harassment policies, or contribute to social inequalities that perpetuate GBV. Furthermore, journalists should expose religious teachings and harmful traditional practices that condone or contribute to GBV, including, for example, religious justifications for domestic violence or gender inequality, child marriages, and the practice of female genital mutilation as an initiation ritual in certain cultures.

Furthermore, the focus should go beyond exposing individual incidents to uncovering institutional, systemic issues that allow GBV to persist (see 2.2.3). This means journalists should be investigating how legal systems, social services, and cultural norms fail to protect survivors and encourage abuse to persist. For example, journalists should investigate why law enforcement struggles to address GBV effectively, highlighting issues like victim-blaming within the legal system or inadequate support services for survivors.

Journalists should also expose hidden issues by investigating under-reported forms of GBV, particularly those rooted in colonial legacies. Brodie (2020:125), Bhattacharjee (2021:132) and Nkoala (2022:59) note that media representation is often the opposite of statistical realities. GBV reporting tends to excessively focus on sexually driven homicides (Boonzaier, 2017:476) committed by strangers (Bhattacharjee, 2021:132), ignoring the most common forms of violence, such as domestic violence and IPV, which creates a significant distortion in the representation of GBV. This can be addressed through presenting statistics in a way that highlights the scope of the problem. Journalists should thus be transparent about the incidence of GBV as a crime and supply the necessary context for the audience to interpret and comprehend statistics.

3.5.1.5 Minimising harm and maintaining social harmony

Within social responsibility theory, journalism must be mindful of potential social consequences, avoiding content that incites violence or reinforces harmful stereotypes. Postcolonial theory similarly emphasises sensitivity to the social context. From this, it can be deduced that both these theoretical frameworks aim to abide by the core journalistic ethical principle of minimising harm (see 3.2.2.3).

Considering the sensitive nature of GBV, news that depicts violence should use appropriate content warnings to maintain social harmony and prevent survivors from being re-traumatised. This can be easily achieved on platforms like *News24* and *IOL* by allowing the audience to view sensitive content. Similarly, articles should include resources and support for individuals influenced by GBV as this will enable individuals to reconnect and interact with the community and reclaim their personhood (as suggested by African philosophies, see 3.4.1). The article should thus provide information on culturally relevant support services available to survivors. This could be implemented similarly to the resources associated with reporting on suicide (Döring, 2020:44).

Minimising harm and maintaining social harmony would require journalists to be more mindful of frames utilised in their reporting of GBV, as it requires the journalist to consider the survivor's humanity. Neither the news report nor the journalistic process should re-traumatise survivors of GBV or unjustifiably harm the community. Thus, the journalist should refrain from detailed descriptions of violence and avoid reinforcing cultural socio-economic stereotypes regarding survivors and perpetrators.

This would include not shocking the audience with sexually explicit details of the crime and emotionalised descriptions of the perpetrator as a “monster” or “pervert” (Döring, 2020:42). Minimising harm, whether one agrees or not, includes protecting humanity and rights of suspected offenders (Döring, 2020:44). Thus, before declaring an individual as a perpetrator of violence, the journalist needs to have substantial evidence to verify such a claim as this will influence social cohesion. This does not equate to not believing accusations of violence but instead requires the journalist to dig further than assumptions and accusations, as required by its role as a watchdog. The expanded watchdog role (see 3.5.4) should be mindful of the social context, the potential impact on communities and the perpetrator's humanity. However, this should never prevent journalists from exposing power-inequality forms (see 3.3.3 and 3.4.2).

3.5.1.6 Professional ethics and decolonising communication

The researcher suggests moving beyond codes of ethics to maintain professional standards of truthfulness, independence, minimising harm, and accountability (see 3.2.2.3). This does not nullify

current codes of conduct, such as the SA Press Code, but encourages journalists to decolonise the perception of ethical communication.

Postcolonial theory suggests prioritising survivor narratives (see 3.4.2). However, social responsibility theory emphasises the ethical principle of objectivity (see 3.3.3). As mentioned earlier, a survivor-centred approach may be misinterpreted to contradict the nature of objectivity (see 3.3.3). This study suggests that a survivor-centred approach does not mean deviating from the core journalistic principle of truthfulness but emphasises that truth be pursued in minimising harm (Moore, 2021:40). Thus, not prioritising but amplifying voices of survivors by calling out gender violations and harmful rhetoric (UNICEF & ZUJ, 2019:3).

Furthermore, journalists are encouraged to move beyond traditional journalist-driven narratives, emphasising the agency of marginalised communities through collaborative storytelling (see 3.5.2). This necessitates fostering trust by engaging respectfully with these communities (see 3.5.3). However, adherence to established professional guidelines remains paramount. This includes resisting the commercial pressure to sensationalise GBV narratives and ensuring the safety of survivors and whistle-blowers by protecting their identities.

3.5.1.7 Public platform and decolonised media

As a public platform, journalism requires journalists to facilitate public discussions about GBV and foster conversations about prevention and support. GBV articles should thus provide credible resources (see 3.5.5) that include information about relevant support services available to survivors. Ideally, within the postcolonial perspective, media platforms should also be utilised to dismantle colonial legacies and advocate for gender equality and a more just society.

3.5.2 Proposed ethical framework for GBV media reporting

By analysing the ethical principles identified within social responsibility and postcolonial media theories (see 3.3.3 and 3.4.2), SRQ1 was answered. The previous section provided insight to answer SRQ1.

This literature study concludes that ethical GBV journalism within the social responsibility framework is defined through the moral principles of accuracy and comprehensiveness, contextualisation, representativeness, public interest, serving as a social watchdog, independence, professional ethics, minimising harm, and journalism as a public platform (see 3.3.3). Postcolonial theory as an approach to ethical GBV reporting is defined through the following journalistic ethical principles: deconstructing colonial influences and power, expanding the watchdog role, redefining public interest, respectful listening and empowerment, balancing accountability, and focusing on communal relationships and ethical communication (see 3.4.2).

Table 3.1 summarises the journalistic ethical standards within the proposed ethical framework, as discussed above:

Table 3.1: Proposed ethical standards of GBV reporting in South Africa

Ethical principle	Description
Accuracy and comprehensiveness with deconstructed power:	Verify information, be transparent about sources, and be comprehensive in reporting. Engage with marginalised communities as sources of information and abandon stereotypical narratives that do not reflect South African realities. This means seeking alternative perspectives, understanding how colonialism's legacy fuels GBV, and avoiding stereotypical narratives that silence marginalised voices.
Contextualisation and respectful listening:	Focus on thematic reporting of GBV, incorporating contextual elements such as statistics, social narratives, and root causes. Actively listen to the experiences of survivors from marginalised communities and amplify their voices. Contextualisation should authentically reflect the realities of marginalised people while minimising harm.
Representativeness and redefining public interest:	Redefine public interest to ensure diverse voices are heard and represent society—report on the GBV experiences of communities facing less visibility.
Expanding watchdog role:	Hold accountable all abuses of power contributing to GBV. Investigate how legal systems, social services, and cultural norms perpetuate the issue. Expose under-reported forms of GBV.
Minimising harm and maintaining social harmony:	Respect the humanity of both victims and perpetrators. Be mindful of language use, avoid graphic details, and consider the impact on survivors and communities.
Professional ethics and decolonising communication:	Maintain core principles like truthfulness and accountability. Amplify survivor narratives and move beyond traditional reporter-driven stories.
Public platform and decolonised media:	Facilitate public discussions about GBV and foster conversations about prevention and support.

Henceforth, the proposed principles will be referred to as 'the proposed ethical framework.'

In the following section, the researcher will analyse the SA Press Code to determine the ethical expectations placed on the journalist when reporting on GBV, answering SRQ2: What expectations does the Press Code place on journalists in the context of reporting GBV?

3.6 SA Press Code

Firstly, the SA Press Council and media regulation (see 3.6.1) will be discussed to provide the context for the SA Press Code. Secondly, the ethical principles in the SA Press Code that apply to journalists' reporting on GBV will be discussed and analysed (see 3.6.2). Lastly, in pure due diligence, the SA Press Code will be discussed and compared to the Press Code of the Independent Media Group [28](see 3.6.3).

[28] While most major media outlets in South Africa subscribe to the authority of the SA Press Council, there are exceptions. The Independent Media Group, which includes *IOL*, withdrew from the SA Press Council in 2016, opting for its own press code (Satchwell *et al.*, 2021:280). Their

3.6.1 The SA Press Council and Media Regulation

Obagwu and Idris (2019:35) and Nnaemeka and Ezeabasili (2020:22) emphasise the importance of responsible media practices when referring to professional media regulation. While Obagwu and Idris (2019:35) highlight self-regulation, which the press voluntarily submits to through ethical codes as the primary means, Nnaemeka and Ezeabasili (2020:22) acknowledge a potential role for both self-regulation and government oversight, where needed, to ensure media freedom and social responsibility. Retief (2013b:57) defines self-regulation as media outlets voluntarily adhering to a code of ethics they develop.

In South Africa, media regulation is first governed by the constitution and laws, followed by bodies such as the SA Press Council (2023), a co-regulatory mechanism created by the print and online media (Retief, 2013:57; Thloloe, 2012:109; Satchwell et al., 2021:280). Media houses may also implement their own internal codes to supplement these standards (see 1.1.1 & 3.3.2).

South Africa's history with press regulation is complex. During Apartheid, the press was subject to government control, leading to a lack of credibility (Retief, 2013b:58). Following Apartheid, the democratic government supported self-regulation of the media. However, in 2012, the threat of a government-controlled Media Appeals Tribunal (MAT) emerged (Retief, 2013b:58). In response, the press advocated for a model of independent co-regulation, which would be independent of the government but still include public participation (Retief, 2013b:58).

The SA Press Council and its code of ethics are built on the view that government involvement in press regulation is incompatible with the constitutional value of press freedom (Wasserman, 2011:799; Thloloe, 2012:110) (see 3.2.2.2). Freedom of expression and the guarantee of press freedom are constitutionally protected under section 16 of the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution. According to Satchwell *et al.* (2021:96), the preamble of the SA Press Code affirms the media should strive to uphold these rights by committing journalists to the highest standards of credibility. It is crucial that the right to freedom of expression, and thus press freedom, is placed within the more significant constitutional context, as it functions alongside many other fundamental rights, such as the right to human dignity (Lion-Cachet, 2020:22-24; Wasserman, 2020:462).

Codes of conduct supply minimal expectations of ethical practice and expected standards of behaviour within a profession (Keeble, 2001:131; Ward, 2008a:298; Diaz-Campo & Segado-Boj, 2015:3). In journalism, codes of conduct are firmly rooted in the idea of journalism's centrality to democratic self-

membership was re-established in January 2024 (SANEF, 2024). Given this development within the research timeframe, this study will explore the potential differences between these press codes to understand the varying ethical expectations placed on journalists regarding GBV reporting.

governance – if a people are to be free, they need access to information that is truthful, free from undue influence, and representative (Culver, 2017:479; Igyuve *et al*., 2021:25). Ethical codes typically address issues such as the right of the audience to receive information, the need to distinguish between fact and opinion, respecting personal privacy, protecting vulnerable groups, protecting confidential sources, avoiding prejudice, and acting independently (Harcup, 2020:76). Elliot and Ozar (2010:9) suggest that journalism as a profession requires specific responsibilities which are reflected in ethical codes, but not always captured by professional codes of ethics.

Member publications of the SA Press Council, such as *News24*, voluntarily subscribe to the Press Council's Code of Ethics and Conduct for SA Print and Online Media (SA Press Code), which guides journalists in gathering and distributing news as well as guide the Press Ombud and Appeals Panel to reach decisions on civil complaints (Satchwell *et al.*, 2021:262). The SA Press Code (SA Press Council, 2022) upholds constitutional rights and provides a framework built on normative ethics from which journalists can make ethical decisions. The preamble of the press code encourages the press to strive for truth, avoid unnecessary harm, reflect a multiplicity of voices, show particular concern for children and vulnerable groups, and act independently (Retief, 2013b: 67-68). The prescription is at the core of the SA Press Code (SA Press Council, 2022): "The press shall take care to report news truthfully, accurately and fairly … in context and a balanced manner, without any intentional or negligent departure from the facts…".

Wasserman (2020:464) states that normative media policy, such as the SA Press Code, has been contested and undergone several revisions to be more responsive to the needs of the developing nation. According to Thloloe (2012:111), the SA Press Code was developed by evaluating more than 100 ethical codes across the globe and undergoes regular revision. This ensures that the SA Press Code aligns with international normative models and best practices as far as such standards can exist objectively (Krüger, 2009:34) (also see Retief, 2002; Retief, 2013b). The last revision of the SA Press Code took effect on 30 September 2022 (SA Press Council, 2022).

However, despite the comprehensive ethical guidelines presented in the SA Press Code (see 3.6.2), the South African media landscape still faces several ethical lapses that have significantly influenced the public's trust that journalists fulfil their responsibilities (Wasserman, 2021). Since its establishment in 2007 as the current media regulator (Satchwell *et al.,* 2021:280), the public has scrutinised the SA Press Council, and its effectiveness in media regulation has been questioned (Reid & Isaacs, 2015:6; Lion-Cachet, 2020:77; Wasserman, 2020:464). In a study that investigated the efficacy of the SA Press Council by analysing the cases brought before the council between 2009 and 2013, Reid and Isaacs (2015:21-25) note that section 1.1 of the SA Press Code, which remained the same across revised versions of the code, was the single most infringed upon article of the press code. This section refers to the truthful, accurate

and fair reporting of news (Reid & Isaacs, 2015:25). In an ethics report by Satchwell *et al.* (2021:262), the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF) echoes these findings as they found section 1, specifically section 1.1, was the most violated article of the SA Press Code. Reputational damage, factually incorrect reports, and biased reporting were identified as the leading topic for civil complaints (Satchwell *et al.*, 2021:262).

3.6.2 Ethical guidelines of GBV reporting in the SA Press Code

The term "gender-based violence" is not explicitly addressed in the SA Press Code (SA Press Council, 2022). However, the code does have several clauses (Section 3.4, 5.1, 8, 9 and 11) that directly or indirectly apply to GBV. Journalists are, however, still motivated to adhere to the basic professional journalistic standards within the SA Press Code, such as accuracy, benevolence, reflecting a multiplicity of voices, showing particular concern for children and other vulnerable groups, exhibiting sensitivity to the cultural customs, and acting independently (Thloloe, 2012:111-112; Wasserman, 2021).

The following table (Table 3.2) details the specific sections (3.4, 5.1, 8, 9, and 11) of the SA Press Code (2022) relevant to GBV reporting:

Table 3.2: Guidelines for ethical GBV reporting in the SA Press Code

Section	Clause	Guideline
Privacy, dignity, and reputation	3.4	… not identify rape survivors, survivors of sexual violence[29] which includes sexual intimidation and harassment or disclose the HIV / AIDS status of people without their consent and, in the case of children, from their legal guardian or a similarly responsible adult as well as from the child (taking into consideration the evolving capacity of the child), and public interest is evident. It is in the best interests of the child.
Discrimination and hate speech	5.1	… avoid discriminatory or denigratory references to people's race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth or other status, and not refer to such status in a prejudicial or pejorative context – and shall refer to the above only where it is strictly relevant to the matter reported, and if it is in the public interest;
Children	8.1 8.2 8.3	… exercise exceptional care and consideration when reporting about children. If there is any chance that coverage might cause harm of any kind to a child, he or she shall not be interviewed, photographed, or identified without the consent of a legal guardian or of a similarly responsible adult and the child (taking into consideration the evolving capacity of the child); and a public interest is evident; … not publish child pornography; and … not identify children who have been victims of abuse or exploitation, or who have been charged with or convicted of a crime, without the consent of their legal guardians (or a similarly responsible adult) and the child (taking into

[29] Sexual violence, according to the SA Press Code (SA Press Council, 2022), is defined as acts ranging from verbal harassment to rape and includes coercion, social pressure, and physical force, which aligns with the study's operational definition of GBV (see 2.2.3).

		consideration the evolving capacity of the child), the public interest is evident, and it is in the best interests of the child
Violence, graphic content	9.1 9.2 9.3	… exercise due care and responsibility when presenting brutality, violence, and suffering; … not sanction, promote or glamorise violence or unlawful conduct; and … avoid content which depicts violent crime or other violence or explicit sex unless the public interest dictates otherwise – in which case a prominently displayed warning must indicate that such content is graphic and inappropriate for specific audiences such as children.
Confidential and anonymous sources	11.1 11.2 11.3	… protect confidential sources of information – the protection of sources is a fundamental principle in a democratic and free society; … avoid the use of anonymous sources unless there is no other way to deal with a story, and shall take care to corroborate such information; and … not publish information that constitutes a breach of confidence unless the public interest dictates otherwise.

3.6.2.1 Privacy, dignity, and reputation

The SA Press Code (Clause 3.4) protects survivors of sexual violence by prohibiting the disclosure of their identities and HIV/AIDS status without consent. This extends to minors, which require permission from their legal guardian; however, according to Retief (2013b:90), the journalist should also be convinced that it is in the child's best interest. Thus, the child's age and whether they can consent should also be considered (Retief, 2013b:90). Respecting survivor autonomy is of utmost importance (Retief, 2013b). This aligns with the proposed framework's ethical principles of contextualisation and respectful listening (see 3.5.2).

Although not explicitly stated, Section 3 of the SA Press Code prioritises public interest, survivor protection, and accurate, sensitive reporting of GBV. These align with the framework's goals of minimising harm and maintaining social harmony. These expectations align with the proposed framework's ethical principle of minimising harm and maintaining social harmony (see 3.5.5).

The above literature states that resources should be dedicated to reporting on the GBV experiences of those facing less visibility rather than prioritising sensationalised cases (see 3.5.3). Thus, insisting "public interest should be evident" could be a way of excluding the reporting of cases of sexual violence that cannot be sensationalised or fit existing narratives, adding to the public misconceptions that already exist regarding GBV. The research does not suggest intruding on the private lives of GBV survivors, simply that media reporting should more closely reflect South African realities.

3.6.2.2 Discrimination and hate speech

Section 5.1 of the SA Press Code indirectly applies to GBV media reporting as journalists are discouraged from using degrading, dehumanising, and offensive language to not perpetuate societal stereotypes concerning survivors and perpetrators. These stereotypes are often built on normative ideas that stem from colonial thought (see 2.3).

Section 5.1 of the SA Press Code aligns with the proposed ethical framework (see 3.5.1), arguing that perpetuating stereotypes of survivors and perpetrators based on race, ethnicity, or socio-economic background should be avoided. Journalists should be aware of their biases reflected through the language and frames they use in GBV reporting, for example, the idea of an "ideal victim" (Boonzaier, 2023:86-87). Stereotypes within the media feed common misconceptions such as who is at risk and who is a perpetrator of violence (see 2.4), which influences how society approaches solutions to GBV.

3.6.2.3 Children

Section 8 of the SA Press Code, based on Section 28.2 of the Bill of Rights, urges journalists to "exercise exceptional care" when reporting minors. The ultimate recommendation is not to minimise harm but to avoid damage altogether. Retief (2013b:100) notes that Section 8 of the SA Press Code is the only section that combines the words "exceptional" and "care and consideration," which implies journalists should be taking the clause very seriously.

The section implies that the identity of children, irrespective of whether they are the perpetrator or victim of GBV, should be protected. Retief (2013b:93) notes that the clause does not refer to the child's interest but to the child's 'best' interest. Thus, the public interest and the minor's best interest must be present to identify them.

3.6.2.4 Violence and Graphic Content

Section 9 of the SA Press Code specifically applies to the presentation of brutality, violence, and suffering in the media, which implicitly includes that associated with GBV. The Press Code attempts to curtail sensationalising trauma by prohibiting the glamorisation of violence or unlawful conduct. Further, content that depicts violent crime, other violence and explicit sex is also discouraged unless within the public interest – in which case there should be a prominently displayed warning of graphic or inappropriate content.

Satchwell *et al.* (2021:266) utilise the case study of Women in Action *et al.* v *Die Son*, where the publication described the rape of a woman in her home in the most graphic detail. The editor of the publication argued that the intention of the article was "to expose the violent nature of this criminal act to the public," however, the Press Ombud questioned what purpose was served by detailing the rape (Satchwell *et al.,*

2021:266). The Ombud's question regarding the purpose of the graphic details raises the ethical question of whether such descriptions of violence are necessary to achieve the intended goal of raising awareness or whether the same point can be made without causing unnecessary distress.

The study's suggested framework (see 3.5.8) prohibits the promotion or glamorisation of violent conduct as it is not conducive to minimising harm and maintaining social harmony (see 3.5.5). Brutality and violence should be approached with sensitivity to community norms and always have context, avoiding unnecessary sensationalism or gore. When showing violence serves the public interest, such as exposing human rights abuses, the audience's and survivor's human dignity is essential. Clear content warnings and viewer limitations are also crucial to protect vulnerable audiences. The framework aims to minimise the negative impact of violence in media by fostering responsible presentation and preventing desensitisation.

3.6.2.5 Headlines, captions, posters, pictures, and video

Section 10 of the SA Press Code encourages journalists to avoid misleading, misrepresenting, or manipulating news reporting elements. Failing to use these elements responsibly violates the ethical principles of accuracy, comprehensiveness, and contextualisation, which can have severe consequences within communities: sensational visuals can desensitise viewers to violence or suffering, biased representation can distort the truth of a story, and inaccurate headlines can help spread misinformation.

In an ethics report by Satchwell *et al.* (2021:96), SANEF suggests an amendment to the SA Press Code that clarifies the prohibition of misleading headlines and should include clickbait online. Thus, in GBV reporting, headlines, captions, and visual or audio material should reflect the article's content while adhering to other clauses within the SA Press Code.

3.6.2.6 Confidential and anonymous sources

When reporting on GBV, journalists should prioritise protecting the identities of confidential sources, especially survivors and witnesses who may fear retaliation when exposing GBV. This aligns with the fundamental democratic principle of source protection and suggestions within social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique to protect the dignity of survivors. However, complete anonymity should be avoided if possible. As mentioned earlier, this information should still be verified and corroborated to ensure truthfulness. Journalists are responsible for corroborating information from anonymous sources to ensure its accuracy. Only when the public interest in exposing GBV outweighs the potential harm to the source should such information be published

Bridge sentence

3.6.3 Theoretical statement 3

Although not explicitly stated, the SA Press Code provides a clear framework of ethical expectations in GBV reporting. Beyond the fundamental tenets of journalism – accuracy, fairness, acting independently, and a variety of perspectives – ethical GBV reporting demands special attention to vulnerable groups such as marginalised communities still experiencing the aftermath of colonial gender hierarchies. Guidelines include ethical standards regarding privacy, dignity and reputation, discrimination and hate speech, children, violence and graphic content, and confidential sources.

3.6.4 Independent Media Press Code

According to Krüger (2008:38-41), a press council must be known for representing the entirety of the media industry, "especially when the self-regulatory system is voluntary". While some publications choose not to subscribe to the press council's authority, their credibility suffers significantly if these publications are significant with substantial influence (Krüger, 2008:23-24). Retief (2013:57) concurs, stating that all media stakeholders must cooperate towards a common goal for self-regulation to function effectively. This approach is based on the media's commitment to upholding professional credibility and earning public trust (Retief, 2013b:57). Accordingly, it is expected that all major South African media outlets subscribe to the authority of the SA Press Council and thus the SA Press Code (SANEF, 2024). However, the Independent Media Group, which owns *IOL*, has faced several ethical controversies, notably its repeated withdrawals from the SA Press Council. Independent Media initially withdrew from the SA Press Council in 2016, citing perceived bias in the Council's adjudication process (Satchwell *et al.*, 2021:280; SA Press Council, 2024). Instead, the group subscribed to its own Independent Media Press Code (hence referred to as the IM Press Code) (Satchwell *et al.*, 2021:280). After a seven-year absence, the Independent Media Group renewed its membership with the SA Press Council in 2024 (SANEF, 2024; SA Press Council, 2024). Notably, the group was expelled from the Council in October 2024 for failing to comply with the Council's rulings. SA Press Council Chair Judge Fritz Brand stated that it was unacceptable for publications to wilfully refuse to obey the Council's decisions (SA Press Council, 2024). Independent Media defended its withdrawal, by alleging systemic bias within the SA Press Council, arguing that remaining within the Council compromised their editorial independence and integrity (Phiri, 2024). The group maintains they withdrew from the SA Press Council prior to its formal expulsion (Phiri, 2024).

The Independent Media Group has faced criticism and controversy regarding its ethical practices. Concerns regarding editorial independence, political influence, and journalistic integrity have been particularly prominent since its acquisition by Sekunjalo Investments (McKune, 2013; Dasnois & Whitfield, 2019). A notable controversy involved the resignation of senior journalists who cited editorial interference, alleging that certain stories were either suppressed or framed to align with specific agendas

(Dasnois & Whitfield, 2019). These ethical disputes, including the tension between Independent Media and the SA Press Council, could influence the study's results depending on the ethical code IOL adhered to during the study period.

Like the SA Press Code, the term 'gender-based violence' is not explicitly addressed in the IM Press Code (2023). However, the code does have several clauses (Sections 4, 5, 7 and 9) that directly or indirectly apply to GBV reporting. On the surface, the IM Press Code seems much more specific regarding GBV reporting as it has direct references to reporting on "sex crime" (see section 7 of the IM Press Code, 2023), as opposed to a singular reference to "sexual violence" in the SA Press Code (see section 3.4 of the SA Press Code, 2022). However, the SA Press Code's direct reference to discourage the publication of an individual's HIV/AIDS status in the same section as protecting the identity of victims of sexual violence (see section 3.4 of the SA Press Code, 2022) shows a deeper cognisance of what the nature of GBV is in South Africa.

There is no vast difference between the IM Press and SA Press Code regarding GBV reporting. Both prioritise accuracy, privacy, and respect for victims. However, there are some subtle distinctions. The following table (Table 3.3) details the specific sections (Sections 4, 5, 7 and 9) of the IM Press Code relevant to GBV reporting in comparison with the SA Press Code:

Table 3.3: Comparing GBV Reporting Guidelines in the IM Press Code and the SA Press Code

IM Press Code	**SA Press Code**
Privacy	Privacy, dignity, and reputation
4.3 Publish details of a person's health, family life, home, or communications without that person's consent. 4.6 Where there is personal grief or shock, journalists and editors shall handle subjects with the necessary consideration including in the publication relating thereto.	3.4 not identify rape survivors, survivors of sexual violence which includes sexual intimidation and harassment, or disclose the HIV / AIDS status of people without their consent and, in the case of children, from their legal guardian or a similarly responsible adult as well as from the child (taking into consideration the evolving capacity of the child), and a public interest is evident, and it is in the best interests of the child.
Children	Children
5.2 Whenever a picture of a child is to be published it shall be done taking the Constitutional rights of the child into account. Whenever the identity of a child is disclosed, whether pictorially or in print – 5.4 The statutory restrictions on the naming or identification of children shall be observed and adhered to.	8.1 exercise exceptional care and consideration when reporting about children. If there is any chance that coverage might cause harm of any kind to a child, he or she shall not be interviewed, photographed, or identified without the consent of a legal guardian or of a similarly responsible adult and the child (taking into consideration the evolving capacity of the child); and a public interest is evident; 8.2 not publish child pornography; and

IM Press Code	SA Press Code
5.5 The interests of the privacy and the reputation of the child shall be considered and, where necessary, protected. 5.6 The permission of the parent or guardian of any child shall be sought in all cases where the identity of the child is to be disclosed. 5.7 Even if the parent or guardian consents to disclosure of identity of a child, Independent Media shall exercise a cautious discretion, if it may be harmful to the child to publish the identity of the child. 5.8 When it is editorially necessary to publish a picture of a child, which is potentially harmful to such child, the identity of the child shall be obscured in such a manner that the child cannot be recognised. In this regard, the face of the child shall be blurred or "pixelated" completely. 5.9 When it is editorially necessary to publish pictures of children who are involved in sexual or simulated sexual activity, such as to draw the public's attention to the existence of abhorrent practices, such pictures shall be done in an informative manner and not in a manner that could be deemed as being intended to be erotic. 5.10 No picture of children depicting nudity (other than pictures anticipated in terms 5.5 above) shall be published.	8.3 not identify children who have been victims of abuse or exploitation or who have been charged with or convicted of a crime without the consent of their legal guardians (or a similarly responsible adult) and the child (taking into consideration the evolving capacity of the child), the public interest is evident, and it is in the best interests of the child
Discrimination, racism and hate speech	Discrimination and hate speech
9.1 No disparaging remarks about someone's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability shall be published. 9.2 Reference to someone's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability shall be avoided unless relevant	avoid discriminatory or denigratory references to people's race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth or other status, and not refer to such status in a prejudicial or pejorative context – and shall refer to the above only where it is strictly relevant to the matter reported, and if it is in the public interest
Victims of crimes	Violence, Graphic content
7.1 A victim of a sex crime shall not be named unless he or she consents explicitly. 7.2 If the victim of a sex crime is a minor, their identity shall never be disclosed unless he or she consents explicitly after reaching the age of majority. 7.3 No information that may lead to the identification of the victim of a sex crime may be published. 7.5 Victims of crime shall be treated with compassion, both when interviewed and in the publication.	9.1 exercise due care and responsibility when presenting brutality, violence, and suffering; 9.2 not sanction, promote or glamorise violence or unlawful conduct; and 9.3 avoid content which depicts violent crime or other violence or explicit sex unless the public interest dictates otherwise – in which case a prominently displayed warning must indicate that such content is graphic and inappropriate for specific audiences such as children.

IM Press Code	SA Press Code
Sources and collecting information	Confidential and anonymous sources
8.1. Sources of information shall be identified and named in articles unless paragraph 8.2 below applies. 8.2. Where a source asks explicitly for confidentiality, the source shall not be identified, and Independent Media shall protect the secrecy as far as possible.	11.1 protect confidential sources of information – the protection of sources is a fundamental principle in a democratic and free society; 11.2avoid the use of anonymous sources unless there is no other way to deal with a story, and shall take care to corroborate such information; and 11.3 Do not publish information that constitutes a breach of confidence unless the public interest dictates otherwise.

3.6.4.1 Privacy

Section 4 of the IM Press Code, like section 3 of the SA Press Code, addresses the matter of privacy. Section 4.3 of the IM Press Code repeats what is understood by the legal concept of 'the right to privacy,' which is constitutionally protected. Other than the SA Press Code, where protection of a person's HIV/AIDS status is explicitly stated, it is implied through the word "health."

Clauses 4.3 and 4.6 of the IM Press Code focus on protecting individual privacy in general, while clause 3.4 of the SA Press Code offers more specific protections for particularly vulnerable groups. Both clause 4.3 (IM Press Code, 2023) and clause 3.4 (SA Press Code, 2022) restrict disclosing personal details without consent, but clause 3.4 goes further by explicitly mentioning sexual violence and HIV/AIDS status. Section 4 of the IM Press Code does not expressly address victims of sexual violence (as addressed by the SA Press Code). However, it does have a dedicated section on crime reporting crimes (see discussed 3.6.3.3).

Additionally, section 4.6 of the IM Press Code (2023) motivates journalists to act with the necessary consideration when dealing with personal grief or shock. This clause emphasises empathy when reporting on events that cause grief or shock, such as death and violence. As suggested in the literature study, brutality and violence should be approached with sensitivity to community norms and always have context, avoiding unnecessary sensationalism or gore. When showing violence serves the public interest, such as exposing human rights abuses, the audience's and survivor's human dignity is essential. This aligns with the implied social sensitivity expected from journalists under the SA Press Code.

Overall, clause 3.4 of the SA Press Code provides a more targeted and nuanced approach to protecting the privacy of survivors of sexual crimes in comparison to the IM Press Code, especially for those who have experienced severe trauma or are underage.

3.6.4.2 Children

Section 5 of the IM Press Code addresses reporting on children. The section stipulates that reporting on minors will abide by statutory restrictions. However, the code also stipulates that the "interests of the privacy and the reputation of the child shall be considered and, where necessary, protected." The wording may confuse whether a child's identity should inherently be protected considering their constitutional rights or if perpetrating violence grants disclosing their identity due to the journalist regarding their reputational interest unnecessary to protect. With this regard, the SA Press Code's section on reporting on minors seems more eloquent as it clearly and comprehensively emphasises avoiding harm. The SA Press Code also has a broader approach to what this approach would entail, prohibiting interviews, photographs, and other material entirely if there is a chance of inciting harm to a minor.

Like the SA Press Code, the IM Press Code requires journalists to protect minors' identities, obtain consent from parents or legal guardians before publishing material concerning them, and take necessary precautions to ensure their safety, such as pixelating the faces of minors in images (Independent Office of the Group Ombud, 2023).

Although both press codes prohibit the publication of child pornography, the IM Press Code again uses language that can be misinterpreted. Consequently, upon the initial analysis of the press code, it was found it does not blatantly prohibit the publication of minors in sexual or simulated sexual activity, merely stipulating that if the publication of such material is necessary, it should not be deemed as erotic (clause 5.5 of the IM Press Code, 2023).

It is argued that both sections are similar in intent. However, to have a more expansive guideline on ethical reporting regarding children, the IM Press Code may have made it more complicated to read and, thus, challenging to comprehend.

3.6.4.3 Victims of crimes

The IM Press Code dedicates section 7 to reporting on the victims of crimes, focusing specifically on sex crimes. This is significantly different from the SA Press Code's singular reference to sexual violence. However, the code does not supply a definition of what constitutes sex crimes, which leaves the concept open for interpretation. Likely, the definition focuses on sexually motivated violence or abuse and does not conform to the GBV definition determined in the study (see Chapter 2). Alternatively, it could refer to sex work, which is still considered illegal in South Africa.

The section protects the identity of sex crime victims irrespective of age by prohibiting the publication of information that may lead to identification unless the victim has consented as an adult. Section 7.5. of the IM Press Code states that "victims of crime shall be treated with compassion, both when interviewed and

in the publication." This aligns with the expectations set by the SA Press Code regarding reporting on victims of sexual violence.

3.6.4.4 Discrimination, racism, and hate speech

Section 9.1 of the IM Press Code discourages discriminatory or derogatory language. The SA Press Code includes avoiding discriminatory references to people's sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, age, culture, and language—this shows a more extraordinary cognisance of the influence of colonial thought on social stereotypes.

3.6.4.5 Sources and collecting information

The IM Press Code explicitly requires the journalist to identify sources. However, as seen in the SA Press Code, it does not have the same guidelines regarding anonymous sources or when the confidentiality of sources is required. Instead, sources should request confidentiality for the publication to protect their identity. This concept does not align with guidelines suggested in the literature regarding the protection of the reputation and dignity of GBV survivors.

3.6.4.6 Summary

Although both press codes of conduct have the same intentions, an attempt at making the IM Press Code more encompassing has resulted in an ambiguous guideline. At face value, the IM Press Code seems as though it serves as a better journalistic ethical guide for GBV reporting due to its dedicated section to survivors of crimes and explicitly mentioning sex crimes. Upon analysis, however, it fails to prove cognisance of the greater South African realities regarding GBV, such as HIV/AIDS, pregnancy, and socio-economic circumstances. Within this study, it should thus be acknowledged that the possibility exists that journalists who followed the IM Press code may have made mistakes when reporting GBV when it comes to some issues explicitly mentioned in the SA Press Code.

3.7 Conclusion

This literature study investigated the responsibilities of South African journalists reporting on GBV within the journalistic ethical frameworks of the social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory, and the SA Press Code.

The chapter first orientates the reader by determining what constitutes the concept of journalistic ethics by broadly discussing the background of journalistic ethics (see 3.2.1) and principles of journalistic ethics (see 3.2.2) as found in the literature. This provided the necessary context for the theoretical framework of social responsibility theory (see 3.3) and postcolonial critique (see 3.4).

Secondly, the literature study drew upon the journalistic ethical frameworks of social responsibility theory (see 3.3) and postcolonial critique (see 3.4) to answer SRQ1: *How do social responsibility- and postcolonial media theories contribute to defining ethical journalism in South Africa regarding GBV?* The researcher concludes that social responsibility theory and postcolonial media theory contribute to defining ethical journalism in South Africa in terms of GBV through the following journalistic ethical principles: accuracy and comprehensiveness with deconstructed power, contextualisation and respectful listening, representativeness and redefining public interest, expanding the watchdog role, minimising harm and maintaining social harmony, professional ethics and decolonising communication, as well as utilising journalism as a public platform and decolonised media (see 3.5.8).

Additionally, the SA Press Code (see 3.6) was analysed to determine the ethical expectations placed on the journalist when reporting on GBV, answering SRQ2: *What expectations does the Press Code place on journalists in the context of reporting GBV?* In this context, the researcher assumes that journalists reporting on GBV are expected to respect the privacy of survivors of sexual violence by protecting their identity and HIV/AIDS status irrespective of their age (see 3.6.2.1); avoid discriminatory or denigratory references to a person in a prejudicial or pejorative context (see 3.6.2.2); not glamorise or promote violence or unlawful conduct, emphasising responsible reporting in the case of public interest (see 3.6.2.4); to take exceptional care when reporting on minors, particularly when violence or crime is involved (3.6.2.3), accurately and transparently use headlines, captions, visuals, and video content as not to mislead audiences (see 3.6.2.5), and protect the identity of confidential sources (3.6.2.6).

In addressing SRQ1 and SRQ2, the researcher identified essential ethical components for a framework on reporting GBV news, answering SRQ3: *What key elements should a framework for GBV news reporting include to align with social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory, and the guidelines of the Press Code?* The framework's essential components are (see Table 3.1):

- Accuracy and comprehensiveness: Reporting should ensure factual precision and thoroughness, deconstructing power structures to present a balanced narrative. This means seeking alternative perspectives, understanding how colonialism's legacy fuels GBV, and avoiding stereotypical narratives that silence marginalised voices.
- Contextualisation and respectful listening: Stories must be contextualised within socio-political realities, with respectful engagement with sources.
- Representativeness and redefining public interest: Coverage should broaden the notion of public interest to include marginalised voices and diverse perspectives.

- Expanded watchdog role: Journalists are encouraged to actively scrutinise and hold accountable all abuses of power contributing to GBV. This includes investigating how legal systems, social services, and cultural norms perpetuate the issue and expose under-reported forms of GBV.
- Minimising harm and maintaining social harmony: Reporting should limit sensationalism, focusing instead on harm reduction and societal cohesion.
- Professional ethics and decolonising communication: Adherence to professional ethics should include a commitment to decolonising narratives and reporting practices.
- Utilising journalism as a public platform and promoting a decolonised media: Journalism should serve as a platform for public engagement, promoting community storytelling.

Furthermore, the framework should emphasise specific ethical considerations as informed by the SA Press Code: safeguarding survivor privacy, identity and health status regardless of age (3.6.2.1); avoid discriminatory or denigratory references to a person in a prejudicial or pejorative context (3.6.2.2); avoid glamorising or promoting violence, with careful attention to public interest (3.6.2.4); to take exceptional care when reporting on minors, particularly when violence or crime is involved (3.6.2.3), accurately and transparently use headlines, captions, visuals, and video content as not to mislead audiences (see 3.6.2.5), and protect the identity of confidential sources (3.6.2.6).

CHAPTER 4 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO DETERMINE RESPONSIBLE GBV REPORTING

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher established the theoretical foundation guiding this study, which examines the responsibilities of South African journalists when reporting on gender-based violence (GBV). This foundation draws on social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory, and the South African Press Council's Code of Ethics and Conduct for Print and Online Media (SA Press Code, 2022).

In Chapter 4, the researcher outlines and justifies the research approach, design, and methods for the empirical component of the study. The chapter begins with a discussion of the qualitative research approach, followed by a detailed research design outline and an analysis of key concepts and constructs identified in Chapter 3. This is followed by an in-depth exploration of the selected research methods, specifically literature reviews and qualitative content analysis. Finally, the chapter addresses the study's reliability and validity.

4.2 Research approach

Qualitative research emphasises meaning and interpretation in unique and context-bound cases (Yilmaz, 2013:318-319; Hill & Wheat, 2019:34-35) based on the assumption that social phenomena are complex and, thus, cannot be reduced to isolated variables (Yilmaz, 2013:311-312). Alternatively, a quantitative research approach reduces phenomena to variables of interest. It explains them through mathematical-based methods such as statistics (Yilmaz, 2013:311), which does not create the same detailed understanding as qualitative research (Rozas & Klein, 2010:397; Yilmaz, 2013:314-315). If conducted well, qualitative research can answer specific research questions that quantitative research designs cannot (Busetto *et al.,* 2021:8). Detailed, descriptive data obtained through a qualitative approach helps to build validity and create an in-depth understanding of research findings within social sciences (Rozas & Klein, 2010:397, Yilmaz, 2013:314-315; Hill & Wheat, 2019:34).

The researcher employs a qualitative research design within this study, which is particularly apt for understanding GBV reporting, a social phenomenon that is not necessarily quantifiable. Qualitative data obtained through literature reviews and thematic content analysis, as is the case in this study, focusing on detail and depth rather than mere quantification, would lead to a deeper understanding of research issues (Rozas & Klein, 2010:397; Yilmaz, 2013:314-315). Qualitative content analysis is a supplementary rather than a standalone technique (Devi Prasad, 2019:15). To enhance the reliability and plausibility of the findings, Devi Prasad (2019:13) recommends integrating qualitative content analysis with additional methods that can provide complementary insights into the issue. This multi-method

approach, which combines literature studies and qualitative content analysis, enriches the exploration of journalistic responsibility in GBV reporting by addressing the complexities of media portrayals from various angles. For example, the literature analysis that applies postcolonial discourse to social responsibility theory helped the researcher to create a framework for GBV reporting, which informs the coding sheet for content analysis. In combination, these approaches allow for a more nuanced and insightful examination of how journalism mediates societal understandings of GBV. This methodological richness not only deepens the analysis but also opens the door to a more comprehensive exploration of the ethical responsibilities journalists face in their portrayal of such sensitive and consequential issues.

4.3 Research design

The following table outlines the specific research questions, corresponding research methods, and accompanying chapters addressing these questions.

Table 4.1: Research design

Specific research question	Research method	Chapter
1. How do social responsibility- and postcolonial media theories contribute to defining ethical journalism in South Africa regarding GBV?	Literature review	3
2. What expectations does the Press Code place on journalists in the context of reporting GBV?	Literature review	3
3. What key elements should a framework for gender-based violence news reporting includes to align with social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory, and the guidelines of the South African Press Code?	Literature review	3
4. To what extent did *News24* practise ethical journalism in the context of GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024)?	Qualitative content analysis	5
5. To what extent did *IOL* practise ethical journalism in the context of GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024)?	Qualitative content analysis	5

4.4 Concepts and constructs

The following table identifies concepts, sub-concepts, and constructs derived from the theoretical statements (TS) formulated in Chapter 3 (see 3.7). The relevant concepts and constructs form the study's theoretical basis and are the foundation of a comprehensive data coding sheet for content analysis.

Table 4.2: Theoretical statements, concepts, and constructs

Theoretical statement	Concept	Sub-concept	Constructs
TS1: Social responsibility theory is a normative media theory that prescribes ethical frameworks and professional standards for journalists, emphasising their obligation to serve the public interest. Social responsibility theory outlines key ethical principles for journalists, highlighting their role in serving the public good within a democratic society. Ethical journalism within social responsibility theory requires the following journalistic ethical principles: accuracy and comprehensiveness, contextualisation, representation, public interest, serving as a social watchdog, independence, professional ethics, minimising harm, and journalism as a public platform (see 3.3.3)	Social responsibility theory	Professional ethical standards	Accuracy and comprehensiveness Contextualisation Representation Independence Professional ethics Minimising harm
		Obligation to serve the public interest	Public interest Serving as a social watchdog Minimising harm Journalism as a public platform
TS2: A postcolonial critique argues the media should be aware of its biases and actively promote diverse voices. This perspective emphasises challenging power structures, recognising cultural identities, and the media's role in social change. In South Africa, colonial legacies embedded in media perpetuate gender inequalities. Postcolonial theory suggests the following journalistic ethical principles from postcolonial theory: deconstructing colonial influences and power, expanding the watchdog role, redefining public interest, respectful listening and empowerment, balancing accountability and harmony, and focusing on communal relationships and ethical communication (see 3.4.2)	Postcolonial critique (applied to journalism)	Challenging power structures	Deconstructing colonial influences and power Expanding the watchdog role
		Recognising cultural identities	Focussing on communal relationships and ethical communication Respectful listening and empowerment
		Media's role in social change	Redefining public interest Respectful listening and empowerment Balancing accountability and harmony
TS3: Although not explicitly stated, the SA Press Code provides a clear framework of ethical expectations about GBV reporting. Beyond the fundamental tenets of journalism – accuracy,	SA Press Code	Professional ethical standards	Accuracy Fairness

Theoretical statement	Concept	Sub-concept	Constructs
fairness, acting independently, and a variety of perspectives – ethical GBV reporting demands special attention to vulnerable groups such as marginalised communities still experiencing the aftermath of colonial gender hierarchies. Guidelines include ethical standards regarding privacy, dignity and reputation, discrimination and hate speech, children, violence and graphic content, and confidential sources.			Independence Variety of perspectives Minimising harm
		Guidelines for GBV reporting	Privacy Dignity and reputation Discrimination and hate speech Reporting on children Violence and graphic content Confidential sources

4.5 Research methods

This study will utilise a qualitative research approach. The research methods used are literature reviews and qualitative content analysis as empirical methods.

4.5.1 Literature study

A thorough literature study is foundational to research as it establishes theoretical frameworks, builds conceptual models, advances knowledge, and facilitates theory development (Onwuegbuzie *et al.,* 2012:1; Lim *et al.,* 2022:507). According to Paul and Criado (2020:6), the primary purpose of a literature study is to critically analyse existing research in a specific area, identifying relevant theoretical frameworks, contexts, constructs, and methodologies. Additionally, the literature study helps shape the research agenda by pinpointing gaps, such as inconclusive findings or emerging areas of inquiry, which guide new research directions (Paul & Criado, 2020:6; Lim *et al.,* 2022:508).

A literature review is a more structured study that systematically analyses and synthesises an existing body of work in a field. It aims to evaluate previous studies critically, challenge established norms, and advance theoretical foundations through thoroughly examining past research (Post *et al.,* 2020:352; Kraus *et al.,* 2022:2577). Literature reviews often identify vital problems, inconsistencies, and emerging trends, contributing to the development of theory (Kraus *et al*., 2022:2577). While both a literature study and a

literature review evaluate theoretical frameworks, a literature study focuses more explicitly on synthesising and critiquing the body of knowledge within a particular research area.

In this study, the researcher conducted two literature studies to evaluate existing theories and integrate them within the South African media context to formulate guidelines for ethical reporting of GBV that are contextually relevant and socially informed. Chapter 2 explored the contextual background of GBV reporting in South Africa, focusing on how gender is understood within the postcolonial context and how these influences media representations of GBV. Chapter 3 established the theoretical frameworks of social responsibility theory, postcolonial critique, and the SA Press Code, emphasising journalistic ethics. These integrated theories were used to address the first two specific research questions and inform the content analysis of GBV reporting by *IOL* and *News24* during the research period.

Academic journals, books, electronic databases (including EBSCOhost, EDS Search, WorldCat Discovery Search, National ETD Portal, Sabinet, NWU library database, and Google Scholar), and internet sources were utilised to determine the theoretical and contextual background for this study. As social responsibility theory is a normative media theory, several South African researchers use it as a framework for their studies, particularly concerning journalism and media studies (e.g. Fourie, 2005; Iqbal & Yousaf, 2018; Mokwena, 2018; Hlongwa, 2019). Within this study, the discussion regarding social responsibility theory focuses on analysing African (e.g. Chan-Meetoo, 2012; Babran & Atatherian, 2019; Obagwu & Idris, 2019; Igyuve *et al*., 2021) and South African interpretations of the theory (e.g. Ward, 2008a; Retief, 2013b; Rodny-Gumede, 2015; Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022). In exploring normative media ethics from an African perspective, *Media Ethics and Regulation: Insights from Africa,* edited by Chan-Meetoo (2012), proved especially beneficial as it explores the SA Press Code and gender-sensitive reporting in Africa.

Realising Western theories such as the social responsibility theory on its own is not sufficient to evaluate and advance media ethics in the South African context, Wasserman (2006; 2010), Rao (2010), Fourie (2011), and Ward (2015) introduced postcolonial critique as a critical mode of enquiry. Although the literature on the postcolonial critique of media ethics seems limited to these researchers, many South African master's and doctoral studies discuss GBV (see De Villiers, 2018; Brodie, 2019; Kabaya, 2021; Ngubane, 2021; Mofokeng, 2021; Braam, 2022; Mbele, 2022) and the media's role in the construction of gender identity (see Isrealstam, 2014; Phiri, 2014; Mpemnyama, 2020; Aguera, 2021) and race (see Naicker, 2021; Sekumana, 2021; Shezi, 2021) within the context of post-colonialism. Beneficial academic articles for understanding the nature of GBV in South Africa within the postcolonial media context are 'The Life and Death of Anene Booysen: Colonial Discourse, Gender-based Violence and Media Representations' (Boonzaier, 2017) and 'Spectacularising Narratives on Femicide in South Africa: A decolonial feminist analysis' (Boonzaier, 2023). *Women Journalists in South Africa: Democracy in the Age*

of Social Media, edited by Daniels and Skinner (2022), proved a beneficial book as it analyses race, class, and gender in South African journalism (Rodny-Gumede, 2022:15-29) and women journalists in South Africa reporting on sexual violence and GBV (Chiumbu, 2022:31-47).

The literature review determined that multiple theories used in conjunction best address the problems associated with GBV reporting in South Africa. The contextualisation of GBV based on the journalists' responsibility to provide explanation, understanding, and background, as suggested within social responsibility theory, has led to several studies on agenda-setting (see Ndlovu, 2014; Brodie, 2020; Chetty, 2021; Tshabalala, 2022) and language analysis (see Harrison, 2021; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021), but few South African studies investigate how the chosen theoretical frameworks manifest in how journalists report on GBV. In a Spanish study, Carratalá (2016:60-61) suggests changing how journalists represent GBV by addressing the roots of the societal problem and not merely positioning it as crime news. Pulido *et al.* (2021:15) share this opinion, concluding that it is necessary to recover quality ethical practices in GBV reporting as journalism's original purpose relates to its service mission. Among these suggestions is advancing survivor-centred[30] Journalistic practices (Carratalá, 2016:61; Pulido *et al.*, 2021:15).

Earlier South African research has found that GBV receives increased media attention during the annual 16 Days Campaign (see Media Monitoring Project, 1998; Harries & Bird, 2005; Buthelezi, 2006). These studies are, however, nearly 20 years old, do not use the same theoretical basis (instead opting for agenda-setting or framing theory), and are very limited in time frame. A more recent and comprehensive study by Silima (2019:42) focused on South Africa's online media reporting of intimate femicide between November 2014 and April 2015, and November 2016 to April 2017, displays the same trend of increased media attention during the activism period. Further, the study showed that reporting lacked critical analysis and context (Silima, 2019). Notably, the study was also rooted within framing theory. There is thus a gap in media research to evaluate the 16 Days Campaign within the current journalistic context through the lens of media ethics. Buthelezi (2006:507) concluded that the victim narrative in newspapers during the 16 Days Campaign produces and reinforces disempowerment.

Although not directly linked to the 16 Days Campaign, recent South African studies, such as the research done by Brodie (2020:136), found that media reporting on GBV should be held to higher ethical standards of accuracy and accountability, including protecting the dignity of survivors, again stressing a survivor-centred approach. The often event-based approach to GBV reporting fails to contextualise the violence within broader social and cultural factors, perpetuating harmful stereotypes of both victims and perpetrators (Buthelezi, 2006; Brodie, 2020; Bhattacharjee, 2021). As such, GBV reporting often falls short

[30] A survivor-centred approach requires sensitive language in reporting, respect for privacy, avoiding retraumatisation of survivors and communities, avoiding stereotypes and refraining from victim-blaming (see 2.4).

of social responsibility and perpetuates harmful power structures. This perspective aligns with both social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique. Social responsibility theory emphasises the ethical obligations of the media and other public institutions to promote social justice and well-being. Postcolonial critique highlights how dominant discourses can perpetuate power imbalances and marginalise certain groups, including women and victims of GBV.

Though the above studies aided the understanding of different concepts within the conceptual and theoretical framework relevant to this study, no similar study was identified within the South African context. Closest, perhaps, is the study by Chiumbu (2022:31-47), 'Reporting Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: A Decolonial Gaze on Women Journalists in South Africa.' However, this study focuses on decolonial media theory and GBV reporting by specifically women journalists. Thus, social responsibility, postcolonial critique and the SA Press Code have not been used as a theoretical framework for analysing event-based GBV reporting by *IOL* and *News24*.

4.5.2 Empirical research methods

The researcher employed qualitative content analysis as an empirical research method.

4.5.2.1 Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis is a systematic (Mayring, 2000:2; Forman & Damschroder, 2007:39) and theory-driven (Mayring, 2019:11) approach used to compress mass amounts of text into content categories based on explicit coding rules (Stemler, 2000:1; Forman & Damschroder, 2007:40; Mayring, 2019:7) to identify meanings and patterns (Patton, 2002:453; Kleinheksel *et al.*, 2020:128; Preiser *et al.*, 2022:270) that guide further interpretation of data (Devi Prasad, 2019:7; Mezmir, 2020:15). Researchers, such as Mezmir (2020:15) and Preiser *et al.* (2022:270-272) explain qualitative content analysis is utilised by the researcher to discover and examine patterns in meaning-creation by focusing on the content, underlying themes, and meaning that emerge in a text, and make this 'meaning' more explicitly noticeable. Consequently, the method requires a detailed analysis without rash quantification (Mayring, 2000:2), yielding rich, descriptive data (Yilmaz, 2013:314-315; Linström & Marais, 2014:26).

Thematic content analysis, a variation of qualitative content analysis, is a method for identifying patterns or themes within data (Mayring, 2000:2; Patton, 2002:453; Preiser *et al.*, 2022:274). According to Preiser et al. (2022:274), the key to selecting these patterns or themes is their ability to answer the research question and comprehensively represent the studied phenomenon. The researcher's extensive engagement with the content allows insight into what is written and what is left out or implied (Linström & Marais, 2014:27; Mezmir, 2020:17; Preiser *et al.*, 2022:274). The researcher can approach this process either deductively, based on existing theory, or inductively, by exploring the data for patterns (Mezmir,

2020:15; Preiser *et al.*, 2022:274). The analysis involves multiple data readings, breaking it down into sections, coding these sections, and refining the codes as more data is analysed.

Humble and Mozelius (2022:77) describe the process of qualitative content analysis as involving several vital steps. Initially, the researcher uses "existing theory to identify key concepts or variables", which serve as the "initial coding categories" (Potter & Levine-Donnerstein, 1999 in Humble & Mozelius, 2022:77). Data is coded and organised into these predetermined categories (Humble & Mozelius, 2022:77). However, since not all data fit neatly into these categories, the fourth step involves highlighting other potentially relevant data (Humble & Mozelius, 2022:77). Finally, in the fifth step, this highlighted data is analysed and categorised into new or sub-categories within existing ones (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005 in Humble & Mozelius, 2022:77).

In this study, the researcher will employ a thematic approach, using pre-identified themes (deductive[31]) alongside themes emerging from the data (inductive[32]). The pre-identified themes have been drawn from the proposed ethical framework[33], as discussed in Chapter 3 (see 3.7). Thus, the analysis will help the researcher evaluate whether the proposed framework needs further refinement. The researcher will do this by comparing to what extent news reporting by *News24* and *IOL* aligned with the principles identified in the proposed ethical framework.

There are several limitations or challenges regarding content analysis as a method (Kleinheksel *et al.*, 2020:136; Humble & Mozelius, 2022:79). In qualitative research, enhancing reliability often involves implementing detailed coding rules to improve consistency; however, these rules may limit the accessibility of coding to the study's audience (Kleinheksel *et al.*, 2020:136). While relying on the coder's judgment can improve the study's resonance with the audience, it may compromise reliability. Kleinheksel *et al.* (2020:136) emphasise that coder reliability and consistency are essential for qualitative analysis. To maintain coding stability, researchers should allocate time for recording and establishing thorough audit trails that document the development and application of codes. Additionally, clear definitions of codes and thorough coder training can significantly improve content analysis (Kleinheksel *et al.*, 2020:136). However, Humble and Mozelius (2022:79) consider defining categories as another challenge as researchers may struggle to distinguish between codes and themes and how to handle the potential overlap of codes and themes, potentially coding everything and creating too many categories. Sticking to the research questions in the analyses is essential to prevent this (Humble & Mozelius, 2022:79).

[31] Deductive refers to where the codes used to analyse the data are predetermined, based on previous research in the field and/or a conceptual framework or model. The codes are developed before the data is collected, without reference to the data (Vears & Gilliam 2022:113).
[32] Inductive refers to the approach where codes used to label the data are developed during the coding process, based on the actual content of the dataset (Vears & Gilliam 2022:113).
[33] Proposed ethical framework consists of journalistic ethical principles or standards identified within social responsibility theory (see 3.3.3), postcolonial critique (see 3.4.2), and the SA Press Code (3.5.2)

In this study, the researcher developed an extensive coding sheet to aid consistency in analysing the research material, utilising the ethical considerations identified within the proposed framework. The coding sheet containing the categories/themes/concepts identified in the literature study as relevant to the ethical dimensions was compiled. Additionally, news items were coded according to the form of GBV identified (see 2.3) and whether the article was published during the 16 Days Campaign. Identifying the forms of GBV represented in the media during the research period allows the researcher to determine how highly they rank on the journalistic agenda.

Research results derived from the coding book will be presented in simple frequency tables highlighting (a) the number of stories published by both online news sites, (b) the number of stories before, during and after the 16 Days Campaign, (c) genres, and (d) themes.

4.5.2.1.1 Research material

Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021:1360) state that there are two types of sampling approaches: probability and non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is the approach most frequently used in qualitative research to understand complex, often context-specific, phenomena such as journalistic reporting of GBV in the South African context. The most common type of non-probability sampling is purposive sampling (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik 2021:1360). Purposive sampling is an approach for the purposive selection of samples based on meeting specific criteria of interest (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik 2021:1360).

In this study, the researcher used relevance sampling to choose the sample from *News24* and *IOL*. Krippendorf (2019:122) explains that relevance sampling involves a systematic approach where a researcher uses a conceptual hierarchy to progressively reduce the number of units considered for analysis. The goal is not to obtain a representative sample of the population but to focus on a specific subset of relevant texts by excluding those that do not contain pertinent information (Krippendorf, 2019:122). This process continues until the pool of relevant texts is manageable.

- **Sample**

The population consisted of all news items regarding GBV published on *IOL* and *News24* during the research period, excluding advertisements, promotional content, and notices but including editorials or opinion pieces. The articles were identified by searching the term 'gender-based violence' on the websites of *IOL* and *News24* using their search engines. Because the search was deliberately restricted, the dataset excludes articles that addressed GBV without explicitly labelling it as such (Brodie [2020] highlights that GBV-related reports are often framed under general crime categories such as 'murder', 'assault', or 'rape'). However, limiting the key search term ensured that articles about the 16 Days Campaign were

included and that the dataset could be managed effectively. Although it can be viewed as a limitation, it does not diminish the quality of the dataset. The research period spanned from 14 October 2023 to 21 January 2024, covering six weeks before, during, and after the 16 Days Campaign, enabling the researcher to evaluate whether the online news sites relied on event-based reporting.

News24 and *IOL* were purposefully selected because they are the most-read online news sites in South Africa and thus supply a fair example of South African news on GBV. The South African Readership Statistics for online news publications show that *News24* (news24.com) and *IOL* (iol.co.za) are the biggest online news publications in South Africa (Letsoalo, 2022). In 2020, *News24* had a readership of 12.3 million, and *IOL* had a readership of 7.3 million (MyBroadband, 2020). In May 2023, *News24* was still the most visited news website in South Africa, followed by *IOL* (Similarweb, 2023).

- ***News24:*** *News24* is owned by Media24, South Africa's largest media company, with various interests, including digital media, newspapers, magazines, e-commerce, book publishing, printing, and distribution (News24, 2023). Media24 is part of Naspers, a global media and e-commerce conglomerate (News24, 2023). *News24* introduced a subscription service, allowing readers to pay a monthly fee (currently R89,00) for access to exclusive content (News24, 2020). Regular readers, including marginalised communities, can access only breaking news stories.

- ***IOL:*** *IOL*, the online platform for Independent Media, hosts the digital offerings of some of South Africa's prominent newspapers, including *The Star*, *Pretoria News*[34], *Daily News*, *The Mercury*, *Cape Times*, *Cape Argus*, *Weekend Argus*, *Sunday Independent*, *Saturday Star*, *Independent on Saturday*, and *Sunday Tribune* (IOL, 2023). *IOL* is a free news platform; thus, the community does not have to subscribe to access content.

The 16 Days Campaign, aimed at raising awareness and combating GBV, is likely to increase media coverage during the period (South African Government, 2023). Including the campaign in the research period allows the researcher to assess whether reporting intensifies or shifts in tone, content, or approach and observe if reporting is sustained beyond the event-driven focus of the campaign. This enables a comparative analysis to determine if the focus on GBV is solely campaign-driven or reflects an ongoing commitment to addressing GBV as a systemic societal issue. In summary, this period facilitates an examination of the quantity, quality, and consistency of GBV reporting.

The inclusion criteria require articles to (a) be published on *News24* or *IOL*; (b) be published during the research period of 14 October 2023 to 21 January 2024; (c) be identified through 'gender-based violence'

[34] *Pretoria News* stopped publishing in May 2023.

as a keyword; (d) adhere to the operational definition of GBV as identified within the study, and (e) adhere to the South African context.

Three hundred seventy-nine articles were initially identified as part of the population – 299 articles by *IOL* and 80 by *News24* by fulfilling the minimum requirements. Based on the adherence to the inclusion criteria, articles were accordingly eliminated to form the sample. A total of 208 articles remained – 158 articles by *IOL* and 50 articles by *News24*.

The remaining sample was coded using the online news site abbreviation, date of publication and number of articles identified within the sample for that day, for example, N-12/12/22-01 (Dayimani, 2022) or I-17/06/23-03 (Majiba, 2023). This was later simplified to variables. Articles within the sample published by *IOL* were indicated as Variables I-1 to I-158. Articles within the sample published by *News24* were similarly indicated as Variables N-1 to N-50. The online news content was then analysed through thematic content analysis to determine to what extent these publications practise ethical journalism in the context of GBV.

Given the relatively small sample, percentages (as opposed to numbers) are used to present co-occurrence of the variables in tables. This ensures that the data is clear and meaningful.

4.5.2.1.2 Measuring instruments

In the previous chapter, elements of ethical GBV reporting were identified through a literature review and used to construct the proposed ethical framework. These elements will be used to compile the datasheet for content analysis.

Table 4.3: Journalistic ethical principles within the proposed ethical framework

Constructs	Operational definition
Professional ethics:	Journalists are expected to adhere to established professional codes and ethical guidelines. Codes of conduct define the minimal expectations of ethical practice, ideal standards of conduct, and accepted behavioural conventions expected from journalists. They are ideally adopted after consultation with the public and regularly updated.
Ethical communication:	Postcolonial theory suggests focusing on ethical communication, which fosters human interaction and respect rather than rigid codes of conduct. This aligns with African communal ethics, which prioritise relationships over individual accountability.
Accuracy and comprehensiveness:	Journalists must publish truthful and detailed information on matters of public interest. The ethical principle of accuracy and comprehensiveness is built on truthfulness and objectivity. It requires transparency regarding using headlines, captions, other content, and quotes.
Contextualisation:	Providing relevant social context allows audiences to understand the complete picture behind reported events.

Constructs	Operational definition
Public interest:	Journalists are responsible for acting in the public's best interest, exposing wrongdoing and holding powerful institutions accountable. Postcolonial theory calls for a broader definition encompassing the nation, including marginalised communities often excluded based on race, ethnicity, and socio-economic factors.
Representation:	Reporting should reflect diverse voices and perspectives, giving a representative view of society. Fulfilling this role requires publishing content from multiple viewpoints and avoiding stereotyping perpetrators and victims/survivors.
Expanded social watchdog:	Journalists act as watchdogs for society, uncovering corruption, threats to public safety, and societal inequalities that must be addressed. Postcolonial theory builds upon the "watchdog" role to encompass all forms of power inequality.
Balancing accountability and harmony:	Journalists must achieve a balance between accountability and maintaining social harmony. Postcolonial theory emphasises sensitivity to the social context. However, this does not mean shying away from critical discussions about power dynamics and societal issues that fuel GBV.
Respectful listening and empowerment:	Postcolonial theory emphasises respect for human dignity, including “listening” to formerly colonised peoples “on their terms.”
Minimising harm:	Reporting should be mindful of potential social consequences, avoiding content that incites violence or reinforces harmful stereotypes. Balanced discussions on sensitive topics can be encouraged, provided they are done responsibly and in the proper context.
Communal relationships:	The focus is on honouring communal relationships rather than maximising welfare or abiding by norms. Metz (2015) suggests treating individuals according to their capacity to enter relationships of solidarity.
Privacy and dignity:	The practice of safeguarding individuals' privacy and dignity involves protecting the identity and HIV/AIDS status of survivors, avoiding the inclusion of personal information that does not contribute to the narrative, and refraining from intruding on private grief.
Confidentiality:	Confidentiality in reporting entails protecting the identity of survivors, ensuring that all sources are identified, and avoiding using anonymous sources unless essential.
Protecting children:	Journalists must protect children's identities by refraining from revealing any information that may lead to identifying the child’s name, such as their parents, school, house, or neighbourhood. Further, it should avoid publishing sexually exploitative images of children.
Independence:	To ensure objective reporting, journalists should be free from undue influences, such as government or commercial pressures.
Public platform:	The media serves as a platform for public discourse, facilitating the exchange of information, comments, and criticism. It must be accessible to as many people as possible in society.

Constructs	Operational definition
Deconstructing colonial power:	Postcolonial theory critiques how media can perpetuate colonial power structures and cultural dominance. Journalists must be aware of personal biases and actively promote diverse voices, ensuring that marginalised communities are heard and represented accurately.

A proposed ethical framework (see 3.5) was formulated based on the ethical principles identified in social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique. Table 4.4 below shows these identified elements and the measuring instruments that will aid the researcher in recognising these elements within the research material.

Table 4.4: Identified elements of ethical GBV reporting and measuring instruments

Construct	Measuring instrument
Accuracy and comprehensiveness with deconstructed power:	Are multiple sources used in the article? Are all sources of information clearly and transparently attributed in the article? Does the article include perspectives from marginalised voices, such as women experts, crime survivors, and affected communities? Are headlines, captions, visuals, and video content used accurately and transparently to avoid misleading the audience?
Contextualisation and respectful listening:	Does the article include relevant statistics? Does the article explore the social narratives and root causes related to the issue? Does the article provide adequate social context for the topic being discussed? Does the article quote individuals from the affected communities?
Representation and redefining public interest:	Does the article cover GBV experiences from communities that are less visible in mainstream media? How many sources are used? Who is quoted?
Expanding watchdog role:	Does the article investigate how legal systems, social services, and cultural norms perpetuate GBV? What type of GBV is reported on?
Minimising harm and maintaining social harmony:	Does the article avoid stereotyping perpetrators and victims/survivors? Is the article written with a survivor-centred approach, avoiding graphic details, choosing appropriate language, and reflecting on the impact on survivors and their communities? Does the article refrain from glamorising or promoting violence or unlawful conduct? Does the article utilise content warnings where appropriate?
Professional ethics and decolonising communication:	Does the article adhere to core journalistic principles such as truthfulness and accountability? Does the article amplify the narratives of survivors/victims? Does the article move beyond traditional reporter-driven perspectives?

Construct	Measuring instrument
Public platform and decolonised media:	Does the article facilitate public discussions about GBV? Does the article foster conversations about prevention and support? Is the article accessible to a broad audience? Does the article critically discuss the power dynamics and social norms perpetuating GBV?
Privacy and dignity:	Does the article protect the identity and HIV/AIDS status of survivors? Does the article avoid including personal information that does not contribute to the narrative? Does the article refrain from intruding on the private grief of the individuals involved?
Protecting children:	Does the article protect the identity of children involved in the story? Does the article avoid publishing sexually exploitative content of children?
Confidentiality:	Does the article protect the identity of survivors? Are all sources identified? Does the article avoid using anonymous sources unless essential?

4.5.2.1.3 Analysis and interpretation of data

Using the data table below, the researcher was able to systematically analyse the selected articles published by *News24* and IOL during the research period. Table 4.5 shows the datasheet developed from the measuring instrument in Table 4.4.

Table 4.5: Datasheet

Data table												
Item code		Headline				Date		*		Summary		
GBV:		FV	CV	SV	VW	VC	VO	Type:				
Sources:		Type:		C	An	I	P	S	A	Co	Fa	F:
Contextualisation		St	SC	SN	RC	Stereotype/generalise				P	S	Co	N
Survivor-centred approach		L	D	IS	IC	CW	Pr	Su	M	Available		
Children		PI	D	MR		Media						
Notes												
Key terms												

Explanation:

Gender-based violence		Sources		Survivor-centred approach	
FV	Family violence	C	Confidential	L	Language
CV	Community violence	An	Anonymous	D	Graphic details
SV	Structural violence	I	All sources identified	CW	Content Warning
VW	Violence against women	P	Alleged perpetrator	Pr	Prevention
VC	Violence against children	S	Survivor	Su	Support
VO	Violence against others	A	Authorities	M	Misleading elements
Contextualisation		Co	Communities	IS	Consider the impact on the survivor
St	Statistics	Fa	Families	IC	Consider the impact on the community
SC	Social context	F	Female	GBV Type[35]	
SN	Social Narrative	Children			Domestic violence
RC	Root causes	PI	Protect identity		Structural/workplace violence
Stereotype/generalise		D	Graphic details		Rape
N	None	MR	Misrepresentation		Femicide

*Marking the block indicates that the article was published during the 16 Days of Activism

After a preliminary analysis of 20 articles, the coding sheet was adapted to include 'families' under the category of 'sources' to differentiate between familial and community sources. The category 'media' was also added to analyse if the images, captions, and video material accurately describe the articles' content. A section for 'key terms' was also added so the researcher could group articles of similar themes and content, such as grouping all articles regarding a specific case. The section for all sources identified was removed after data analysis, which revealed that the category interfered with data interpretation.

This rich descriptive data was entered into a coding book for simplicity's sake. The coding book lists variables such as the headline, journalist, date, and whether the article falls within the 16 Days Campaign; the context, form, and type of GBV; the amount and type of sources, including how many of these sources are women; contextualisation; stereotypes; survivor-centred approach; reporting on children; notes and

[35] The GBV type is indicated by colouring the block with the relevant colour. These colour indications are simply a way to make the coding process easier for the researcher and not an example of the entirety of GBV types identified within the sample. The GBV types were identified and coded to be associated with a colour as part of the qualitative analysis.

quotes from the text; notable media; and key terms. Due to the vast number of variables, the coding book was a more effective measuring tool than the original datasheet. However, the researcher had limited knowledge of effectively translating the data into pivot tables and enlisted a professional's help. Together, they built the coding document to collect the necessary information for the study efficiently.

4.6 Reliability and validity of the study

The researcher will be cautious of the concerns usually associated with qualitative research to ensure reliability and validity by providing the interpretations from the data as a true reflection of the collected data (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014:125 in Linström & Marais, 2014:26). A common concern in qualitative research is ensuring objectivity in data collection, analysis, and interpretation; however, a certain degree of subjectivity will not render the study invalid (Cohen, 2001:329). The study follows a multi-method approach, based on the definition of triangulation, as a measure for data monitoring to ensure the data's reliability, validity, and trustworthiness as part of the research design. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon (Carter e*t al.*, 2014:545; Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021:3) and reduces biases in sampling, procedural bias and researcher bias, thus increasing validity and credibility (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021:5). While the study initially framed this approach within triangulation, it is more accurately described as a multi-method strategy, given the interconnected nature of the selected methodologies, theoretical frameworks, and sources (Carter *et al*., 2014:545; Natow, 2020:161-162). While the study does not fully achieve triangulation in the strictest sense, the multi-method approach provides a comprehensive and analytically rigorous framework for the research.

- Methodological approach: A range of distinct yet complementary methods were employed to gather data, including literature reviews and qualitative content analysis.
- Theoretical approach: Social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique were integrated under the broader premise of journalistic ethics. Although these frameworks offer distinct analytical insights, they share alignment within the humanities/social sciences domain, reinforcing rather than independently verifying the findings. This theoretical approach, alongside the SA Press Code, informed the development of a proposed ethical framework for journalistic reporting.
- Source triangulation: Data was gathered from theoretical and empirical sources, such as academic journals, books, news archives, dissertations, journalistic ethical codes and guidelines, campaign and advocacy literature, legal and judicial sources, public and academic databases, and online sources.

Linström and Marais (2014:65) argue that qualitative research, such as content analysis, poses challenges related to data collection, analysis, and the final presentation of results. Operational definitions may differ

from one study to the next, complicating the use of a reliable coding sheet. Therefore, it is vital to have set definitions based on academic literature to ensure the reliability of findings.

4.7 Ethical considerations

Ethical research aims to avoid harm to participants while contributing to the study and the broader research field. The researcher must assess whether the chosen methods may cause damage or benefit, focusing on mitigating risks to the subjects' reputation, dignity, or privacy. It is crucial to emphasise that this study does not seek to examine GBV as a phenomenon but rather its reporting. As such, it will not include interviews with gender experts, individuals mentioned in the articles, or other stakeholders, as this falls outside the study's scope. Although expert in-depth interviews with journalists, editors, and copy tasters were initially considered, they were excluded to keep the scope within the limits of a master's dissertation.

The content analysed for this research is in the public domain, sourced from publicly accessible platforms such as *News24* and *IOL*. The study did not proceed with empirical research until ethical clearance was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at North-West University, South Africa. Upon amendment of the scope of the study, the research was re-evaluated to a "no risk" study. The final ethics approval letter of study was awarded by the NWU Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) on 23 October 2024 (see Addenda A). The professional who aided in creating the coding book had no interaction with the raw content or results of the study.

All collected data is stored securely in password-protected cloud storage, in compliance with data privacy regulations, and will remain accessible only to the researcher for five years. Supervisors and examiners can have access to the data upon request.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher has outlined the study's methodological framework, which examines what is expected of South African journalists when they report on GBV. A qualitative research approach was chosen to allow for a nuanced understanding of journalistic ethics and practices in this sensitive area, with literature reviews and qualitative content analysis as the primary empirical methods. The research design, including the purposive sampling of *News24* and *IOL* articles, ensures that the study focuses on relevant GBV reporting surrounding the 16 Days Campaign.

Using methodological, theoretical, and source triangulation, the study's reliability and validity are enhanced, and potential biases mitigated. The ethical considerations discussed ensure that the research is conducted with integrity and respect for the privacy and dignity of individuals involved.

Overall, the chapter provides a foundation for analysing how South African media outlets adhere to ethical guidelines when reporting on GBV. The proposed ethical framework (see 3.7) will be further evaluated in Chapter Five, where it will be used as a measure to analyse real-world journalistic practices in GBV case studies. This analysis aims to offer deeper insights into the extent to which the media aligns with the proposed journalistic standards and assess whether the framework requires additional refinement to effectively support sensitive and ethical GBV reporting.

CHAPTER 5 ETHICAL GBV REPORTING BY NEWS24 AND IOL: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the researcher outlined the study's methodological framework, which examines ethical expectations for South African journalists reporting on gender-based violence (GBV). Employing a qualitative approach through literature reviews (see Chapters 2 and 3) and content analysis, the study focused on *News24* and *IOL*[36] articles covering the 16 Days Campaign.

The proposed ethical framework (see 3.7) will be further evaluated in Chapter 5, where its alignment with real-world practices will be tested, and potential refinements will be considered to support sensitive and ethical GBV reporting better. Given South Africa's high rates of GBV and the media's role in shaping societal perceptions (see 2.4), examining GBV coverage in the South African context is particularly relevant. This chapter, guided by the qualitative content analysis-method outlined in Chapter 4, focuses on the reporting practices of two prominent South African online news sites, *News24* and *IOL*, about the 2023 16 Days of Activism Campaign, addressing the third and fourth specific research questions, namely:

- SRQ3: *To what extent did News24 practise ethical journalism in the context of GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024)?*
- SRQ4: *To what extent did IOL practice ethical journalism in the context of GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024)?*

The specific research questions will be addressed through a qualitative content analysis of 208 articles published during the research period, 158 by *IOL* and 50 by *News24* (see 4.5.2.1.1), interpreted in alignment with the study's proposed ethical framework (see 3.7). This framework will guide the description and interpretation of the findings, offering a structured basis for evaluating the ethical dimensions of GBV reporting in these articles.

5.2 Presentation of data

The content analysis findings are presented using the standards within the proposed ethical framework as headings and the constructs as subheadings (see 3.5.2). The standards are accuracy and comprehensiveness with deconstructed power, contextualisation and respectful listening, representation and redefining the public interest, expanding the watchdog role, minimising harm and maintaining social

[36] Note that the Independent Media Group, including *IOL*, left the SA Press Council in 2016 and followed its own Press Code until rejoining in 2024 (SANEF, 2024). Although similar to the SA Press Code, this shift may have influenced journalists' adherence to ethical GBV reporting during the research period (see 3.6.3).

harmony, professional ethics and decolonising communication, privacy and dignity, and protecting children.

In summary, violence against women (VAW) emerged as the most prominently reported form of GBV, with a particular focus on crimes occurring within domestic or intimate partner contexts. Among these, femicide was the most frequently reported crime. Notably, nearly 30% of articles in the sample were published during the 16 Days Campaign. The campaign also reflected a nearly twofold increase in daily reporting compared to the rest of the study period. This suggests that media coverage of GBV is significantly heightened during the campaign, though its consistency and depth beyond this period remain areas for further scrutiny.

5.2.1 Accuracy and comprehensiveness with deconstructed power

The ethical principle of accuracy and comprehensiveness in journalism is rooted in truthfulness and objectivity but also requires addressing colonial biases in reporting (see 3.5.1.1). This approach involves using research methods that engage affected communities and recognise how colonial legacies shape the economic and social structures contributing to GBV. Traditional reliance on authoritative, often male, sources risks reinforcing elite perspectives and perpetuating harmful narratives, such as victim-blaming and insensitivity (see 2.4).

The proposed ethical framework for GBV reporting expands on accuracy and comprehensiveness, urging journalists to move beyond conventional fact-checking. It calls for seeking diverse perspectives, acknowledging colonialism's ongoing impact on GBV, and challenging stereotypical narratives that marginalise voices (see 3.5.2). Achieving accuracy within this framework means examining source selection, representation, and overall reporting practices through a lens that deconstructs power dynamics, engaging directly with marginalised communities to shape more truthful narratives.

5.2.1.1 Source selection

Table 5.1 illustrates the percentages of analysed source types utilised by each publication within the research period, highlighting both publications' heavy reliance on authoritative sources.

Table 5.1: Type of sources in IOL and News24

Type of Sources	IOL		News24	
	Percentage within the study period	Percentage within 16 Days Campaign	Percentage within the study period	Percentage within 16 Days Campaign
Authoritative	79.75	78.05	74	73.68
Community	31.65	34.15	42	26.31
Family	18.35	17.07	6	5.26
Survivor	7.59	7.31	6	10.53
Alleged perpetrator	N/A	N/A	8	5.26

Type of Sources	IOL		News24	
	Percentage within the study period	Percentage within 16 Days Campaign	Percentage within the study period	Percentage within 16 Days Campaign
Confidential[37]	4.43	7.31	12	15.79

While Table 5.1 focuses on individual source types rather than their combinations, the analysis reveals notable differences in how the two online news sites prioritise and integrate sources. *IOL* appears to favour a combination of authoritative and community sources, whereas *News24* relies more on anonymous and confidential sources, particularly during the 16 Days Campaign. This suggests that *News24* may adopt a more reactive approach to sourcing during critical periods like the 16 Days Campaign, gathering and utilising sources primarily in response to unfolding events rather than proactively seeking diverse or comprehensive perspectives beforehand (Mathisen, 2023:657).

Table 5.1 further demonstrates that both publications strongly rely on authoritative sources across the study period, with *IOL* consistently integrating community voices. In contrast, *News24* initially emphasises community perspectives, but shifts focus during the 16 Days Campaign to include more survivor voices, aligning with the campaign's objectives. In the sample, *News24* displays a more balanced approach by relying less exclusively on authoritative sources than *IOL,* where more than half of the articles only used official sources. The comparison shows a heavy reliance on, and implied preference for, authoritative sources rather than using the community's authentic voice. The researcher argues that such reliance perpetuates the colonial legacy in the media, which prioritises authority over community voices. Drawing on authoritative sources, often predominantly male, can elevate elite interests and concerns, often at the expense of representing public realities (see 2.4).

During the research period, *News24* demonstrated a more effective integration of community narratives than *IOL*, suggesting a more robust engagement with grassroots perspectives that enhances the authenticity of its reporting. For instance, in article N-02, with the headline 'Jukulyn: The place called hell where residents are haunted by violence and crime,' *News24* examines the murder of a young girl while also addressing the ongoing violence and crime that plague the community. Instead of adopting a strictly event-based approach, the article situates the tragedy within a broader social narrative. It incorporates the voices of community members, offering a more nuanced, contextualised portrayal of the crisis beyond official police reports. Specifically, N-02[38] highlights how police resources are preoccupied with escorting delivery vehicles rather than pursuing criminals, illustrating the broader implications of systemic neglect. Thus, the article explores a GBV-related crime while also discussing the broader social context in which

[37] Confidential sources are more thoroughly addressed in 5.2.8
[38] See explanation of classification protocol on page 89.

the crime took place, not limiting the narrative to the voices of officials but also not ignoring these authoritative sources as they are part of the contextual background.

Moreover, article N-25, 'Gugulethu residents call on government to impose severe penalties on gender-based violence offenders', presents diverse community perspectives. It highlights not only the experiences of women but also the emotional and financial toll of GBV on men, and it acknowledges that GBV impacts same-sex relationships as well. By featuring a range of voices, the article captures the complexities of GBV, reflecting that it transcends traditional gender boundaries. The researcher argues that this nuanced approach aligns with the proposed ethical standard, emphasising the 'deconstruction of power' by urging journalists to engage meaningfully with marginalised communities. This involves moving away from stereotypical narratives that misrepresent GBV in the South African context and being mindful of language and presentation when depicting these communities (see 3.5.1). By doing so, journalists can present a more comprehensive and accurate representation of the social dynamics.

In contrast, *IOL's* coverage, such as article I-27, 'Police condemn acts of GBV after the rape of an 84-year-old woman', often reduces survivors[39]' experiences of clinical details provided by authorities. Phrases like "police say" and "reports indicate" depersonalise the survivors, offering minimal engagement with their narratives. This depersonalised clinical language belies the emotional depth and complexity of GBV and is a common theme in *IOL's* reporting. Although widely practised, the researcher argues that referring to individuals as merely a "complainant" (I-154) or "accused" (I-155), rather than using terms like "survivor," contradicts the standards within the proposed ethical framework. Such language diminishes the human impact of the crime by reducing individuals to legal labels, thereby detracting from the personal and social dimensions of their experiences (see 3.4.1).

Survivor voices are underrepresented in both publications (see Table 5.1). Within the sample, *News24* publishes fewer articles featuring survivor perspectives than *IOL* in their general reporting. Nonetheless, *News24* places a slightly stronger emphasis on survivor perspectives by prioritising personal experiences in the survivors' voices, offering a more authentic representation of their experiences. In contrast, the *IOL* sample tends to centre on official sources, which, while necessary, do not capture survivors' direct, personal accounts. Despite the lower frequency of survivor stories in *News24*, their approach is more aligned with ethical journalistic standards, as it gives space to survivors to speak for themselves rather than relying solely on external interpretations (see 5.2.3; 5.2.5.2.3). Both outlets could emphasise the survivor narrative more often. However, this representation should not come at the cost of re-

[39] Whilst the terms 'victim' and 'survivor' are sometimes used interchangeably, 'victim' is a term most often used in legal and medical sectors, while 'survivor' is a term generally preferred in the psychological and social support sectors (Sonke Gender Justice, 2017:6). Within the study the researcher prefers the terms 'survivor,' except in cases like femicide, where it would be inaccurate.

traumatising survivors (see 3.5.1.5) or violating any laws or professional/institutional ethical codes of conduct journalists should adhere to (see 3.5.1.6; 3.6.2.1). The aim should be to highlight the realities of GBV.

Interestingly, the data in Table 5.1 reveals differing editorial approaches between *News24* and *IOL* regarding including alleged perpetrator perspectives. During the 16 Days Campaign, *News24* used fewer alleged perpetrators as sources, aligning with the campaign's focus on survivors. To the researcher, this adjustment suggests an editorial sensitivity to the campaign's goals, as focusing on the voices of alleged perpetrators might risk shifting the narrative from survivor-centred advocacy. In contrast, *IOL* excludes alleged perpetrator voices altogether during the campaign and in general reporting.

Further, both outlets limit the use of anonymous sources, especially in campaign coverage, while confidential sources gain prominence, likely due to the sensitive nature of the topics addressed.

Although the study acknowledges that anyone, regardless of gender orientation, can be a victim of GBV, it is significant that women are disproportionately affected by GBV in terms of frequency, intensity, and brutality compared to men (see 1.1; 2.3). Therefore, the study must address the disparity in sourcing, particularly regarding women as sources.

The findings show that on average, the number of sources quoted in the *News24* sample, 43.97% were women, and on *IOL*, 38.07%. This imbalance shows a gap in including women's voices within the sample, limiting the richness and depth of coverage on GBV. The literature suggests that women are primarily featured for personal accounts rather than as experts or spokespersons (Orgeret, 2018:353), while professional sources, typically male, are preferred, rendering personal voices invisible (Brodie, 2019:263) (see 2.4). However, the *News24* sample amplifies the voices of women experts, specifically during the 16 Days Campaign, offering them a platform to share their insights and perspectives on GBV and related issues. Notable contributors include Dr Nechama Brodie (N-39), Prof Amanda Gouws (N-40), Mia Malan (N-15), and Tanya Pampalone (N-15). Brodie is a South African author, journalist, and academic known for her work on GBV and fatal violence, addressing complex social narratives in books like *Femicide in South Africa* and *Farm Killings in South Africa* (Coetsee, 2020*;* Brodie, n.d.). Gouws is a distinguished professor of political science at Stellenbosch University (Stellenbosch University, n.d.), specialising in South African and gender politics, particularly on women's representation, rights, and activism. Malan is the editor-in-chief and founder of Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism, a health-focused journalism centre, and known for her award-winning investigative work on public health issues such as HIV/AIDS in South Africa (Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism, 2024a; Mail & Guardian, 2024). Pampalone is an experienced journalist and editor who writes on health, social justice, and environmental issues, contributing to

Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism (Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism, 2024b). This targeted inclusion of women's expertise is absent in the *IOL* sample, highlighting *News24's* distinctive approach.

In summary, *IOL* demonstrates a strong reliance on authoritative sources. *News24*, while relying on authoritative sources, does so to a lesser extent and incorporates more integrated community voices into its coverage. This suggests that *News24* may be more attuned to local perspectives, potentially enhancing the authenticity of its reporting. Despite the higher percentage of female sources in *News24*, the sample highlights a significant gap in media coverage, where women's experiences and perspectives are underrepresented in the broader societal context of GBV, limiting the depth of reporting.

5.2.1.2 Misrepresentation

In this study, misrepresentation refers to instances where the article's text does not align with the caption(s), image(s), or headline (see 3.6.2.5). In the sample, fewer inaccuracies such as these were seen in *News24's* reporting than in that of *IOL*.

In the *News24* sample, only four examples (8%) that could point to misrepresentation were identified. For instance, in N-01, 'Tackling GBV and dismantling toxic masculinity's grip on men,' the headline fails to accurately reflect the article's content, which is a broader discussion of faith and GBV. It neglects to address how faith or religion contributes to tackling GBV or toxic masculinity, as implied through the headline. Similarly, in N-44, 'Turning the toxic tide of violence against women and children,' the headline suggests a general discussion on GBV and femicide (GBVF). In contrast, the article focuses on structural abuse related to religion. Though these misrepresentations are not deliberate, the vagueness in headlines and imagery could have a bearing on public perception, especially on complex social issues like GBV. It is important to note that both examples are opinion pieces.

In contrast, inaccuracies were seen more often in *IOL*'s reporting through sensationalist or slanted headlines (which could be related to 'clickbait' [see 2.4]) (Kaushal & Vemuri, 2021) or shifting the focus of articles away from GBV. Overall, 15.82% of articles within this sample contained some form of misrepresentation. Kaushal and Vemuri (2021) argue that these practices reduce the credibility of news content overall. The researchers contend that these practices also compromise ethical standards for GBV reporting, particularly regarding accuracy and public trust. Many *IOL* headlines did not accurately represent the content of their articles. In these examples, GBV could be a method to lure readers to read articles, but these narratives often represent 'just another crime'. For example, I-08, 'Botlokwa police investigate the gruesome discovery of the body of an 18-year-old woman', also includes an unrelated crime involving a male body unrelated to GBV. Although reporting on different issues in the same story is common, especially in crime coverage, it could diminish the importance of the main topic of the story.

Moreover, in this example, the unrelated case also involves the discovery of a body, which could very well lead to confusion. Similarly, I-20, 'Pinetown woman gunned down in alleged domestic dispute,' focuses on a case of domestic violence (DV) but also an unrelated road accident. The headline does prioritise GBV, yet the many details about the accident could diminish the gravity of the GBV incident. This approach can unintentionally downplay the significance of DV as a societal issue and overlook the experiences of survivors, victims, and communities affected by this pervasive problem.

5.2.1.3 Accuracy

The ethical principle of accuracy and comprehensiveness is rooted in truthfulness (see 3.2.2.1) and objectivity (see 3.3.3). While absolute truth may be elusive (Retief, 2013b:68), journalists aim to maintain truthfulness by verifying facts, fairly representing stories, being transparent about sources, and ensuring thorough reporting. This becomes critical when covering sensitive topics like GBV, where even minor inaccuracies can significantly impact public trust.

In the *News24* sample, only two articles exhibited apparent issues with accuracy, whereas a single *IOL* article raised similar concerns. For instance, in N-29, 'UPDATE | Kristen Kluyts murder: Alleged killer trembled in the dock,' a disclaimer notes the story was "edited for accuracy" but does not clarify what changes were made, raising concerns about transparency. In N-19, 'Justice still fails Nakita Kalubi months later,' the survivor's name is inconsistently spelt, alternating between "Nakita" and "Nikita." In contrast, in I-47, 'GBV victim still awaiting justice,' her name is consistently spelt as Nikita Kalubi.

News24 consistently specifies whether an article is an opinion piece or a column and identifies the author. For instance, N-15, 'OPINION | Mia Malan and Tanya Pampalone: From Oscar to Diepsloot - why do men become violent?' clearly labels the article as an opinion piece, with the views expressed by the writers. In this example, their expertise in the field lends authority to their writing (see 5.2.1.1). Moreover, the article includes numerous links to other news reports, published research, and official information sources such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime Research, Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism, South African Medical Research Council, and South African Medical Journal to support the opinion presented. This trend within the sample suggests that within *News24,* opinion pieces are attributed to credible voices, helping maintain the integrity of the content. Notably, 24% of the published articles within the *News24* sample are opinion pieces.

News24 consistently attributed information more clearly in its opinion pieces and columns throughout the sample period in comparison to *IOL*. Both online news sites, however, show occasional lapses in attribution in certain types of reporting, particularly in crime and court cases. In these instances, some articles fail to state whether the information was sourced from court proceedings or official

documentation. This can undermine the article's credibility, as readers could be left questioning the origin of critical details. Clear attribution, particularly in sensitive areas like crime reporting, is essential for maintaining public trust and journalistic integrity.

The proposed ethical framework urges journalists to practice transparency in reporting, particularly in conveying how their editorial decisions impact the community. This involves fostering informed choices through truth and opinion, promoting communal relationships, ensuring accuracy, encouraging diverse viewpoints, protecting reputations, and prohibiting harmful or violent speech (see 3.4.2). This means transparency in sources is necessary within GBV reporting (see Metz, 2015:83-86 in 3.4.2).

Summary

The reporting in *News24* mostly aligns with the ethical framework's principles of accuracy and comprehensiveness but with room for improvement, particularly concerning source selection, misrepresentation, and transparency. *News24* often relies on authoritative sources, and there is limited engagement with community voices, which reflects an ongoing colonial legacy where elite perspectives are prioritised over social realities. This imbalance can perpetuate power dynamics in the portrayal of GBV. Overall, while *News24* shows commitment to accuracy and truthfulness, it falls short of fully deconstructing power imbalances in GBV reporting, often side-lining marginalised voices.

In comparison, *IOL's* reporting only partially aligns with the ethical principles of accuracy and comprehensiveness. While factual inaccuracies were rare, the over-reliance on authoritative sources severely marginalised community voices. Women's voices were limited, creating a notable gender gap in represented perspectives. Additionally, 15.82% of articles featured misleading headlines or clickbait, undermining the seriousness of GBV. Although *IOL* aims for accuracy, these issues with source diversity and misrepresentation hinder full ethical compliance.

5.2.2 Contextualisation and respectful listening

The contextualisation process should authentically reflect marginalised people's realities; however, it should be sensitive to protecting the dignity of trauma survivors (see 3.5.2). Within the concept of contextualisation, the researcher will first discuss event-based reporting and then analyse contextual elements utilised within the samples.

5.2.2.1 Event-based reporting

Figure 5.1 illustrates the daily number of articles published by *News24* and *IOL* within the sample. It should be acknowledged that *IOL* represents multiple news titles, whilst *News24* represents fewer (see p. 167).

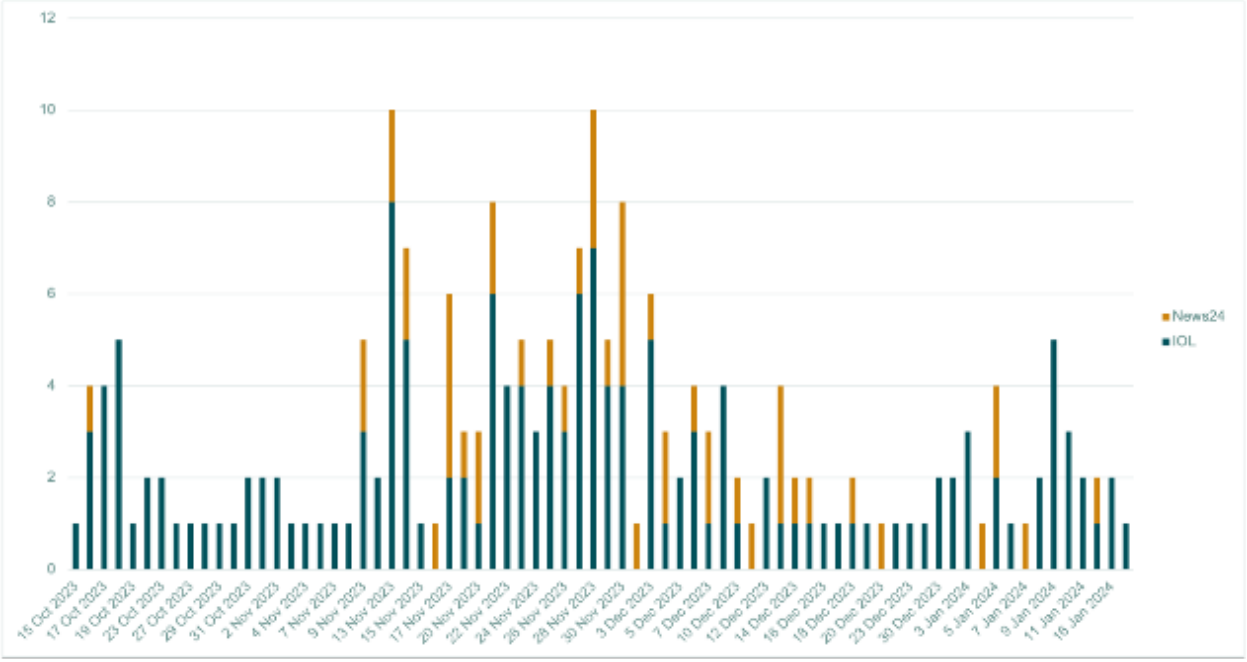

Figure 5.1: Daily number of articles published by IOL and News24 during the research period

The analysis of event-driven journalism within the samples, as illustrated in Figure 5.1, shows a notable increase in articles published daily during the 16 Days Campaign. This confirms the researcher's argument that publications tend to increase their reporting during activism periods (see 1.2). In the sample, *IOL* produced more articles on average than *News24*, which, according to the researcher, raises the issue of quality versus quantity. *IOL'*s higher quantity of articles illustrates a broader scope of coverage. Still, it raises concerns about whether this increased volume inhibits the contextualisation needed for ethical and responsible reporting of GBV, as expected within the proposed ethical framework. In contrast, *News24*, while publishing fewer articles per day, offered more in-depth coverage, focusing on contextualising GBV within systemic and societal structures (see 5.2.4.1). This disparity suggests that while both online news sites show increased output during the advocacy period, *IOL*'s volume-focused approach prioritised surface-level reporting, whereas *News24* provided more critical engagement with GBV issues (see 5.2.4). The researcher acknowledges that not all reporting can be in-depth but asserts that all GBV reporting should have a level of socio-historical contextualisation to avoid harmful narratives and public misconceptions.

Additionally, *News24*'s reporting demonstrates a focus on violence against women (VAW) (72%), with femicide being a predominant theme (28%). However, during the 16 Days Campaign, the focus shifts towards a broader critique of structural violence (26.32%), indicating a strategic use of the campaign to address systemic GBV issues, which additionally might suggest that certain forms of GBV, especially

systemic forms, are only highlighted during specific awareness events, potentially limiting the depth of critical discourse outside these periods (see 5.2.4.2).

Comparatively, *IOL'*s reporting on GBV tends to focus heavily on family violence (36%) and VAW (68.99%), with femicide (36.06%) being a prominent theme. However, the reporting often lacks a sustained focus on structural and systemic issues, particularly outside of the 16 Days Campaign. *IOL*'s emphasis on community and public forms of violence during the campaign highlights the publication's reactive nature to the advocacy period, but this fails to explore the systemic drivers of GBV fully. Additionally, the underrepresentation of children and other vulnerable groups in *IOL*'s GBV reporting suggests a narrow focus that may hinder a comprehensive understanding of the broader societal impacts of GBV (see 5.2.4.2).

Thus, both publications display event-based reporting during the 16 Days Campaign. However, their approaches differ slightly. *IOL* publishes more articles overall, reflecting a focus on quantity with the aim of spreading awareness. This suggests a higher volume of coverage, potentially favouring broader but less in-depth reporting. *News24*, on the other hand, although also increasing published articles, shifts its focus more towards structural and systemic issues during this period. While it publishes fewer articles, its coverage delves deeper into the systemic causes of GBV, providing a more critical analysis of the broader societal and institutional factors at play.

5.2.2.2 Contextualisation

A solution to the problem of event-driven journalism is thematic reporting, which would entail highlighting how GBV in South Africa stems from intersecting inequalities and the country's colonial history (Chiumbu, 2022:44), which continues to influence gender roles, economic disparities, and cultural norms that perpetuate violence (see 2.2). Thematic reporting incorporates contextual elements such as statistics, social narratives, and root causes (Ali & Pasha, 2022:5 in 3.5.2). This process of contextualisation must authentically reflect the realities of marginalised people while also being sensitive to protecting the dignity of trauma survivors (see 3.5.2). Table 5.2 presents the total percentage of contextualisation elements identified within the sample.

Table 5.2: Contextualisation in IOL and News24 within the research period

Contextualisation	IOL		News24	
	Percentage of sample within 16 Days Campaign	Percentage of sample	Percentage of sample within 16 Days Campaign	Percentage of sample
Not applicable	31.71	29.75	15.79	18
Social context	19.51	22.78	68.42	54
Root causes	14.63	8.23	42.1	24

Contextualisation	IOL		News24	
	Percentage of sample within 16 Days Campaign	Percentage of sample	Percentage of sample within 16 Days Campaign	Percentage of sample
Social narratives	46.3	48.73	94.73	64
Statistics	21.95	17.72	31.58	28

Notably, several articles within the sample contained no discernible form of contextualisation and were therefore marked as 'not applicable.' The following section discusses contextualisation and respectful listening by discussing statistics (see 5.2.2.1), social narratives (see 5.2.2.2), social context (see 5.2.2.3), root causes (see 5.2.2.4), community sources and sensitive reporting (see 5.2.2.5), and the use of stock images (see 5.2.2.6).

5.2.2.2.1 Statistics

As seen in Table 5.2, almost a third of the *News24* sample had some form of statistics in the article content. In contrast, fewer than a fifth of articles in the *IOL* sample utilised statistics as contextualisation.

Within the sample, statistics are frequently accompanied by additional contextualisation, including social context and root causes. However, not all statistics contribute to a deeper understanding of GBV as a social issue within the community, as it is not always presented in a reader-friendly or socially relevant way. Connecting statistics to broader social contexts or root causes promotes a more nuanced understanding of GBV as a societal issue (Carratalá, 2016:44) by emphasising how intersecting inequalities and the legacies of the country's colonial history perpetuate GBV (Chiumbu, 2022:44) (see 2.4).

In some cases, the statistics presented can be difficult for readers to grasp because they are not broken down into relatable information. For example, in N-37, 'Kirsten Kluyts' killing: Joburg teacher's attacker put on her clothes before he left running trail,' the article states:

> *On Friday, just days before the 16 Days of Activism campaign against gender-based violence, Police Minister Bheki Cele released the quarter two crime statistics for 2023/24.*
>
> *He celebrated the 0.8% decrease in the murder rate between July and September this year, with 6,945 people murdered. Of those, 881 were women, and 293 were children.*
>
> *During this time, there were 1,514 reported incidents of attempted murder involving female victims. There were 14,401 reported assault GBH [Gender-based Harm] incidents, and children reported 361 incidents of attempted murder and 1,820 of assault GBH.*

This is the norm in many articles using statistics within the *IOL* sample. For example, I-82, '16 days of no violence against women children: 881 women and 293 children were killed in SA in just three months', presents a range of statistics but fails to provide context that would help readers grasp their significance. Instead, the article gives the impression that the statistics were included merely to fill space without effectively tying them into the broader narrative. For example:

> *According to the most recent crime statistics released by the National Minister of Police, Bheki Cele, a staggering 881 women and 293 children were killed during the period of July and September this year.*

And:

> *A staggering 14,401 female victims were victims of assault, and 1,514 were victims of attempted murder during the three-month period.*
>
> *Over 10,500 rapes were reported, and according to the SAPS, 4,726 rape incidents took place at either the home of the rape victim or the home of the perpetrator who are known to the victim, such as a family member, a friend or a neighbour.*

Furthermore, I-82 relies heavily on the comments of a single NGO representative to speak on behalf of survivors and communities rather than offering a more nuanced and comprehensive perspective. This requires engaging with marginalised communities as sources of information and abandoning stereotypical narratives that do not accurately represent GBV within the South African context (see 3.5.1.1). The lack of contextualisation weakens the impact of the statistics and fails to fully engage the reader with the realities of the issue at hand.

Conversely, certain articles effectively integrate statistics to highlight the severity of the issue in terms that community members can understand. For instance, N-39 'Nechama Brodie | Paper planes: No safe spaces for South African women' excels at making large numbers comprehensible by stating: "… between 10 and 11 women are now being killed every single day in South Africa". Similarly, N-40, 'Amanda Gouws | Imagine going for a run and ending up dead,' simplifies statistics by detailing the environments where rapes occurred (see Figure 5.2). This makes the statistics easier to comprehend and shows the severity of crimes committed in the language or format readers can understand.

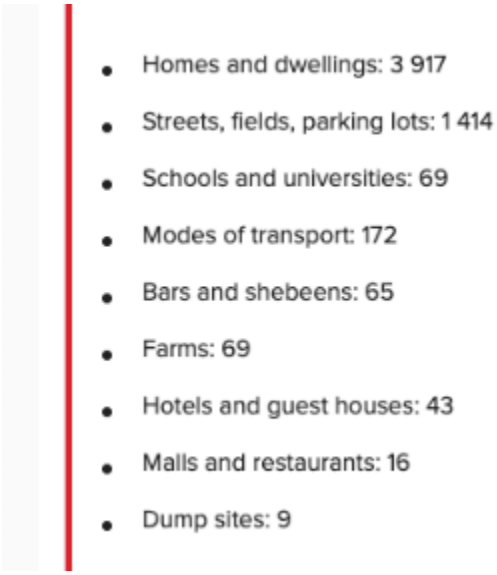

Figure 5.2: Breakdown of environments where women are murdered as presented in N-40

In the case of *IOL*, although there are examples where statistics are well integrated into discussions on societal issues like teenage pregnancy in South Africa, these are isolated instances within the sample. I-17 focuses on the problem of teenage pregnancy by using statistics as the primary means of analysis rather than relying on individual cases, thereby respecting privacy whilst sharing social reality. Similarly, I-26 enriches the narrative by integrating both statistical data and social narratives, offering a more comprehensive view of the issue and its relevance within the South African context. For example, through the introduction, it highlights:

> *On Christmas Day, the Limpopo province welcomed 209 newborns, a moment of joy tainted by a concerning statistic—50 of them born to teenage mothers. The youngest, a mere 15 years old, gave birth to a 1kg baby. This surge in teen pregnancies reflects the growing trend, with 17 more teenage mothers compared to the previous year in the province.*

These examples demonstrate how statistics, when combined with social realities, can enhance public understanding of issues like teenage pregnancy, but such efforts are inconsistent in the sample.

5.2.2.2.2 Social narratives

Within the sample, 20% of the articles within *News24* and 33.54% of the articles within *IOL* use social narratives as the sole form of contextualisation without including other critical elements like statistics or root causes. This reliance on social narratives emphasises their importance in shaping the discourse regarding GBV. Yet, it also highlights the potential limitations in achieving a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of GBV without incorporating additional contextual factors (see 5.2.2.2).

Within the *News24* sample, social narratives are often introduced through opinion pieces (see N-39; N-40; N-41), where it is frequently reiterated that GBV affects women across race, age, and socio-economic class — implying that no woman is truly safe. However, social narratives can also be presented through various other means.

N-08, 'Nicoleen Swart speaks out a year after that awful abuse video went viral,' and N-20, 'Bhekisisa Mncube | Embracing forgiveness and healing in the face of familial abuse,' focuses on the survivor's social narrative, detailing their recovery process after leaving an abusive relationship. N-48, 'NGOs speak out against gender-based violence in Khayelitsha, calling the community to unite,' introduces a community-centric approach to the social narrative, exploring how communities respond to and address GBV.

Although the survivor narrative is limited to about 7% of articles within the *IOL* sample, it should be noted that *IOL* does make space for survivors to share their stories in their authentic voices. For example, in I-09, 'Radio personality says working with Kini Shandu on Gagasi FM was the 'worst year' of her career,' Clarissa Mfeka shares her experience in her authentic voice through embedded TikTok videos. In I-46 'Hunt for throat slasher: Arthur Sass a wanted man after alleged attack on estranged wife,' the survivor,

who prefers to not be named due to safety concerns, shares her narrative in her authentic voice through quotes such as:

> *I registered a case and they told me it's assault but how can that be? It should be attempted murder! He tried to kill me and this is after he told me he will kill me. He went on the run now, but I am so scared to leave my house.*

N-07, 'Student accused of Kirsten Kluyts' murder admits to stripping her and wearing her clothes,' and N-10, 'I took her clothes, but did not kill her – Kluyts' murderer accused,' utilise the accused's narrative to contextualise the story through his testimony. N-10, though like N-07, has a stronger focus on the details of the accused's account of finding the body of Kirsten Kluyts and taking her clothes to not implicate himself, allegedly an innocent passer-by, along with the state's narrative of stealing the clothes as an attempt to obstruct justice. Notably, N-07 illustrates how not all social narratives provide the reader with adequate social context. In this example, the account focuses on the alleged perpetrator's experience without exploring the broader societal, structural, or systemic factors contributing to GBV, leaving gaps in comprehensive understanding.

5.2.2.2.3 Social context

During the 16 Days Campaign, both *News24* and *IOL* increased their focus on the social context in GBV reporting, though the depth and effectiveness varied (see Table 5.2).

The *News24* sample shows a significant shift, with social context appearing in more than half of the overall reporting, rising to a much higher proportion during the 16 Days Campaign (see Table 5.2). 'Social context' entails that the article not merely relays the event's details from a specific narrative but delves deeper into social structures that perpetuate violence. Article N-02, 'Jukulyn: The place called hell where residents are haunted by violence, crime,' although not published during the campaign, exemplifies this approach by contextualising an individual murder within the larger community struggles against crime. It illustrates the value of authentic community voices by actively seeking their experiences and perspectives. Additionally, the narrative about police resources being diverted to escort delivery services rather than addressing criminal activity reflects a critique of systemic issues, adding depth to the reportage. This community-centred approach elevates the story beyond an isolated incident, positioning it within the lived realities of those affected.

Within the 16 Days Campaign, the *News24* sample provided the social context specifically in its reporting on the mismanagement of the GBV Command Centre (GBVCC) by the then minister of social development, Lindiwe Zulu, as seen in N-06 'ANC chief whip Pemmy Majodina demands answers for Lindiwe Zulu about GBV centre and wasted R100m', N-14 'How Lindiwe Zulu bungled R100m fund meant to empower survivors of GBV', N-23 'Minister Lindiwe Zulu and her deputy face off about the GBV command centre's collapse' and N-31 'How states' GBV call centre collapsed.'

In contrast, *IOL* provides social context in only 22.78% of its articles, with 8.86% relying solely on social context (see Table 5.2). This figure (see Figure 5.2) increases during the 16 Days Campaign. However, *IOL*'s integration of social context with other essential elements like root causes or statistics is limited, often falling below 1.9% or less across the sample. This indicates a tendency to address GBV without engaging deeply with the systemic issues that underpin it, such as social inequality or historical legacies (see 3.4.1). Consequently, while *IOL* discusses GBV, it often lacks the critical perspectives to understand the complexities involved.

In summary, while *News24* and *IOL* incorporate social context into their GBV reporting, *News24* offers a more thorough examination of the broader societal issues, particularly during awareness campaigns. *IOL*, meanwhile, has room for improvement in providing more affluent, more critical perspectives that explore the underlying factors contributing to GBV rather than just reporting isolated incidents or superficial social narratives.

5.2.2.2.4 Root causes

The *News24* sample shows an increased focus on exploring root causes during the 16 Days Campaign (see Table 5.2). N-15, 'OPINION | Mia Malan and Tanya Pampalone: From Oscar to Diepsloot - why do men become violent?', an article published during the 16 Days Campaign, critically analyses the root causes associated with GBV, attributing it to male childhood trauma (domestic abuse), adult trauma such as witnessing a rape or murder, or sexual entitlement. Other articles such as N-16, 'OPINION | 'A world free from violence': Miss World SA's call for men to join GBV fight,' and N-24, 'OPINION | How we talk to young boys is key to curbing the GB scourge in South Africa,' stating that communities are responsible for raising men in safe and healthy environments – it is thus from unsafe and unhealthy environments that toxic masculinity stems. Most of the focus within this sample falls on how society educates and supports young men and boys (see N-16; N-24; N-28). N-32, 'OPINION | Here we go again, 16 Days of Activism? Really!' states that this education should be an ongoing intention, addressing systemic issues, moral decay, and lawlessness. Notably, all these examples are opinion pieces.

N-02 and N-25 are the only examples within the *News24* sample of asking the grass-roots community what they consider the root causes of violence. For example, in N-25, 'Gugulethu residents call on government to impose severe penalties on gender-based violence offenders,' a member of the community shares the following:

> *Women abuse us emotionally, physically and financially," he said. "Whatever they want to do to us they do because they know the law is on their side. Our law in this country protects women the most.*

Another community member also shares their view:

> *Mkhangeli, a sangoma who is openly gay, said there was abuse even in same-sex relationships. He said that many people use the nature of their relationship with their victims as an entitlement for abuse.*

By comparison, root causes are significantly underrepresented in the *IOL* sample. Articles that address both social context and root causes account for only 1.9% of the study's sample. Similarly, integrating root causes with other forms of contextualisation, such as statistics or social narratives, is rare, with percentages often below 2%. The researcher argues that this suggests that the root causes of GBV are not thoroughly examined in the sample. While the focus on social narratives is more prevalent, the lack of in-depth exploration of root causes means that the reporting may not fully contextualise the systemic or societal factors contributing to GBV, such as poverty, patriarchy, or historical inequalities. Within the proposed ethical framework, journalists are expected to critically examine how the media perpetuates and reinforces colonial power structures and cultural hegemony (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:43; Fourie, 2011:35), yet this critical perspective is notably absent, further limiting the depth and context of the reporting. The failure to integrate root causes consistently limits the articles' ability to comprehensively understand GBV as a structural issue, thus not fully aligning with the goals of the proposed ethical framework that calls for addressing these more profound aspects of GBV.

While the *News24* sample does not fully unpack colonialism as a root cause of GBV, it often attributes the problem to patriarchy and toxic masculinity (see for example N-16; N-24). This is also seen within the *IOL* sample. In I-24, 'Limpopo police launch operation to safeguard women, children, and the elderly after disturbing rape in Tshidzini Village', a source quoted stating:

> *We must deal with pervasive patriarchal norms that promote the use of violence as an acceptable social practice. It cannot be right that women and children are continuously subjected to inhumane acts. This has to stop.*

This can also be seen in articles such as I-12, 'Calls for justice after dismembered woman's body found in freezer', in which a member of a local NGO assigns blame to patriarchal masculinity for GBV. The article states:

> *Tarisai Mchuchu-MacMillan, executive director of an anti-GBV non-governmental organisation, Mosaic, denounced the act, pointing out that the patriarchal masculinity that underpins the violence and abuse that women and children experience in their homes, relationships, and communities needs to change.*

A similar narrative is shared in I-84, 'GBV can be irradicated if the country can stop destructive masculine behaviour in its tracks, says NPO 'Father A Nation''. The NGO believes that toxic masculinity is the result of paternal wounds due to absent and abusive fathers. The article states:

> *This [absent fathers] often results in paternal wounds and destructive beliefs about masculinity, with young men looking to figures such as gangsters, abusers, or absent fathers as role models.*

Within the *IOL* sample, the only critical discussion of GBV's root causes within the South African context appears in I-54, 'Violence in South Africa is a menace in many forms and against many people', which explores the perpetuation of violence due to the country's colonial legacy. The article highlights the legacies of colonial patriarchy in contemporary gender-based abuse stating that "It [GBV] is systemic and deeply entrenched in institutions, religion, culture, and tradition." The article further emphasises:

> *… these high levels of violence are an enduring legacy of our colonial and apartheid past, which is driven by social dynamics formed during the years of racial and gender oppression, with systematic hardship, under-education, out of control violence, and distraction of normal family life.*

Notably, this in-depth analysis of root causes is often confined to opinion pieces, particularly within the *News24* sample. For example, N-40, 'Amanda Gouws | Imagine going for a run and ending up dead', written just before the 16 Days Campaign, critically analyses the root causes for GBV in South Africa, though not focusing on a strictly local or postcolonial framework. In fact, the column criticises theoretical approaches that aim to explain gendered violence, stating:

> *Theories that try to explain violence, such as our violent colonial and apartheid pasts, people's social exclusion as a consequence of poverty and inequality, and blaming democracy for emasculating men by giving women too many rights – do not explain why it is men who turn to sexual violence and not women also who are exposed to the same violent history, social exclusion and previously limited rights.*

Instead, N-40 explores complex theories like "necropolitics"[40] and "gore capitalism"[41], which suggests that certain bodies, particularly from marginalised groups, are seen as more disposable within global power structures. These concepts point to systemic inequalities, devaluing some lives for economic and political gain. However, the challenge lies in making these academic ideas more accessible and relevant to broader audiences (see 5.2.5.2.1). Perhaps here the fact that *News24* is a subscription-based platform suggests they may garner some appreciation towards theoretical discussions (see 5.2.7). This does not take away from the fact that the academic language used in N-40 would be inaccessible to most South African communities.

Ultimately, both publications show limited exploration regarding the root causes of GBV, with discussions regarding colonialism's legacy as a contributor to gendered violence confined to a total of two opinion pieces in the entirety of the sample.

5.2.2.2.5 Community sources and sensitive reporting

Within the sample, *News24* and *IOL* display problematic tendencies in using community sources, with the underrepresentation of survivors and occasional reliance on authoritative sources that use inaccessible

[40] Necropolitics is the use of social and political power to dictate how some people may live and how some must die. The concept was first introduced by Achille Mbembe in his seminal essay 'Necropolotics' (Mbembe, 2003).
[41] Gore capitalism refers to an economic system in which violence, exploitation, and death are normalised and commodified, often for profit.

language. There is a tendency, specifically in the reporting of *IOL*, to sensationalise violence and shift focus away from trauma or consequences of crime to narratives of rehabilitation or campaign successes, which can distort public perception regarding the gravity of GBV offences.

In the case of *News24*, nearly half of the articles utilised community voices as sources (see 5.2.1.1). Around a third of the articles in the *IOL* sample utilised community voices as sources, with only 7.60% focussing on the community as the sole source of information (see 5.2.1.1). The trend indicates a concerning underrepresentation of those directly affected by GBV. This limited inclusion risks perpetuating stereotypes and prevents a comprehensive understanding of the complexities surrounding GBV.

As seen in Table 5.1, *IOL* consistently uses community voices, whereas *News24* shifts towards survivor narratives during the 16 Days Campaign. In both samples, the community sources were often NGOs within communities or community leaders. Within the *News24* sample, the community frequently raises GBV issues not prominent within the media, such as abuse of traditional or cultural practices and abuse within same-sex relationships (see N-25; N-48). However, challenges arise when journalists adopt the language of community representatives (see 5.2.5.2.1). For example, in N-17, 'Gender-based violence activists turn the focus to women working in informal sectors,' the language used by leaders might include insensitive language, which journalists often adopt when quoting them directly. For example:

> *We identify the **victims** through our volunteers who work in police stations and with community leaders, and we assist them with getting medical attention and support, from going to the clinic to open cases and attending the cases with the **victims** and their families.*

While terms such as 'victim' may be commonly used, the researcher argues they can undermine the survivor-centred approach by reinforcing disempowering narratives or stereotypes about survivors of violence. Journalists need to balance accurate reporting with ethical considerations (see 3.5.2).

Specifically, in the *IOL* sample, interaction with the community often involves incorporating NGO members as a voice for the community. This means that the realities in which the community lives are frequently filtered through the specific cause the NGO stands for. Comparatively, in the *News24* sample, these sources speak on behalf of the community, whereas in *IOL's* reporting, NGOs often replace community voices. For example, I-82 'Calls for justice after dismembered woman's body was found in freezer', the article does not focus on the specific case referred to within the headline, rather it provides interventions and solutions proposed by a local NGO.

The lack of community engagement in the *IOL* sample's reporting is concerning. In I-52, 'Female traditional leader murdered in her KZN home – Cogta,' the failure to include the community's voices in the murder of a community leader shows a missed opportunity to offer a more nuanced and locally informed perspective on the incident. In comparison, *News24* would at least aim to include one community

member in similar articles as seen in N-13, 'Gugulethu CPF deputy chairperson shot and killed in an ambush at her home.'

Although the proposed ethical framework highlights the importance of including community narratives and thus the implication of community voices, complexities may arise when community members share their voices authentically. While important, community perspectives often come with inherent biases and stereotypes. Additionally, when community members are quoted, as in I-118 and I-122, *IOL* frequently fails to provide the necessary context or critical interpretation of these quotes. Instead, the articles resort to strings of quotes, which can inadvertently promote biases within communities. This can be seen in examples such as I-75, in which a comment by a community member shifts the focus from the victim,[42] and the atrocities of the crime to her appearance, indirectly blaming her for her fate. Along with stating that the victim had "bruises on her knees" and "the pockets of her pants were pulled out," the community member is quoted stating:

> *... but as her body lay there on the street, I couldn't help but notice that she was dressed nicely, her hair looked good.*

While benign, this quote subtly implies that her appearance may have been linked to her murder, perpetuating harmful victim-blaming narratives.

This tension is also highlighted in articles that rely solely on family or community sources without critically questioning their biases, which can lead to incomplete or insensitive narratives. For example, I-118 'Family reeling after son 'wrongfully' accused of rape dies' relies heavily on the victim's mother's narrative, who was not present during the alleged crime and saw no plausibility in the alleged rape. The mother is quoted:

> *I was not around when all of this happened, I was at church. I know my son would never rape my grandchild, he loved her and always took care of her. I was shocked when I came back from church to learn that my son has been beaten to death by the mob. I also asked my grandchild if it happened, and she said it never happened.*

The article does not explore why the community accused the son or why "the mob" decided there was enough evidence to take justice into their own hands. Conversations with the community would have aided in conceptualising the narrative. However, it should be emphasised that the researcher does not suggest that all community voices should be included indiscriminately, particularly when individuals may have been involved in extrajudicial actions. Instead, it emphasises the need for responsible sourcing and contextual reporting that captures systemic issues without legitimising vigilantism.

[42] In this instance the term victim is accurate as she was murdered.

Interestingly, as illustrated in the example above, when family members are included as sources, particularly in cases of femicide or crimes against children, it is typically the mother of the victim or survivor who controls the narrative. Typically, as also seen within I-118, the mother's narrative is shared and supplemented with an official source.

Both online news sites had instances of insensitive reporting towards the community, particularly regarding survivors and children. Within the *News24* sample, the narrative surrounding Oscar Pistorius in N-04, 'The Prison Files: The thought of never apologising to Reeva's parents 'killing' Pistorius inside,' raises concerns about potential bias, particularly as it suggests a rehabilitative perspective based on statements from prison officials. This portrayal seems to overlook the ongoing concerns expressed by the Steenkamp family, who firmly believe that Pistorius's rehabilitation may not be as simple as suggested (see N-04). This selective emphasis on prison officials' views rather than a balanced representation, including the Steenkamps' perspective, may reflect a broader tendency in media reporting to favour narratives that highlight redemption or rehabilitation, sometimes at the expense of the survivors' voices or victims' families. Such biases can influence public perception, depicting Pistorius in a more sympathetic light while marginalising the emotional and psychological impacts on the Steenkamp family.

In the *IOL* sample, reporting that could be seen as insensitive reporting towards the community occurs more frequently than in the *News24* sample. *IOL's* coverage demonstrates a greater tendency to prioritise sensationalism and graphic detail, often at the expense of sensitivity and respect for victims and their communities. This is particularly evident in several articles where reporting on victims and survivors lacks the necessary care, with a stronger focus on crime details rather than the human suffering involved. For example, I-98, 'Pathologist describes the manner in which Vredenburg toddlers were killed as overkill,' describes a graphic crime scene in which the state pathologist shares the brutality of the minors' murder:

> *State pathologist Dr Nadene-Louise Scherman said Faith had been stabbed 19 times and Conray 14 times. The baby boy had also suffered a blunt force injury to the forehead.*
>
> *Scherman told the court that the examinations were upsetting and described the murders as "overkill*."

Directly following this, the article displays enlarged images of the minors' faces taken while they were still alive, followed by dismissive remarks from the defence, creating a jarring emotional shift that detracts from the gravity of the crime. This rollercoaster effect can make the report seem exploitative and detract from the focus on the survivor's suffering, reducing it to sensationalist elements. From the researcher's perspective, within the proposed ethical framework, this approach is deemed inappropriate, as it fails to acknowledge the humanity of both the survivors of GBV and the community as an audience.

However, not all communities would view the above approach to reporting a violation of their humanity as some may consider the detailed court account as a step towards justice. It is imperative that the journalist is attuned to the community they serve and can make the distinction between serving the community through the narrative of achieving justice and not acknowledging the community's and survivor's humanity. This acknowledgement should not come at the price of diluting the context of gendered crime in such a way that it creates new misconceptions regarding the nature of GBV.

Several other examples can be taken from the *IOL* sample. In I-70, 'Double life sentence for toddler rapist, murderer,' the clinical reporting of a toddler's violent death is presented in stark, detached language, focusing on the details of the brutality rather than sensitively engaging with the trauma and the legacy of the survivor. The shift in the narrative from the mother's trauma to the "win" for the 16 Days Campaign further diminishes the personal suffering by turning the event into a campaign success rather than honouring the human tragedy involved. In I-65, 'Husband arrested for wife's murder, three years after he allegedly bludgeoned her to death and buried her next to a pit toilet,' the image of the skeletal remains of the victim is not only insensitive but also potentially harmful, as it prioritises sensationalist elements over dignity, violating the ethical standard of dignity protection for both the deceased and the community. In all three cases, the reporting demonstrates a focus on graphic crime details at the expense of sensitivity toward victims, survivors, and communities.

5.2.2.2.6 Stock images

The conversation on accuracy and comprehension with deconstructed power would be incomplete without addressing the issue of stock images. Due to the private nature of GBV, stock images are often used to illustrate an article. In this way, journalists do not infringe on private grief or violate the privacy of survivors and victims of violence. However, using stock images raises several ethical and practical concerns.

Stock images often lack context and can oversimplify or misrepresent the complex nature of GBV by reinforcing stereotypes, such as portraying women solely as victims, which detracts from narratives of survivor agency and resilience. Like several other articles, I-29, 'Over 25 000 domestic cases in six months', features a stock image of a man's fist with a blurred figure cowering in the background, which oversimplifies the complex nature of GBV by focusing solely on physical violence. Such visuals reinforce harmful stereotypes of women as passive victims and often fail to represent the diversity and agency of survivors.

Additionally, this misrepresentation reflects a lack of cultural sensitivity, failing to reflect the specific racial and socioeconomic context of the community involved. This can be seen in cases such as I-130, 'Mpumalanga man to spend life behind bars for raping a fifteen-year-old boy', and I-146, 'Free State man

handed 20 years of direct imprisonment for raping a girl' where a stock image of a white convict was used, despite the incidents taking place in a non-white community (see Figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3 Stock image used in I-146 *Free State man handed 20 years of direct imprisonment for raping a girl* (IOL: Pexels/RODNAE Productions, 2023).

Within the sample, *News24* often uses stock images of a silhouette representing a survivor compared to *IOL*'s use of generic court imagery or depictions of violence and arrest. The use of generic imagery, like in I-59, 'Eight arrested for rape of security guards at Merebank office', where handcuffs are depicted without relevance to the specific nature of the crime, detracts from accurately portraying the realities of GBV incidents. Similarly, in I-30, 'Gauteng MEC devastated by death of Echibini learner', and I-118 'Family reeling after son 'wrongfully' accused of rape dies', the same generic stock image of a child illustrated with the word 'rape' is used (see Figure 5.4). This lack of contextualisation can reduce the crime to a simplistic visual trope, rather than addressing its complexity. The stock images, particularly those utilised in the *IOL* sample, contribute little to the narrative, and the researcher argues that they are often used solely because an online format requires an image.

Figure 5.4: Stock image used in I-30 *Gauteng MEC devastated by death of Echibini learner* and I-118 *Family reeling after son 'wrongfully' accused of rape dies* (IOL: Archives, 2023).

Within the sample, *News24* typically uses stock images for opinion pieces and general discussions on GBV. However, when reporting on specific cases, *News24* seems to be more inclined to include relevant images, such as photographs of the court where the hearing takes place. N-35, 'Cape Town judge tries to shake up law on GBV by protecting property rights of victim's child ', exemplifies this apparent effort to minimise the use of stock images. In this article, the publication chooses to feature an image of the judge rather than, for instance, a photograph of the property, which could risk exposing the minor's identity, or a generic stock image only loosely related to the topic.

This discussion on stock imagery does not suggest that journalists should violate privacy and private grief or opt to brutally portray crimes through photos that could retraumatise or re-victimise survivors and the community. The researcher fully acknowledges the sensitivity required to visually portray a crime as intimate as GBV and that this consideration leads to generic portrayals. Merely, the researcher suggests more thought goes into the type of stock images used when required, for example, that it be representative of the communities it tries to depict. The additional argument is to not immediately resort to stock imagery if other images are available.

Summary

Within this sample, both online news sites highlight event-based reporting during the 16 Days Campaign. However, their approaches differ slightly. *IOL* publishes more articles overall, reflecting a focus on quantity. This suggests a higher volume of coverage, potentially favouring broader but less in-depth reporting. *News24*, on the other hand, although also increasing published articles, shifts its focus more towards structural and systemic issues during this period. While the publication publishes fewer articles than *IOL*, its coverage delves deeper into the systemic causes of GBV, providing a more critical analysis of the broader societal and institutional factors at play.

In evaluating *News24*'s reporting on GBV, there is a noticeable inconsistency in its adherence to contextualisation and respectful listening as a concept. While most articles incorporated social narratives to help frame incidents of GBV, a significant number failed to integrate other crucial elements such as statistics, social context, or root causes – essential for a more comprehensive understanding of the issue. Although some articles effectively employed statistics and provided insights into broader social frameworks, others simply relayed numbers without putting them in context for the audience to understand. Similarly, discussions of root causes were often limited, and critical systemic issues, such as the legacy of colonialism, were rarely unpacked. Overall, while there are examples of contextualisation in *News24*'s GBV coverage, the inconsistency suggests only a partial alignment with contextualisation and respectful listening principles.

The *IOL* sample also only partially aligns with the principles of contextualisation and respectful listening as suggested by the proposed ethical framework. Some articles use statistics, social narratives, and survivor voices effectively, but nearly a third of articles completely lack contextualisation, missing links to the systemic nature of GBV. Social narratives are often presented without integrating root causes or critical statistics, limiting a full understanding. Community and survivor voices are underrepresented, and stock images misrepresent South African diversity, reducing narrative authenticity. While there are examples of good practice, the overall reporting falls short of fully meeting the proposed ethical standards.

5.2.3 Representation and redefining public interest

The proposed ethical framework requires journalists to redefine public interest to ensure diverse voices are heard, and report on the GBV experiences of communities facing less visibility. Fulfilling this role within the proposed ethical framework requires publishing a diversity of content from a multiplicity of views to give an accurate representation of society (see 3.4.2). This means that sources should reflect society, rather than limiting it to the opinions of an elite few.

Overall, the *News24* sample frequently included community voices but shifted focus to survivor narratives during the 16 Days Campaign (see Table 5.1). In contrast, while *IOL* consistently incorporated community perspectives, it relied less on these voices, instead favouring official sources (see Table 5.1). The comparison shows a heavy reliance on, and implied preference for, authoritative sources rather than constructing articles using the community's authentic voice (see 5.2.1.1). This may inhibit the publication from truly serving the public interest as there is a disconnect between the community's needs and media representation. Despite this, the publications do engage with gender rights activists, NGOs, community representatives, and survivors in some of their reporting.

Within the *News24* sample, articles specifically focused on emphasising the lived realities of communities that traditionally face less media attention include N-02, 'Jukulyn: The place called hell where residents are haunted by violence, crime' (see 5.2.2.2.2); N-15, 'OPINION | Mia Malan and Tanya Pampalone: From Oscar to Diepsloot - why do men become violent?', which focuses on the community of Diepsloot; N-25, 'Gugulethu residents call on government to impose severe penalties on gender-based violence offenders,' focussing on the community of Gugulethu, and N-48, 'NGOs speak out against gender-based violence in Khayelitsha, calling the community to unite', focussing on the community of Khayelitsha. Although these articles emphasise unique experiences in marginalised communities told in authentic voices, the commitment to portraying these perspectives is, unfortunately, limited to select pieces like these.

The researcher observed that *IOL* has a stronger focus on African and Coloured populations from working-class suburbs and rural communities. However, rather than contextualising these crimes within the

broader frameworks of patriarchy, colonialism, and socio-economic inequality, these communities are often reduced to mere backdrops for reporting on heinous crimes, primarily framed as part of crime and court reporting. For instance, I-52, 'Female traditional leader murdered in her KZN home - Cogta', neglects to include local community members as sources, instead using language that is not easily accessible or comprehensible to the very community it aims to address. Further, both I-12, 'Calls for justice after dismembered woman's body was found in freezer', and I-21, 'Samora Machel man arrested after woman's chopped-up remains discovered in freezer', report on the tragic incident of a woman found in a box-freezer. I-21 adopts a clinical tone, relying on authoritative sources that provide factual information but lack emotional depth and broader societal context. By contrast, I-12 briefly interviews an NGO representative who touches on toxic masculinity and patriarchy, but the article still fails to delve into these critical issues in any meaningful depth.

The use of inaccessible language by authoritative sources and experts in reporting on GBV creates a significant barrier to public understanding, particularly for marginalised communities (see 5.2.2.4; 5.2.2.5), limiting serving of the public interest. Articles such as N-40, which employ specialised terms like "necropolitics" and "gore capitalism", risk alienating readers who may not be familiar with these academic concepts (see 5.2.2.4; 5.2.2.5). Additionally, in direct quotations from official sources, such as lawyers or police, clinical language is often used that depersonalises the survivor or victim, focusing on the state of their body or remains. For example, I-20, 'Pinetown woman gunned down in alleged domestic dispute', a police officer is quoted:

> *"Paramedics were shown inside the house to where a female was found to have sustained multiple gunshot wounds," Jamieson said.*
>
> *"Paramedics assessed the patient and unfortunately found that there was nothing they could do for the patient and she was declared deceased on the scene."*

Similarly, I-94, 'Court to decide accused child killer's 'criminal capacity'', the focus lies on the state of teenager Jerobijn van Wyk's body, which was found in a septic tank, rather than the gravity of the crime. This complexity can obscure important systemic issues related to GBV, making it harder for the public to grasp the deeper social and political factors that perpetuate this violence. By ensuring that the language used is both understandable and respectful (see 3.5.3), journalists can help bridge the gap between expert discourse and community engagement, making the reporting more relevant, impactful, and empowering for the community.

Moreover, quotes from community leaders, such as those found in N-17, are often intended to reflect social concerns, but their use of terms like 'victims' instead of 'survivors' can unintentionally reinforce disempowering narratives (see 5.2.2.5). When journalists quote such language, they must carefully

balance the need for factual reporting with the responsibility to uphold a survivor-centred, respectful approach. Journalists must avoid perpetuating stereotypes or undermining the dignity of survivors by uncritically reproducing harmful terminology. The researcher argues that achieving this balance between accessible language and ethical sensitivity is critical to fostering more inclusive and empowering GBV reporting.

Online media offers an opportunity for in-depth, multifaceted reporting that incorporates perspectives from these overlooked communities, providing a platform for their voices and experiences (see Chasi & Rodny-Gumede, 2022:1633). This means journalists should go beyond covering just high-profile cases and should include stories from marginalised communities most affected by GBV (see 2.2.2 and 2.2.3). Additionally, as suggested within the proposed ethical framework, journalists should utilise languages spoken by these communities and seek experts from diverse backgrounds who can offer nuanced perspectives.

News24 does include in-depth reporting such as seen in N-14, 'How Lindiwe Zulu bungled R100m fund meant to empower survivors of GBV', and N-31, 'How states's GBV call centre collapsed'. However, nuanced discussions regarding GBV are limited to columns written by experts such as governmental ministers, academia and journalists. These discussions mostly address GBV in general without a targeted focus on a specific community. High-profile cases, such as that of murdered schoolteacher Kirsten Kluyts (N-40) or the assaulted Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) student (N-40) are often used as a point of departure for discussions to take place. In N-40, 'Nthabi Nhlapo | Women are killed, raped every day in SA and no one is batting an eyelid', the author introduces the desensitisation of South Africans towards GBV by referencing the brutal assault of a 26-year-old wife and CPUT student, who was reportedly stabbed 20 times by her husband whilst onlookers strolled by and took video footage. The article states:

> *First, although it is probably a good thing it was caught on camera, ideally, when one witnesses such an incident the instinct should be to rush to assist or call for help, not take a video.*
>
> *Second, two other men are seen walking (not running) to the scene and seemingly trying to speak to the attacker, who is a University of Western Cape (UWC) student.*
>
> *The reason these two aspects are glaring is our society has become so desensitised to crimes against women that when they do happen, it is hardly unexpected, regardless of how gruesome they may be.*

In the *IOL* sample, only two articles can be considered in-depth reporting, both related to the parole hearing of Oscar Pistorius (I-80; I-81). These articles detail the parole hearing, the initial case, Pistorius' process of getting parole, reasons for the failure of a previous attempt at parole, and the parole process

in South Africa. They rely on authoritative sources, including a statement from June Steenkamp and input from the Steenkamp family's representative, a community member.

A clear trend observed in the content analysis is the focus on crime and court reporting, with most articles centring on the conviction of perpetrators, specifically within *IOL*. This fixation on court proceedings and sentencing comes at the expense of addressing the lived realities of survivors and affected communities. By neglecting these perspectives, journalists fail to challenge the societal norms that perpetuate violence and inequality, thereby missing an opportunity to align their work with broader human rights goals. More ethical reporting requires journalists to elevate survivor voices, contextualise incidents within socio-political frameworks, and contribute to a more informed and empathetic public discourse on GBV.

Summary

Both *News24* and *IOL* rely heavily on authoritative sources in their reporting on GBV. This reliance limits the representation of community voices. Both platforms underrepresented survivors and marginalised communities, which weakens their ability to serve the public interest effectively.

News24's use of inaccessible language in expert columns risks alienating readers, particularly from marginalised groups. *IOL's* coverage, which focuses heavily on crime and court reporting, tends to sensationalise GBV cases and fails to adequately explore systemic causes like patriarchy and socio-economic inequality. Within both publications survivor narratives are often isolated, while perpetrator accounts are contextualised with additional authoritative accounts. Although there are some efforts to diversify reporting, both platforms fail to fully engage with the lived experiences of communities most affected by GBV.

5.2.4 Expanding watchdog role

The proposed ethical framework calls on journalists to act as watchdogs, holding accountable all abuses of power that contribute to GBV, including those within government, corporations, religious organisations, and traditional leadership structures (see 2.2.3; 3.5.1.2). This expanded watchdog role, as suggested by the proposed ethical framework, also requires the media to scrutinise how legal systems, social services, and cultural norms perpetuate GBV, while holding the media itself accountable for practices that perpetuate gender inequality and violence.

The following section will examine how this watchdog role is perceived in the sample (see 5.2.4.1) as well as investigate which forms of GBV were under-reported (see 5.2.4.2).

5.2.4.1 Watchdog

From the *News24* sample, 16 articles fulfilled the watchdog role to varying degrees by holding accountable or calling for increased accountability from governmental institutions, the judiciary, law enforcement, the media, religious institutions and society in their handling of GBV-related issues. This indicates that 32% of the *News24* sample fulfilled the watchdog function in some capacity. Ten of these articles were published during the 16 Days of Activism. This shows a definite focused approach to GBV reporting during the campaign.

From the *IOL* sample, 18 articles illustrated the watchdog role to varying degrees by holding institutions accountable or calling for increased scrutiny. Although there was not an increase or specific focus regarding the 16 Days Campaign, the articles included focus on religious institutions, governmental bodies, law enforcement, and the justice department. Additionally, *IOL* addressed abuse by NGOs such as Sonke Gender Justice, workplace harassment, and structural violence in universities and schools. This aligns with the expanded watchdog role, as suggested by the proposed ethical framework, which extends to all forms of power inequality not just those committed by the government (see 3.4.2).

During the research period, *News24's* watchdog role is evident in its reporting on the mismanagement of the GBVCC by the then minister of social development, Lindiwe Zulu (see 5.2.2.2.3). In N-14, confidential sources within the department reveal how resources intended for GBV survivors were misused and how proper protocols were ignored in the allocation of funds and staff appointments under the minister's oversight. N-31 provides a detailed breakdown of how the GBVCC deteriorated, clarifying precisely what happened. While not particularly user-friendly through its choice of formal language, it ensures readers fully understand the extent of the mismanagement. It emphasises the structural abuse by highlighting the deliberate placement of the GBVCC in an area plagued by persistent issues, such as inadequate infrastructure and ongoing violence. These challenges were compounded by the centre being understaffed and under-resourced, further limiting its effectiveness in addressing community needs.

Examples of *News24* fulfilling a traditional watchdog role include articles such as N-19, 'Justice still fails Nakita Kalubi months later', which exposes the justice department's inefficiency in prosecuting a gender-based assault where the survivor sustained serious injuries, and N-22, 'Public Protector probes Ekurhuleni chief police for alleged assault and corruption', which holds a police chief accountable for alleged abuse of power involving allegations of assault and intimidation of a pregnant security guard. These instances demonstrate the media's role in scrutinising authority and ensuring transparency in institutions meant to serve the public. Additionally, N-39, 'Nechama Brodie | Paper planes: No safe spaces for South African women', acknowledges progress in GBV legislation while critiquing the lack of implementation, drawing attention to structural violence and institutional failures to protect women. Similarly, N-40 criticises the

government and media, particularly the South African Police Service (SAPS), for issues such as the DNA backlog and police complicity in abuse cases. N-43 shifts focus to universities, criticising their inaction on GBV despite state commitments, thereby emphasising the gap between public declarations and meaningful action.

Within the *IOL* sample I-43, 'Government wasted R11m on unused GBV shelters', and I-147, 'Newborn's dead body found on the roadside in Durban', also examine abuse of power within government systems. I-43 focuses on how structural violence against GBV survivors is perpetuated by government policies, while I-47 explores how a decision by the Department of Social Development (DSD) to ban baby saver boxes has led to unsafe infant abandonment. In both cases, the watchdog role reveals how government actions, or inaction, exacerbate social problems, highlighting the need for systemic change to better protect vulnerable groups. Furthermore, I-74 and I-127 provide detailed accounts of abuse within law enforcement. I-74, 'Cops cuff rape victim on ride with suspect', focuses on police complicity in a rape case and attempted cover-up of the offence whilst I-127, 'Laingsburg cop sentenced to 10 years for raping suspect', points out systemic issues within SAPS, where accused officers remain employed despite serious charges. Both articles fulfil the watchdog role by exposing not just the crimes but also the failures within the justice system that allow such abuses to continue.

Additionally, in I-153, 'WCED records 32 cases of sexual harassment, abuse from January to September', the article focuses on the abuse of power by teachers engaged in sexual relationships with minors. While the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) is mentioned for its policies on abuse reporting and educator vetting, the article criticises the department for failing to properly contextualise and address the widespread issue of abuse in schools. This highlights the importance of not only reporting on policies but also critically assessing their real-world effectiveness. Still in the vein of education, I-113 explores violence perpetrated by student leadership at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), holding both the Student Representative Council (SRC) and the institution accountable. The watchdog function in this case serves to expose the abuse of power within educational settings, calling for institutional reform.

The expanded watchdog role, as proposed in the ethical framework, is reflected in the *News24* sample, particularly through its focus on challenging cultural norms and societal perceptions that contribute to GBV. For example, three articles address abuse and structural violence within a religious setting (N-01; N-23; N-44). N-44, 'Joanne Joseph | Turning the toxic tide of violence against women and children', reads:

> *At the Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide which took place in 2019, faith-based organisations were accused of perpetuating the cycle of violence in South African society. It was a shameful truth that has led to increased internal scrutiny within the religious sector.*

This sentiment is echoed by N-01, ‘Bhekisisa Mncube | Tackling GBV and dismantling toxic masculinity’s grip on men’, in a call for a faith-based initiative to unite churches in their fight against GBV – both internally within church structures and externally in how churchgoers conduct themselves outside of the church. N-26, ‘'Detaching myself from his daggers': GBV survivor shares her story of love, abuse and faith through it all’, provides the account of a Muslim woman who survived spousal abuse, with her husband justifying his actions through cultural norms and religious texts. These examples demonstrate journalism’s role in challenging harmful traditions and fostering critical discussions within influential social institutions. Similarly, in the *IOL* sample, I-15, ‘Long road ahead for Zondo in sex trial’, the article focuses on exposing the abuse of power by a religious leader accused of rape albeit in a concerning manner. While the article touches on the defence’s claims that the accusations are financially motivated, it does little to balance the survivor’s voice and instead emphasises the preacher’s success. The watchdog element here is weakened by sensationalised reporting and implicit bias in favour of the accused, emphasising the need for journalism that critically examines power without perpetuating stereotypes or undermining survivors.

Several other articles in the *News24* sample, particularly opinion pieces, demonstrate an expanded watchdog role by critically examining societal and institutional responses to GBV. N-32 questions the effectiveness of the 16 Days Campaign in South Africa, where GBV remains pervasive, arguing for a year-round focus on the issue. It also challenges the expectation of journalistic objectivity, noting that journalists are often part of the communities affected by GBV. Similarly, N-45 highlights the severity and frequency of violence in South Africa, warning that this has led to widespread desensitisation and apathy and calls for greater accountability from both society and institutions. Interesting articles within this category are N-33 and N-49, which critically address society’s double standards in publicly condemning GBV while excusing high-profile figures like football stars and parliamentarians. It calls out soccer club Orlando Pirates for its hypocrisy in promoting social justice causes while allowing a player convicted of violence, Thembinkosi Lorch, convicted of violence, to continue receiving accolades. The disconnect between crime and punishment is emphasised.

This critical examination of societal and institutional responses is also seen within the *IOL* sample, although to an even more limited degree. In I-54, ‘Violence in South Africa is a menace in many forms and against many people’, the expanded watchdog role is evident in its critical discussion of the root causes of violence in South Africa, particularly how colonial legacies perpetuate ongoing societal abuse. The article states:

> *… these high levels of violence are an enduring legacy of our colonial and apartheid past, which is driven by social dynamics formed during the years of racial and gender oppression, with systematic hardship, under-education, out of control violence, and distraction of normal family life.*

Further, the article calls out social dynamics, providing a broader perspective that moves beyond individual cases to examine how societal structures contribute to GBV. Notably, this is an opinion piece written by Teddy Gomba who works for the Gauteng Department of Social Development.

IOL illustrates a greater alignment with the concept of the expanded watchdog role, as suggested by the proposed ethical framework, as the online news site expands the watchdog role beyond holding the government accountable by also scrutinising instances of workplace sexual harassment (I-36, 'I feel like I am living in a nightmare, says Ferrel Payne's alleged sexual harassment victim') and holding gender advocacy organisations, such as Sonke Gender Justice, accountable for abuse of power (I-40, 'Sonke Gender Justice staffer accused of sexual assault, suspended'; I-42, 'Sonke Gender Justice suspends staffer over sexual offence allegations'). By scrutinising institutions that should represent progress in the fight against GBV, the journalism in these articles emphasises the necessity of accountability across all sectors, even within organisations that advocate for survivors.

In summary, the examples within the sample collectively illustrate the expanded watchdog role in journalism, which aims to expose power imbalances and systemic failures across various sectors, including religious institutions, government, schools, and law enforcement (see 3.5.4). While this role is present in both news sites, the researcher believes there are significant missed opportunities to fully empower survivor narratives and critically engage with the broader societal frameworks that perpetuate abuse. The need for ongoing, critical oversight of institutions and societal norms is evident, but there is a notable divide in how these issues are presented. Critical analyses of social norms and structural factors are confined to opinion pieces, while reports on violence perpetrated by government and law enforcement are prioritised in news coverage as seen within the sample. This distinction suggests that deeper reflections on the cultural and societal roots of GBV are often relegated to subjective commentary, restricting opportunities for nuanced discussions within mainstream reporting. Thus, there remains a critical need for reporting within *IOL* and *News24* to evolve and better serve the public interest by integrating comprehensive analyses of GBV's broader societal context (see 2.2.3; 3.5.4).

5.2.4.2 Under-reported GBV

Within the proposed ethical framework, journalists should also expose hidden issues through investigating under-reported forms of GBV, particularly those rooted in colonial legacies. To evaluate what forms of GBV are reported on within *News24*, the forms of GBV (see 5.2.4.2.1), types of GBV (see 5.2.4.2.2) and GBV violence type (see 5.2.4.2.3) will be discussed.

5.2.4.2.1 Forms of GBV

Table 5.3 illustrates the different forms of violence identified within the sample, focusing on three main categories: family violence, community violence, and structural violence (Nnaemeka & Ezeabasili, 2020:20 in 2.3). Also worth noting is that 'N/A' is significant as it shows that the online news sites completely omitted reporting on these forms of violence.

Table 5.3: Forms of GBV identified within *IOL* and *News24* within the research period

Forms of GBV	IOL		News24	
	Percentage of articles	Percentage of articles within 16 Days Campaign	Percentage of articles	Percentage of articles within 16 Days Campaign
Community Violence	34.18	43.9	28	26.32
Community Violence, Structural Violence	2.53	4.88	N/A	N/A
Family Violence	48.10	41.46	36	15.79
Family Violence, Community Violence	3.8	2.44	4	5.26
Family Violence, Structural Violence	0.63	0.00	N/A	N/A
Structural Violence	10.76	7.32	32	52.63

Table 5.3 illustrates that the *News24* sample has a relatively even distribution of coverage. However, during the 16 Days Campaign, there is a notable shift, with structural violence making up more than half of the reporting, indicating a heightened focus on systemic issues during this period. This shift is primarily driven by an increase in columns, which tend to engage more critically with structural and systemic aspects of GBV (see 5.2.4.1). Notably, there are no articles addressing the intersections of structural and community violence or structural and family violence, indicating a gap in the exploration of these overlapping contexts within GBV reporting.

Alternatively, the *IOL* sample shows an increased focus on family violence (see Table 5.3). This suggests that GBV is often framed within the private or domestic sphere, possibly reinforcing the notion that it is a personal or familial issue, rather than addressing broader societal and structural factors that contribute to the violence (see 2.3). This focus may downplay the systemic nature of GBV and overlook the broader societal changes needed to combat it. Focus on community violence spikes during the 16 Days Campaign within the *IOL* sample (see Table 5.3). This increase indicates that during this period, *IOL* shifted its focus slightly toward more public forms of GBV, perhaps in response to the heightened awareness around community efforts during the campaign. This still fails to accentuate the structural problems and address influences of colonialism, patriarchy and socio-economic legacies. Additionally, the tendency to focus more on community violence during the 16 Days Campaign highlights the reactive nature of the

publication's reporting, which may not provide sustained attention to systemic issues beyond key advocacy periods (see 5.2.1.1).

5.2.4.2.2 Types of GBV

In Chapter 2, the researcher argues that reporting on GBV should not be limited to focusing only on VAW as women are not the sole target of GBV (see 2.3). Table 5.4 presents the representation of violence against children, women, and others (see 2.3) within the sample, offering a clearer perspective on how violence is portrayed across these different categories. Also worth noting is that 'N/A' is significant as it shows that the publications completely omitted reporting on these types of violence.

Table 5.4: Types of violence within *IOL* and *News24*

GBV against	IOL		News24	
	Percentage of articles	Percentage of articles within 16 Days Campaign	Percentage of articles	Percentage of articles within 16 Days Campaign
Children	12.03	7.32	N/A	N/A
Children, Others	1.27	2.44	4	0
Others	N/A	N/A	4	10.53
Women	68.99	78.05	72	47.37
Women, children	17.72	12.20	20	42.11

The most striking finding within Table 5.4 is that violence against women (VAW) is the most extensively covered category in both news sites. This shows a significant focus on women as victims of GBV in these publications, particularly during advocacy periods, which often heighten awareness of women's experiences with violence (see 2.3). However, this sharp focus on women overshadows other forms of GBV, including violence against children and others, and hinders the public's understanding of the broader societal impact of GBV, which affects various groups. This aligns with the researcher's argument in Chapter 2 that GBV is often equated with VAW despite it being experienced by individuals across the gender spectrum (see 2.3).

As observed within the *IOL* sample, violence against children is underreported, especially during the 16 Days Campaign (see Table 5.4). The decline during the campaign may indicate that the heightened focus on women's experiences during the advocacy period leads to a neglect of other vulnerable groups who are also significantly affected by GBV. Significantly, within the *News24* sample, there are no articles specifically addressing violence against children, either overall or during the 16 Days Campaign.

Both online news sites within the sample often pair violence against children in combined categories (see Table 5.4) which may indicate an intersectional approach to reporting, signifying a cognisance that GBV is often interrelated, affecting entire families rather than being limited to mothers. Recognising this

interconnectedness, according to the researcher, highlights the need for a broader approach to their reporting, one that considers how violence impacts children, other family members, and the community at large. However, given the specific guidelines related to reporting on children outlined in the SA Press Code, it is understandable that journalists should approach this topic with caution (see 3.6.3.2). These guidelines prioritise the protection of children's identities and experiences, which could contribute to the lack of coverage, indicating a need for more nuanced reporting strategies that balance ethical considerations with the importance of shedding light on the vulnerabilities faced by children in the context of GBV.

That said, often violence against children is discussed as a by-product of VAW which the researcher argues introduces a narrative that children's experiences need to be viewed in conjunction with other forms of GBV (see Table 5.4). N-35, 'Cape Town judge tries to shake up law on GBV by protecting property rights of victim's child', shifts the focus from the act of femicide itself to its consequences, particularly highlighting the needs of the child who is a survivor of the crime. The article emphasises the judge's call for community and societal support for the child, highlighting the importance of collective action in aiding survivors. This approach critiques the tendency to concentrate solely on the perpetrators and the violent act, instead redirecting attention towards the ramifications of the crime on vulnerable individuals, particularly children. By doing so, it raises awareness of the systemic support required to help survivors heal and thrive, while also questioning the implications of how perpetrators might benefit from their actions, thereby reinforcing the need for a more survivor-centred perspective in discussions around GBV.

There is a notable lack of coverage of violence against others, such as men (as defined in this study), within the sample (see 2.3). Articles reporting on violence against children and others, specifically boys, make up only 1.27% of reporting within the *IOL sample*. Within the *News24* sample there are two articles specifically addressing violence against others, both published during the 16 Days Campaign, suggesting a limited yet targeted approach to covering the experiences of other groups, particularly men, affected by GBV. This absence suggests that media reporting on GBV remains narrowly focused on women and children, often overlooking other groups who may also be victims of violence. This raises concerns about the need for more balanced representation of all demographics impacted by GBV, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Another notable absence within the sample is the representation of GBV against queer individuals. The literature suggests that Black lesbians, trans femininities, and sexually non-conforming masculinities are disproportionately targeted by violence, with corrective rape used as a tool of hetero-patriarchal control (see 2.2.3). There was no reporting on abuse involving lesbians or other non-conforming identities within

the sample, although an instance of homosexual abuse between a male adult and a minor were covered in I-56 'Rape case postponed 46 times as teen victims suffers'.

5.2.4.2.3 GBV violence type

Chapter 2 highlights that GBV reporting often overemphasises sexually driven homicides by strangers, while overlooking more common forms of violence like DV, which is underreported in the media (see 2.4). This selective focus distorts public understanding of GBV, reinforcing sensationalist narratives that obscure the everyday realities of violence in homes and intimate relationships. Table 5.5 illustrates the different combinations of gendered violence identified during the research period. The different violence types were derived from the emerging themes within the sample during qualitative content analysis. Also worth noting is that 'N/A' is significant as it shows that the publications completely omitted reporting on these violence types.

Table 5.5: GBV identified within *IOL* and *News24*

Gender-based violence	IOL		News24	
	Percentage of articles	Percentage of articles within 16 Days Campaign	Percentage of articles	Percentage of articles within 16 Days Campaign
Assault	13.3	9.8	22	15.8
Child abuse	1.27	0	N/A	N/A
Child homicide	9.49	12.2	2	0
Cyber crimes	0.63	0	N/A	N/A
Domestic violence	8.23	9.76	10	15.79
Femicide	36.08	36.59	28	5.26
General	3.8	2.44	18	36.84
Homicide[43]	0.63	0	N/A	N/A
Intimate Partner Violence	10.8	9.8	20	5.26
Rape	20.89	24.39	2	0
Statutory rape	13.29	7.32	N/A	N/A
Sexual assault	1.27	0	N/A	N/A
Sexual harassment	0.63	0	N/A	N/A
Structural	5.7	4.88	22	42.11
Workplace	1.27	0	N/A	N/A
Unspecified	0.63	2.44	N/A	N/A

The data presented in Table 5.5 illustrates that femicide constitutes the largest proportion of GBV-related news within the sample. Whilst both news sites see a decrease in focussing on femicide during the 16 Days Campaign, within the *News24* sample the percentage significantly declines, indicating a shift in focus

[43] Homicide as a type of GBV specifically refers to instances of murder that could not be classified as femicide or child homicide.

away from this form of violence towards other forms of violence during the campaign. Contrary to Bhattacharjee's (2021) assertion that femicide is often perpetrated by strangers, the *News24* sample provides an equal focus on murders committed by intimate partners and strangers. However, the cases that received the main attention through updates and follow-ups was the sexually motivated murder of teacher Kirsten Kluyts by a stranger (e.g. N-07; N-10; N-29; N-37; N-42), the parole hearing of convicted murderer Oscar Pistorius (e.g. N-03; N-04; N-05), and the targeted murder of Gugulethu Community Police deputy-chairperson Lulama Dinginto (e.g. N-09; N-13). Alternatively, the *IOL* sample focuses attention towards homicides committed by an intimate partner, rather than those committed by strangers. Repeated attention was given to South African National Defence Force (SANDF) member Lwanda Zungu who shot his wife (e.g. I-01; I-06; I-07; I-14); the discovery of Busisiwe Mthethwa's body in her freezer, allegedly placed there by her partner (e.g. I-12; I-13; I-21; I-22); the court case of Sugandran Naicker who bludgeoned his girlfriend to death (e.g. I-10; I-16; I-25), and the Oscar Pistorius parole hearing (e.g. I-80; I-81; I-83; I-113).

The focus on structural violence experiences an increase during the 16 Days Campaign within the *News24* sample (see Table 5.5). This reflects the heightened focus of the publication on systemic issues and social structures that perpetuate violence during this period, aligning with the campaign's broader goal of addressing the roots of GBV. However, it also raises concerns that structural violence receives insufficient attention outside of this campaign period, potentially suggesting a temporal bias in reporting. Similarly, the coverage of 'general violence,' which encompasses multiple forms of GBV, rises during the campaign (see Table 5.5). This broader approach might indicate a deliberate effort to address GBV comprehensively during the awareness campaign. Notably, opinion pieces also increased during this time, often discussing GBV in a general rather than specific context.

Contrastingly, this trend of increased reporting regarding structural violence and abuses was not observed within the *IOL* sample where this representation severely lacks in comparison (see Table 5.5). This modest rise during the 16 Days Campaign reflects the publication's recognition of the systemic dimensions of GBV, including the role of institutional and governmental failures in perpetuating violence. Nonetheless, the intersection of structural violence with other types, such as workplace violence, remains underexplored. This lack of intersectional analysis limits the narrative surrounding societal structures' contribution to GBV, leaving critical aspects of systemic violence underrepresented in public discourse.

Within the sample, the reporting of DV shows only a marginal increase during the campaign (see Table 5.5). This modest rise may reflect a broader media tendency to underrepresent DV, despite its prevalence as a critical GBV issue. Articles covering DV typically focus on the success stories of survivors, as seen in the case of N-08, 'Nicoleen Swart speaks out a year after that awful abuse video went viral', and N-26,

'Detaching myself from his daggers': GBV survivor shares her story of love, abuse and faith through it all', with some articles, such as N-18 ''Detaching myself from his daggers': GBV survivor shares her story of love, abuse and faith through it all', offering advice on identifying domestic abuse and seeking help. Despite this, these narratives are few and lack exploration of contextual factors such as culture and religion.

Similarly, intimate partner violence (IPV), widely recognised as one of the most common forms of GBV, is significantly underrepresented in both samples, although receiving decreased focus during the 16 Days Campaign (see Table 5.5). Within the sample, *IOL*'s reporting frequently ties IPV to more extreme forms of violence such as assault, potentially overshadowing the everyday realities experienced by many survivors. When IPV is linked with incidents of sexual violence, it tends to receive greater media attention by the publication, with coverage increasing during the campaign. This trend implies that *IOL's* reporting is more likely to emphasise sexually motivated IPV. In sharp contrast, *News24's* reporting shows a more focussed approach to IPV reporting and was less likely to only focus on sexually motivated violence. For example, the focus on IPV and assault, which make up 20% of the overall sample, sharply declines to 5.26% during the campaign. This reduction could indicate a shift in focus towards broader societal violence during the 16 Days Campaign, but it also risks reinforcing misconceptions about the nature of GBV and who its victims are (see 2.4).

Minor-related GBV receives minimal media attention within the sample (see Table 5.5), which, given the strict guidelines and ethical standards outlined in the SA Press Code, is understandable (see 3.6.2.3). However, this absence suggests that the news sites largely overlook the violence experienced by children, particularly during periods of heightened GBV awareness. The researcher argues that minimal coverage of combined forms of violence, such as child abuse linked with assault or minor homicide, indicates that the media outlets rarely present familial violence in its full complexity, thus failing to represent the multifaceted realities of child victims. Thus, overlooking the systemic and interconnected nature of the violence they endure.

Despite the importance of crimes like IPV and rape in the South African context, these issues are significantly underreported during the campaign. For example, in the *News24* sample, each accounting for just 2% of general reporting and receiving no specific coverage during the 16 Days Campaign. This absence is troubling, as these forms of violence are central to the lived experiences of many survivors (see 2.3; 2.4). The lack of focus on these crimes during the campaign might suggest a prioritisation of systemic or structural forms of violence, with less attention given to personal and immediate crimes. Table 5.4 illustrates this shift in emphasis, highlighting how structural violence and broad narratives around GBV take precedence during the campaign within *News24*'s reporting. However, the researcher asserts that

the reduced focus on specific forms of violence, such as femicide, IPV, and rape, suggests that the campaign may lead to unintentional underrepresentation of critical aspects and lived realities of communities in South Africa.

As seen in Table 5.5, *News24* has several gaps in the types of violence they report on in comparison to *IOL,* which implies that the publication may be neglecting crucial aspects of GBV that affect vulnerable populations, including children and those subject to institutional abuse. This absence suggests a narrowed focus during the research period, potentially limiting public awareness of the full scope of GBV issues. In this approach, the publication may risk missing opportunities for advocacy and systemic change and inadvertently perpetuate societal ignorance regarding certain types of violence. This gap could further marginalise the voices of affected individuals and hinder efforts to drive comprehensive discussions and reforms as suggested by the proposed ethical framework.

5.2.4.2.4 Summary

The analysis shows *News24*'s expanded watchdog role was limited. While 32% of articles addressed power abuse contributing to GBV and held institutions accountable, coverage was mostly episodic and focused on the 16 Days Campaign. Structural violence and institutional failings were highlighted during the campaign, but deeper critiques were mostly confined to opinion pieces. The reporting also lacked sustained focus on under-reported GBV forms, such as IPV and violence against children. Overall, *News24*'s role as a watchdog was seen inconsistently, lacking a thorough approach to ensuring accountability.

While much of *IOL'*s reporting effectively holds power structures accountable for their role in GBV, there are inconsistencies in representation. The focus on VAW, though important, often overshadows the experiences of other affected groups and frames GBV as a personal rather than systemic issue. Additionally, the reporting lacks depth in exploring the connections between different forms of violence, with IPV being significantly underreported.

5.2.5 Minimising harm and maintaining social harmony

The proposed ethical framework states that it is essential to respect the humanity of both victims and perpetrators of GBV (see 3.5.5). Language should thus be used thoughtfully, avoiding graphic details, and ensuring that it does not retraumatise survivors or harm affected communities (see 3.5.5). Consequently, careful consideration must be given to the potential impact of words, prioritising dignity and sensitivity in all communication. To explore the concept of minimising harm and maintaining social harmony, this section will discuss stereotypes, the survivor-centred approach, glamorising or promoting violence, and content warnings.

5.2.5.1 Stereotypes

Within the proposed ethical framework, journalists should respect the humanity of both victims and perpetrators (see 3.5.1.5). Minimising harm also involves protecting the humanity and rights of suspected offenders, ensuring that journalists do not prematurely label individuals as perpetrators without sufficient evidence (see 3.5.5). Figure 5.5 provides a breakdown of the stereotype categories present in the sample. It categorises the stereotyping of communities, perpetrators, and survivors, alongside cases where no stereotyping is evident.

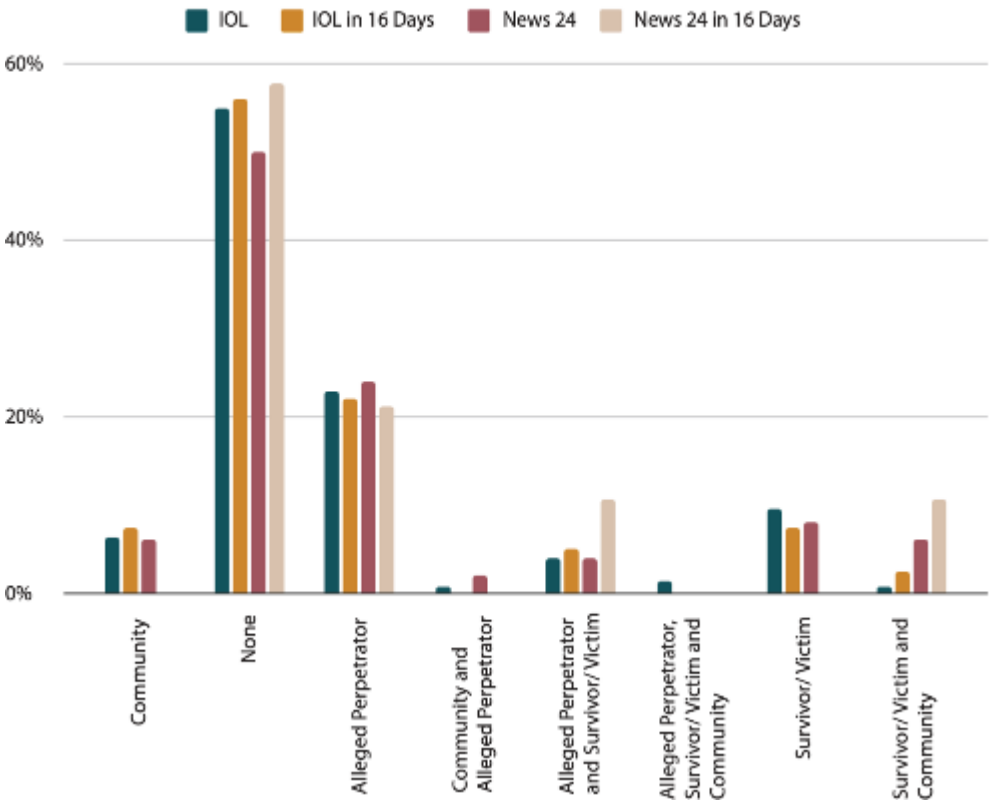

Figure 5.5: Stereotypes identified in *IOL* and *News24* during the research period

Notably, the above graph shows a significant number of articles within the publications did not portray any form of stereotyping. This illustrates that both news sites are at least aware that they should avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes.

The categorisation of community stereotypes in the sample highlights that while community-related biases may be less frequently reported, they still exist. These stereotypes can contribute to harmful narratives about entire communities, suggesting that violence is endemic to certain groups without addressing the broader social, economic, and political contexts (see 2.3). In N-42, 'Kirsten Kluyts' killing: Joburg teacher's attacker put on her clothes before he left running trail' (also see I-73 'Crime expert believes the brutal murder of a Joburg school teacher was premeditated'), which focuses on femicide of teacher Kirsten Kluyts, the article highlights a troubling narrative regarding the perception of safety in

South Africa and stereotypes associated with certain communities. By noting that her murder occurred in a secure park, an area not typically associated with crime, the article reinforces the idea that no woman is truly safe, regardless of her surroundings. The article further asserts that only the "most heinous [crimes] make the media" (N-42) because it disrupts the notion of safety in a familiar, secure and predominantly well-off space, implying that Kluyts' murder is considered more shocking due to its occurrence in a seemingly safe neighbourhood. This portrayal could contribute to a stereotype that GBV is more prevalent in certain socio-economic or geographic regions while neglecting the reality that violence occurs across all communities (see 2.4). By depicting Kluyts' murder in this way, the article not only reflects broader societal anxieties about crime but also reinforces harmful narratives that certain spaces garner an expectation of violence. It also aligns with Boonzaier's (2023:86-87) concept that within media reporting there exists an 'ideal victim' (see 2.4). This portrayal not only amplifies the fear surrounding GBV but also perpetuates stereotypes about certain areas being "safe" versus "unsafe," which can skew public perceptions of crime and victimisation (see 2.4).

Almost one fifth of the samples display a degree of stereotyping toward alleged perpetrators (see Figure 5.5). It means that a considerable portion of coverage may fall into generalisations that can affect public perception. A stereotype that is often present is that the alleged perpetrator is not a violent person and was somehow provoked to commit a heinous act such as femicide. In I-14 'Wife slain: SANDF member 'a violent man', the perpetrator's sister voices "We don't know Lwanda as a violent person" and describes him as a "protector". It is heavily implied throughout the text that the victim must have provoked him to have him commit murder. In I-23, 'Further assessments for cop who murdered his three children before parole hearing consideration', although sharing that the former police officer had a history of domestic abuse, the article also highlights that he felt provoked to murder his children due to his wife not choosing to adhere to his ultimatum.

Stereotypes can also manifest as portraying all perpetrators as uniformly violent or ascribing certain characteristics to individuals based solely on their gender or socio-economic background. Such representations can obscure the complexities of GBV, including the varied motivations and circumstances that contribute to such violence. Within the *News24* sample, perpetrators are frequently depicted as irredeemable 'monsters', however, this does not seem to apply to affluent perpetrators such as Pistorius (N-03; N-04; N-05) and Lorch (N-33; N-34; N-49). In *IOL's* reporting, this tendency is particularly evident in the portrayal of working-class perpetrators depicted as fundamentally violent and incapable of reform while affluent, often white, perpetrators are frequently depicted in ways that rationalise their behaviour or emphasise their rehabilitation. An example of an affluent individual receiving preferential treatment can be observed in the court hearing of popular preacher Stephen Zondo for alleged rape (I-15, 'Long road ahead for Zondo in sex trial'). The discourse surrounding his defence prominently included claims that

women seek to extort the wealthy preacher. Additionally, the article emphasises Zondo's success and the substantial stakes he has at risk, which may influence public perception and the legal proceedings. In contrast, I-73, 'Crime expert believes the brutal murder of a Joburg school teacher was premeditated', suggested that the alleged perpetrator has done the crime before and that multiple crimes will be revealed through the case.

Significant gaps remain, particularly in offering nuanced portrayals of survivors. Often, survivors are depicted as either entirely powerless or excessively resilient, which oversimplifies their experiences. For instance, stereotypes of survivors can generalise their realities, as seen in N-11, 'Domestic violence spikes during this time here's how victims can get help', which serves to protect individual privacy, especially for DV survivors. This approach prioritises generalisation over intrusive details about personal and sensitive narratives, aiming to balance the need for representation with respect for the individuals involved. Stereotypes that generalise the experiences of survivors, as seen in some articles, can protect their privacy while risking oversimplification.

By portraying survivors in stereotypical ways, media reports can reinforce victim-blaming attitudes or portray them as weak and in need of rescue rather than highlighting their strength and agency. Further examples show implied victim narratives where the boys who survived a domestic violent situation in which their mother was murdered are not seen as 'survivors' (I-04 'Mom, sons of murdered woman fear future'). Their grandmother reinforces the narrative of victimhood and repeatedly refers to them as "victims." This serves as a confirmation that language choices play a pivotal role in perpetuating stereotypes, such as repeatedly referring to individuals as "victims" even when the narrative frames them as survivors, as seen in I-53 'Rape victim Ntombesintu Mfunzi races past scourge to victory of motherhood'. Additionally, I-53 reflects the societal pressure on women to fulfil specific roles, such as being a mother, thus diminishing their complexity and resilience.

Victim-blaming is evident in stories such as I-01 'Soldier who allegedly shot and killed his wife abandons bail' (also I-10) where an alleged affair is implied to justify a murder:

> *Another Zungu family member … had alleged that Zungu found out that Tania was cheating on him with someone close to him, and that might have been one of the reasons Zungu decided to kill her.*

This kind of language perpetuates the dangerous notion that unfaithfulness justifies violence or murder. The phrase "one of the reasons" further implies that the murder was somehow her fault. In another example, a woman is stereotyped for being drunk at the time of the incident, subtly implying that her state of intoxication plays a role in her being targeted (I-131 'Teen found murdered in Steenberg'). These examples demonstrate how media coverage can perpetuate victim-blaming and harmful stereotypes,

which contribute to a broader narrative that undermines the complexity of survivors' experiences and their agency.

Moreover, the stereotype that women remain in abusive relationships solely due to financial dependence is common, with one case (I-107 'This is why GBV cases are not taken seriously in South Africa, fans react to DJ Maphorisa posting Thuli P') implying that a survivor's withdrawal from reporting the alleged incident of IPV, followed by the perpetrator posting a picture of her, exemplifies why GBV is not taken seriously in South Africa. These further strips survivors of their agency and oversimplify their choices.

A concerning trend in this regard is that when survivor narratives are included, they are often presented in isolation. In contrast, voices of alleged perpetrators are supplemented with information from authoritative sources or court proceedings. For example, N-08 and N-26, are both features focused exclusively on the narrative of the survivor – the survivor is the only source and share their story in their authentic voice. However, articles such as N-07, 'Student accused of Kirsten Kluyts' murder admits to stripping her and wearing her clothes', and N-10, 'I took her clothes, but did not kill her – Kluyts' murder accused', share the alleged perpetrator's narrative supplemented with other information obtained in court. The observation suggests that the reporting of GBV, particularly DV, often lacks depth when focusing on survivor narratives. Such an imbalance in reporting may reinforce stereotypes, limit public understanding of the complexities of GBV, and undermine efforts to address its systemic causes. By failing to contextualise survivor experiences within the broader societal and institutional frameworks, media outlets miss an opportunity to advocate for structural change and a more nuanced understanding of GBV. A more balanced approach would provide both survivors and perpetrators with equal contextualisation, fostering more empathetic and informed reporting.

The data in Figure 5.5 also illustrate instances where combinations of stereotypes appear, such as articles featuring both perpetrators and survivors and those that involve all three categories. These overlaps may reflect the challenges in creating comprehensive narratives that acknowledge the complexities of GBV, often resulting in simplified portrayals that do not capture the full spectrum of experiences.

5.2.5.2 Survivor-centred approach

The survivor-centred approach was analysed by looking at language, details, impact on survivors and impact on the community, which shows the percentage in which these survivor-centred elements are seen in articles, in addition to other elements such as prevention, support and misrepresentation, which aids in understanding a survivor-centred approach.

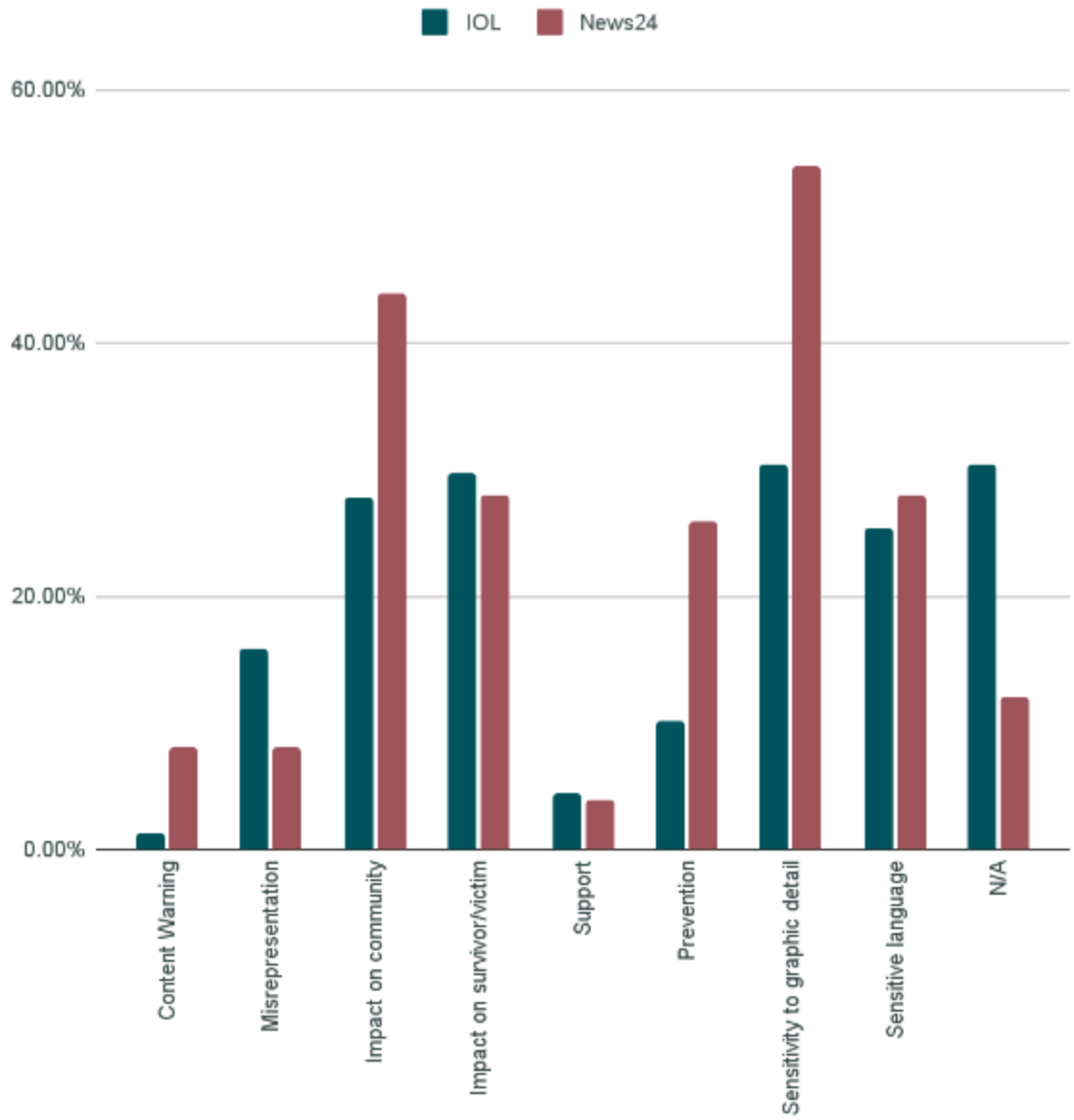

Figure 5.6: **Survivor-centred approach in *News24* and *IOL***

Interestingly, 30.38% of articles within the *IOL* sample and 12% of articles within the *News24* sample could not be coded under any of the categories, indicating that they either lack these key elements or are neutral in their approach. This could signal a missed opportunity for more ethical and sensitive reporting.

The following section discusses language use (see 2.5.2.5.1), sensitivity to graphic details (see 2.5.2.5.2), impact on survivors and community (see 2.5.2.5.3), and prevention and support (see 2.5.2.5.4).

5.2.5.2.1 Language

The researcher argues that minimising harm and maintaining social harmony as an ethical standard requires increased cognisance of the influence of language use. An analysis of the various instances of language usage of both the *IOL* and *News24* samples reveals varied approaches to GBV reporting, with

notable differences in sensitivity, tone, and accessibility of language use (see Figure 5.5). In *IOL*, almost a quarter of the articles employed sensitive, survivor-centred language. Similarly, sensitive language was seen in about 30% of the *News24* sample. However, in both samples many articles were scrutinised by the researcher for their use of insensitive or clinical language, which often diminished the emotional weight of the violence described.

Both outlets frequently relied on clinical language, especially when citing authoritative sources (see 5.2.1.1). In *IOL* articles such as I-22 'Decomposed body of suspected rape victim found' and I-155, 'A 45-year-old Mpumalanga man handed life behind bars for murdering his girlfriend', GBV was approached in a detached, factual manner, reducing survivors to mere statistics and failing to capture the human toll of the violence. *News24* also tended towards a clinical tone, as seen in N-04, where Oscar Pistorius is described as a "convicted killer" while his victim, Reeva Steenkamp, is given a more humanising description as a "law graduate and model", displaying more nuanced language.

Gruesome details were sometimes paired with emotive language, particularly in *IOL*, where articles like I-14 'Wife slain: SANDF member 'a violent man'' used phrases such as "blood oozing" for shock value. Other articles such as I-08 'Botlokwa police investigate the gruesome discovery of the body of an 18-year-old woman' and I-10 'Durban court denies bail to man accused of bludgeoning ex-girlfriend to death', highlighted the brutality of violence inflicted on victims' bodies. Both news sites struggled with balancing sensitivity and detail, with the age of the victim often influencing the tone. Younger victims were typically discussed with more emotive language, while older victims were treated more clinically. For example, in I-32 'Five life imprisonment sentences for KZN rapists' there is an obvious distinction in the way a rape of a minor is reported on in comparison with how the article reports on the rape of an adult. Regarding the minor, the article reads:

> *Netshiunda said that in another case, on June 8, 2023, in the afternoon, an 11-year-old girl told her aunt that she was raped. With the medical examination confirming the rape, the suspect was arrested. After several court appearances, the court handed down the ultimate sentence befitting his horrific crime of violating a child.*

Regarding the adult, the article reads:

> *In the third incident, a woman was waiting for a taxi when two men approached her and demanded money. When she told them that she did not have any money, they grabbed and raped her.*

Language accessibility issues were evident in both outlets, particularly in *IOL*'s reliance on legal jargon and procedural language (I-50, I-94), which alienated readers unfamiliar with technical terms. I-97 'Why language matters in the fight against GBV', explicitly critiques this disconnect, arguing that such jargon inhibits frank discussions about GBV in African communities. The opinion piece critiques the language

used in awareness campaigns and articles, highlighting its inaccessibility to African communities. Terms such as “femicide” and “toxic masculinity,” though academically accurate, often fail to resonate with grassroots audiences, resulting in a disconnect between the language of GBV awareness and its intended impact. The author states:

> *I am concerned that the message about gender-based violence is lost in translation because we – gender scholars, educators, the media, grass-roots activists – use obscure English jargon as tools for educating the public … English terms inhibit frank talks because they are not relatable to ordinary people.*

This critique stresses how language barriers can obstruct collective social action, as GBV terminology in English frequently lacks cultural and contextual relevance for African communities.

This argument is supported by I-82 ‘16 days of no violence against women children: 881 women and 293 children were killed in SA in just three months’, in which confusing language is used:

> *“We, therefore, need more qualified, trained, and skilled individuals to ensure that all the gender machinery and infrastructure that currently exists is effectively implemented and people held accountable if they are not.”*

Even for those with an academic background, such wording can be challenging to comprehend, leading to concerns about the potential confusion it may cause for the average reader, particularly those for whom English is not a first language.

This is also seen within the *News24* sample, opinion pieces or columns written by experts often utilise terminology not readily understood by most communities in South Africa. As mentioned, N-40 utilised the terms “necropolitics” and “gore capitalism”, meaning that some bodies are more disposable than others. These are not concepts average South Africans are familiar with. N-40 for instance introduces the following statements:

> *In her book Gore Capitalism, Sayak Valencia calls the brutal types of violence that are exercised on human bodies tools of "necro-empowerment". Her argument is that in this late phase of (neo-liberal) capitalism, bodies have become commoditised – the "body-made-flesh" and controlled through predatory techniques of extreme forms of violence, such as torture, kidnapping and death. This she calls "gore capitalism".*
>
> *The destruction of the body itself becomes a commodity, and inflicting death becomes the most profitable business in existence. She argues that the raw nature of this type of violence lies at the heart of neo-liberal globalisation, of which death is a form of consumption.*

Like I-82, the argument can be complex for educated audiences to understand and may prove particularly foreign to the average South African community.

Moreover, both news sites grappled with how to label those affected by GBV. Another pitfall regarding language is calling survivors of abuse “victims” (see N-20; N-26). N-24 ‘How we talk to young boys is key

to curbing the GB scourge in South Africa' raises the question of when it should be acceptable for the media to refer to individuals as "victims" – is someone who escaped domestic abusive relationships a 'survivor' or still a 'victim' until completing some recovery? Additionally, an overemphasis on the term 'survivor' could alternatively lead to confusing phrases such as "survivors of gender-based violence and femicide" (see N-06), when femicide means female homicide.

Overall, both *IOL* and *News24* show a commitment to addressing GBV. Still, issues with language use, whether through insensitive terminology, overly clinical tones, or inaccessible jargon, hinder their ability to engage with the complexities of the problem entirely. In summary, *News24* more frequently utilises sensitive language that acknowledges the dignity of survivors. The article's language choices avoid clinical terminology, making the content more accessible to the public. Some opinion pieces or columns use language the average South African community would not necessarily understand or relate to. In contrast, a significant portion of *IOL's* articles use insensitive or clinical language that can dehumanise survivors. The reliance on authoritative sources often leads to a tone that lacks emotional resonance, potentially alienating readers and failing to capture the complexities of survivor experiences. Perhaps the most obvious reason for this difference is the dichotomy of narratives, especially within the 16 Days Campaign – *News24, which* aims to create awareness through an in-depth understanding of social realities. In contrast, IOL blasts the audience with GBV content to create awareness (see 5.2.2.1).

5.2.5.2.2 Sensitivity to graphic details

The proposed ethical framework advises against using explicit or graphic details that could disrupt social harmony; thus, sensitivity to graphic detail is highly encouraged (see 3.5.1.5). Both *News24* and *IOL* exhibit a mix of sensitivity and insensitivity in their reporting of GBV. Within the sample, *News24* demonstrates sensitivity to detail in more than half of the articles sampled, with 2% including prevention measures and content warnings. This suggests an awareness of the potential emotional impact on readers. Moreover, 4% of the sample combines sensitivity to detail with attention to survivors and communities, achieving a more balanced and ethical approach to GBV reporting by considering both informational and emotional aspects. However, *News24* also contains articles that neglect this sensitivity. For instance, N-08 'Nicoleen Swart speaks out a year after that awful abuse video went viral' includes graphic descriptions of a crime, showing a survivor's broken nose, swollen eyes, and facial scars through accompanying images.

IOL displays a comparable trend. Yet, this effort is undermined by numerous instances of graphic and potentially re-traumatising content. For example, I-12 'Calls for justice after dismembered woman's body was found in freezer', features an image of the empty freezer where the victim's body was found, stained with dried blood, without providing any content warning. Other articles offer highly detailed or clinical accounts of violence, which could contribute to the desensitisation of readers or cause distress to those

directly affected by the events described. In some cases, such as I-65 'Husband arrested for wife's murder, three years after he allegedly bludgeoned her to death and buried her next to a pit toilet,' descriptions of skeletal remains are provided, and in I-75 '16 days of Activism: Deadly attacks on three Cape women mark start of non-violence campaign', graphic details of a family's charred bodies following a fire are recounted, displaying insensitivity not only towards the victims but also to their families and communities.

While sensitivity to detail and survivor-centred language are evident in some instances, both *News24* and *IOL* frequently fall short of providing adequate content warnings and mitigating the potential harm caused by graphic or explicit descriptions (see 5.2.5.4). The tendency towards sensationalism or the overemphasis on graphic details highlights the need for a more nuanced and ethically responsible approach to covering GBV cases, one that balances factual reporting with a deep sensitivity to the impact on survivors, their families, and the wider community.

5.2.5.2.3 Impact on survivors and community

The proposed ethical framework states that it is essential to respect the humanity of communities and survivors and honour the legacy of victims (see 3.5.5). Articles that consider the impact on survivors and communities use survivor-sensitive language, minimise gruesome or explicit details, and consider how reporting and publishing the article might influence the survivor's or, alternatively, the victim's legacy.

Both *News24* and *IOL* exhibit varying degrees of sensitivity towards survivors and communities in their reporting of GBV. *News24* demonstrates sensitivity to survivors in nearly a quarter of its articles, often integrating considerations for community impact and language use (see Figure 5.5). The *IOL* sample accounts for the impact on survivors almost three-tenths of its sample when integrating combinations within a survivor-centred approach. Despite this, the prevalence of clinical or insensitive language, along with graphic and re-traumatising details, fails to capture the complexities of survivor narratives. Furthermore, only 1.90% of the articles focus on survivor voices, reinforcing the notion that the impact on survivors is not a primary concern within *IOL*'s GBV reporting.

Moreover, the use of inaccessible or inconsiderate language, alongside graphic depictions of violence, can significantly affect the communities impacted by GBV (see 2.5.2.5.1; 2.5.2.5.2). Survivors and victims are not isolated figures; they are integral members of their communities — known and loved. Thus, what may appear to journalists as just another crime to report can have deep and lasting effects on these communities. The callousness with which media report on GBV tends to influence the way society views personal tragedy. For example, in I-131 'Teen found murdered in Steenberg', her grandmother expressed frustration, stating:

> *People decided to announce the murder on Facebook even before her family were made aware of it. I didn't like that because we didn't want it publicised like that.*

This highlights how insensitive and premature public exposure can add to the trauma experienced by those closest to the victim, illustrating the need for journalists to be more mindful of the community's reality when reporting on such tragedies.

5.2.5.2.4 Prevention and support

Prevention-focused content is included in 6% of articles (see N-15; N-16; N-47) either alone or combined with other factors like content warnings or support within the *News24* sample. In total, considering all combinations within Figure 5.5, more than a quarter of articles give some degree of prevention regarding GBV. This shows that some of the reporting not only focuses on the incident itself but also on broader social measures that could help prevent future violence.

From suggestions for prevention, solutions-driven reporting stems. Solutions-driven reporting in GBV coverage shifts the focus from just reporting incidents to emphasising ways to prevent violence. N-39 states:

> *This needs to be a pragmatic approach, driven by data and research and not by rhetoric. We need street lights. We need regular power. We need the police and justice services to provide transparent and legible data about violence against women without changing the reporting terminology every year, or blaming domestic violence on "boyfriend or girlfriend relationship[s]" as if women are somehow equally responsible for the number of killings. We need a functional police service that responds to women's complaints before they die – data repeatedly shows that, in intimate partner violence, women typically experience multiple, often escalating acts of violence before being killed. We need a functional justice system and policing and prison services that do not unfairly penalise poor black and coloured men by keeping them in jail for years on end without trial – but which are able to efficiently process forensic evidence and convict perpetrators of violent crimes rather than having them out on bail to often re-offend.*

This approach highlights solutions like community engagement, policy changes, and education, aiming to raise public awareness and inspire action. It encourages journalists to provide a broader context, addressing the root causes and showing pathways for positive change. By focusing on prevention and support, this type of reporting helps the media fulfil its role in driving social transformation and reducing harm. N-15 'OPINION | Mia Malan and Tanya Pampalone: From Oscar to Diepsloot - why do men become violent?' addresses the lack of counselling and support services and states that by not investing in mental health support "our country will remain sick". N-43 'CPUT stabbing incident sparks demands for specialised police units on GBV' gives a detailed suggestion as to how the country can approach GBV in

higher education which includes adapted security, increased police presence and introducing GBV education into the curriculum. Notably, both these articles are opinion pieces. Alternatively, N-02 'Jukulyn: The place called hell where residents are haunted by violence, crime' introduces a unique approach to the solutions-driven approach by engaging with the community to determine what they deem solutions for their context to change: increased policing, enhanced law enforcement and heavier sentencing for perpetrators of violence.

Upfront, it can already be stated that *IOL* is not as solutions driven as *News24* as their focus lies on crime and court reporting rather than opinions or discussions addressing GBV as a structural issue. Nonetheless, their attempts to provide prevention strategies should not be overlooked. For example, I-82 '16 days of no violence against women children: 881 women and 293 children were killed in SA in just three months', stresses the significance of early childhood development, while I-104 'Parliament calls for multi-pronged approach to GBV after student violently stabs partner in Western Cape' and I-110 'Minister Nzimande urges Higher Health to implement measures to curb GBV amidst CPUT stabbing' concentrate on initiatives within university settings, including educational programmes and enhanced security measures. Furthermore, I-90 'Harsher penalty needed for GBV' advocates for stronger legal repercussions for perpetrators as a preventive measure. However, none of these strategies thoroughly explore approaches that could effectively tackle the root causes of GBV, such as addressing social norms or the enduring impacts of colonial legacies.

Providing additional support through websites or helplines appears in only two articles in the *News24* sample. *IOL* similarly provides minimal support for survivors of violence (Figure 5.5). The proposed ethical framework (see 3.5.1.5) states that articles should include resources and support for individuals influenced by GBV as this will enable survivors to reconnect and interact with the community and reclaim their personhood (as suggested by African philosophies, see 3.4.1). The article should thus provide information on culturally relevant support services available to survivors. N-11 'Domestic violence spikes during this time here's how victims can get help', which is identical to I-40 'Domestic violence increases over the festive season - here's how to get help', provides a digital tool for additional education and a contact number for individuals to connect with TEARS[44]. At the end of the article, there is bulleted advice from TEARS for "victims" of GBV. N-01 'Bhekisisa Mncube | Tackling GBV and dismantling toxic masculinity's grip on men' supplies a single link to a website with GBV support but fails to mention that this website supplies support and the link thus seems random. The low frequency of support supplied by

[44] TEARS stands for "Transform Education About Rape and Sexual Abuse." It is a South African non-profit organization dedicated to supporting survivors of rape and sexual abuse. The organisation provides various services, including trauma counselling, legal advice, and assistance with medical care, while also working to raise awareness about gender-based violence and advocating for policy changes.

the news sites highlights a potential gap in providing resources or solutions for survivors, which is a key element of survivor-centred reporting and crucial within the proposed ethical framework.

In summary, *News24* provides a more solutions-driven approach, particularly during the 16 Days Campaign, focusing specifically on possible GBV prevention strategies. Their reporting often calls for systemic changes to address the root causes of GBV (see 5.2.2.2.4). Though not consistently or often, articles may include resources and contact information for organisations that offer support to survivors. In contrast, *IOL* shows significantly limited focus on prevention and support for survivors, with minimal strategies outlined to tackle the root causes of GBV. The sample tends to lean more towards crime and court reporting rather than offering constructive discussions on solutions.

5.2.5.3 Glamorising or promoting violence

Within the sample, no article could be identified as glamorising or promoting violence within *News24*. The *IOL* sample does, however, have instances where violence is inadvertently promoted through detailed accounts that could be imitated. For example, in I-70 'Double life sentence for toddler rapist, murderer', it is stated:

> *... Mpulampula lured her outside to an abandoned toilet. There he raped her and strangled her thereafter. He took a plastic bag that was on the floor and lit it with matches, allowing the drops of burning plastic to fall onto her body, causing her to sustain burn injuries...*

Such graphic depictions not only sensationalise elements of violence but may also inadvertently inspire imitating behaviour among vulnerable individuals seeking attention or validation through violence (Huesmann, 2005).

As discussed earlier, *IOL* does have instances of graphic detail and descriptions of violence. This could evoke a strange fascination or intrigue regarding the crime, often desensitising the audience. In I-122, 'Vredenburg mom recounts horror murders of her two young children allegedly by her ex,' a mother recounts the death of her children:

> *Her crying just stopped, and I had to push my way through to get to my children. I couldn't hear Faith cry anymore and saw Derick's sister holding her; she was already dead. He stabbed her 17 times. Conroy was on his knees, and all I heard him say was: 'pappa' ...*

Though the account shares the intense grief the mother experiences due to the unjustified violence, it also speaks to the disturbing trend of journalistic voyeurism briefly mentioned earlier (see 5.2.1.2) where the media increasingly focuses on sensationalising the most graphic or shocking details of crimes. This phenomenon often leads to what the researcher considers a form of crime fetishisation, wherein both journalists and audiences derive a sense of pleasure from uncovering the intimate aspects of these cases. Such coverage prioritises ratings and clicks over ethical reporting, resulting in portrayals of crime that

desensitise the public to the underlying issues of GBV instead of fostering a nuanced understanding of the contributing factors. This approach risks reducing complex human experiences to mere spectacles, undermining the dignity of victims and their families.

In a particularly striking example, I-133 'NPA secures conviction in Oscar Pistorius-like Durban murder case', the article discusses the murder of a wife shot through the front door of her home. However, it tends to overshadow the unique aspects of this crime by drawing comparisons to the highly sensationalised case of Oscar Pistorius, even if the only comparison was an abusive partner shooting the victim through a door. The article directly starts by recounting Pistorius' case and time served. Only in the second paragraph is the actual case of the bus driver murdering his lover mentioned – shot and killed through the front door of her home. The unique elements of the case are replaced with weak comparisons in favour of search engine optimisation. The researcher argues that this tendency to align the narrative with a well-known case may sensationalise the incident further, potentially detracting from the gravity of the crime and the experiences of those involved. It highlights a broader issue within journalism, where the allure of familiar narratives can overshadow the complexity and individuality of violent incidents.

5.2.5.4 Content warnings

Only two articles within the *News24* sample contain content warnings (see N-20; N-26), usually combined with other elements like detail and prevention (see Table 5.4). None of the graphic images within the sample, such as those presented in N-08 (see 2.5.2.5.2), contain content warnings. This suggests that content warnings are severely underutilised, even though they are important for reader preparation, especially in sensitive cases that risk community or survivors' re-traumatisation. N-26 'Detaching myself from his daggers': GBV survivor shares her story of love, abuse and faith through it all,' a feature article focusing on domestic violence, has a "Trigger warning" for "brief mention of addiction and various forms of abuse." The researcher firmly detests the term 'trigger warning' as it may inadvertently downplay trauma-related content. Thus, the researcher suggests using the term 'content warning' or 'sensitive content.'

IOL does not utilise content warnings for graphic or explicit details. In both instances marked as 'content warnings' within the study, the image utilised within the article could arguably serve as a form of warning, as it prominently features the word "rape," indicating to readers that the article addresses a sensitive topic (see 5.2.2.2.6). This lack of explicit content warnings raises concerns about the responsibility of the publication to prepare its audiences for potentially distressing content. By failing to provide clear warnings, *IOL* may inadvertently expose readers to triggering material without adequate preparation, highlighting a significant gap in ethical reporting practices that prioritise community well-being.

Considering the sensitive nature of GBV, the proposed ethical framework suggests news that depicts violence should use appropriate content warnings to maintain social harmony and prevent survivors from being re-traumatised (see 3.5.5). On platforms such as *News24* and *IOL,* this can be easily achieved by giving the audience a choice to view sensitive content.

Summary

Within the sample, the reporting by *News24* shows an attempt at minimising harm and maintaining social harmony by increasingly avoiding harmful stereotypes, particularly during the 16 Days Campaign, suggesting a more careful and socially aware approach. However, significant gaps remain in portraying perpetrators, with affluent individuals often receiving more nuanced or sympathetic coverage. Survivor-centred reporting was inconsistent, with only 15 articles using sensitive language and only two providing content warnings, emphasising underutilised practices that could better safeguard survivors and readers. Thus, while some alignment with the survivor-centred approach is evident, there is still room for improvement in adopting a consistently ethical and harm-minimisation approach.

IOL's reporting within the sample shows limited alignment with the ethical principle of minimising harm and maintaining social harmony. While most coverage avoids stereotyping, almost a quarter of articles reinforce negative stereotypes about alleged perpetrators, potentially affecting public perception and social cohesion. Additionally, survivor representation sometimes perpetuates victim-blaming narratives, and the use of graphic depictions, clinical language, and lack of content warnings may cause further harm. Although ethical considerations are made, the inconsistency in language and imagery indicates gaps in fully meeting the principle of minimising harm in GBV reporting.

Generally, *News24* adopts a more survivor-centred approach to GBV reporting compared to *IOL*. *News24's* language use is more sensitive, detail inclusion is reasonable, and emphasis is placed on the impact of GBV on individuals and communities. Additionally, their reporting incorporates prevention strategies and ethical considerations more often. In contrast, *IOL's* reporting often falls short in these areas, primarily due to its reliance on clinical language, insensitivity in detail presentation, and inadequate attention to the needs and voices of survivors.

5.2.6 Professional ethics and decolonising communication

The proposed ethical framework requires journalists to maintain core principles like truthfulness and accountability, as well as amplify survivor narratives and move beyond traditional reporter-driven stories (see 3.5.6). Thus, journalists should balance authentically representing survivors' experiences while upholding the professional ethical principles presented in the SA Press Code. *IOL's* coverage often fails to amplify survivor narratives within the sample. It tends to remain rooted in conventional crime and court

reporting, which limits a more nuanced understanding of GBV. At the same time, *News24* shows a more significant commitment to professional ethics and exploration of structural issues perpetuating GBV.

Firstly, a survivor narrative would allow survivors of GBV to relay their personal experiences in their own authentic voice. In contrast, a reporter-driven narrative does not necessarily focus on relaying personal experiences; instead, it emphasises principles such as objectivity and merely relays what the reporter considers factual. This often leads to an emphasis on dependence on authoritative sources (as seen in Table 5.3), which limits GBV reporting in the media to crime and court reporting and event-driven journalism, as highlighted within *IOL's* reporting.

Neither news site fully adheres to the principle of minimising harm within the sample. For example, *IOL* rarely represents community and survivor voices, heavily relies on secondary and authoritative sources, frequently includes graphic details of violence, omits content warnings, engages in victim-blaming, and provides invasive coverage. Though not present in all content, it is represented in a large enough part of the sample to be considered. Ethical guidelines such as the SA Press Code emphasise the need for sensitivity and respect in the treatment of survivors, especially those affected by sexual violence. Graphic depictions of violence and failure to protect survivors' privacy directly violate these ethical obligations.

Within the *IOL* sample, private information[45] such as the survivor's post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and recurring injections for a sexually transmitted infection (STI) without explicit informed consent, given that this information would be published, raises significant ethical concerns regarding the balance between providing context and respecting privacy. While contextualising a story is essential for understanding the full impact of GBV, including such intimate details without clear justification crosses ethical boundaries.

Additionally, Section 9 of the SA Press Code addresses the portrayal of brutality, violence, and suffering in the media, including that associated with GBV. It stipulates that, when depicting violence or explicit content, a prominent warning should be provided unless it is unquestionably in the public interest. Both news sites have minimal content warnings, thus violating the SA Press Code (see 5.2.5.4).

Summary

News24's reporting on GBV aligns with professional ethics by adhering to the principles of truthfulness and accountability outlined in the SA Press Code, with minor infractions found other than those related to misrepresentation and accuracy (see 5.2.1.1.2-3), such as its limited use of content warnings. Although

[45]The researcher acknowledges that the right to privacy is recognised as a fundamental human right in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and is protected under the Constitution and common law. While the right to privacy is not absolute, certain information, such as medical details, is constitutionally protected. Although the researcher is aware of these and other privacy laws in South Africa, the focus of this study is on media ethics, not legal frameworks. The legal dimensions of privacy, while acknowledged, fall outside the scope of this research.

survivor narratives are occasionally emphasised, the overall reporting leans more towards factual, expert-led narratives. Thus, while *News24* maintains ethical standards, including survivor-centred stories would better support the decolonisation of information by ensuring more authentic, diverse representations of GBV.

In comparison, *IOL'*s reporting falls short of meeting the ethical principles of professional journalism and decolonising communication outlined in the proposed ethical framework. *IOL*'s coverage frequently defaults to traditional, reporter-driven crime and court reporting, limiting a nuanced understanding of GBV. The ethical duty of minimising harm is often neglected, with *IOL* exposing survivors to further trauma through the omission of community and survivor voices, graphic depictions of violence without sufficient content warnings, and failure to protect survivor privacy.

Overall, *News24* demonstrates a clearer adherence to professional ethical guidelines. In contrast, *IOL'*s articles represent a significant ethical gap, even by the standards within the Independent Media Press Code, as readers are often exposed to graphic content without forewarning. This lack of responsibility towards audience well-being highlights the need for more ethical considerations in reporting practices. The combination of sensationalist reporting, and graphic detail can lead to desensitisation among readers and undermines the seriousness of GBV issues.

5.2.7 Public platform and decolonised media

Within the proposed ethical framework, journalists are to facilitate public discussions regarding GBV and foster conversations about prevention and support (see 3.5.7).

Though *News24* is an online platform, articles are unavailable to a wide-spread audience as most articles are behind a paywall and are not readily accessible to individuals without a monthly subscription (see 4.5.2.1.1). This challenges facilitating broad, inclusive conversations about GBV prevention and support, as outlined in the proposed ethical framework. Additionally, articles which are readily accessible primarily consist of crime and court reporting, which pushes a stereotype of what GBV in South Africa looks like. For these articles, comment sections are limited to subscribers. While, within the proposed ethical framework, journalists are expected to engage the public in discussions on GBV and its solutions, the paywall hinders widespread accessibility, particularly for individuals who cannot afford monthly subscriptions. This limits the reach of vital information and restricts the platform's potential to drive significant societal conversations on GBV.

In South Africa, the paywall issue is particularly problematic due to the country's significant digital divide and economic disparities (Mlaba, 2021; Mongae, 2024). Many South Africans, especially those from lower-income communities, may not have the financial means to afford (Mongae, 2024) subscription-based

news platforms like *News24*. This limits access to crucial information, such as GBV reporting, prevention measures, and support resources, which are often more urgently needed in these vulnerable populations. Additionally, internet access is not universal, and data costs can be prohibitively high, further compounding the accessibility problem (Mongae, 2024). This lack of access can prevent a large segment of the population from engaging in critical discussions about GBV, stifling the ethical goal of fostering widespread public awareness and dialogue. For a country with a high rate of GBV and deeply entrenched social inequalities, making such information inaccessible risks further marginalising those who are most affected by these issues. As a result, the paywall exacerbates the gap between those who can afford to be informed and participate in discourse and those who cannot.

Within the sample, the occurrence of prevention and support is limited; therefore, discussion on the topic is all but encouraged. Additionally, although *IOL* is a free news platform, communities with data access can access the media, and a problem occurs — quantity over quality. While the platform produces a significant volume of articles, this often comes at the expense of in-depth, thoughtful journalism (see 5.2.1.1). When prioritising quantity, media outlets may focus on producing quick, surface-level reports that lack critical engagement with the deeper issues surrounding GBV. The researcher argues that this can result in formulaic stories that focus heavily on crime details and court proceedings while overlooking the structural and social factors that underpin violence, such as patriarchal power dynamics, systemic inequality, and harmful cultural norms. This also affects the ability to engage with marginalised voices and to represent survivors' experiences with the nuance and dignity they deserve. Consequently, the space for meaningful exploration of prevention strategies, survivor support mechanisms, and community-based interventions becomes marginalised. High-quality reporting, by contrast, demands time and resources to investigate, verify, and contextualise information, ensuring that stories do more than recount events by contributing to understanding the broader implications of GBV and offering insight into potential solutions.

5.2.7.1 Summary

While some aspects of the reporting attempt to facilitate dialogue, significant barriers posed by the *News24* paywall and the focus on authoritative narratives prevent it from embracing the principles of decolonised media within the proposed ethical framework.

The *IOL* sample fails to fulfil the ethical principle. While it has the potential to facilitate public discourse, the reporting often prioritises sensationalism and traditional crime narratives over meaningful engagement with survivor experiences and community voices. This limited focus on prevention and in-depth analysis hinders critical discussions about power dynamics and social norms.

5.2.8 Privacy, dignity and confidentiality

Clause 3.4 of the SA Press Code (SA Press Council, 2022) mandates that rape survivors and victims of sexual violence must not be identified or have their HIV/AIDS status disclosed without their explicit consent (SA Press Code, 2023). The definition of sexual violence outlined in the SA Press Code (2023) encompasses a range of acts, from verbal harassment to rape, and includes "coercion, social pressure, and physical force". This definition aligns with the operational definition of GBV used in this study (see section 2.2.3). Moreover, such disclosure should only occur if it serves a clear public interest. Within this study (see 3.6.2.1), it is noted that insisting "public interest should be evident" could be a way of excluding the reporting of cases of sexual violence that cannot be sensationalised or fit existing narratives, which perpetuates the public misconceptions that already exist regarding GBV. The researcher does not suggest intruding on the private lives of GBV survivors, simply that media reporting should more closely reflect South African realities.

Firstly, privacy violations occur when personal, sensitive information about survivors is disclosed without consent. For instance, *IOL* has reported on survivors' mental health and psychiatric conditions (see I-87; I-119) and details about their medical treatments (see I-119; I-136; I-144). For example, I-119 'Accused killer's ex relives ordeal in court', shares the survivor's PTSD symptoms, and that she needs recurring injections for a STI that she obtained from the alleged perpetrator without any indication of explicit informed consent. Such disclosures can have significant repercussions on the survivors' personal lives, potentially leading to stigma and further trauma. Notably, information revealed in court, and thus part of the public record, becomes public information and may be used by journalists. However, although reporting may be permitted within a law- and ethical reporting framework, journalists should still address these issues with sensitivity.

An excellent example of *News24's* approach to privacy and dignity is seen in their coverage of the UWC student who assaulted his wife, a student at CPUT. N-46 'UWC student who stabbed a CPUT student appeared in court for attempted murder' clearly states that the accused's identity will be protected until he pleads. Later, the identity of the accused is still protected despite his plea when it is revealed that he still has to plea about an unrelated rape case (N-36). In these articles, the identity of the survivor is also carefully protected. For example, in N-36, 'Cape Town student caught on camera allegedly stabbing wife abandons bail bid,' the article includes a screenshot from video footage showing the accused attacking his wife. However, to protect her identity, the image is edited to blur her out. This aligns with ethical practices aimed at safeguarding the dignity and privacy of survivors, ensuring that they are not further victimised by media exposure.

In N-43, 'CPUT stabbing incident sparks demands for specialised police units on GBV.' At the same time, the article continues to report on the same case. Using the image in N-36 makes a significant error by revealing both the faces of the accused and the survivor in a photo of them smiling together. This contradicts the earlier effort in N-36 to protect the survivor's identity by blurring her face, displaying a lapse in judgment in handling sensitive material. Such an inconsistency undermines the ethical standards of survivor protection in GBV reporting, as maintaining confidentiality is crucial in preventing further harm to those affected.

I-03 'Mpumalanga cop who gunned down wife and fled with children in lover's car, expected in court,' shows a responsible approach, as the police officer, who is also the perpetrator, is not named, thus protecting the identities of the victim and their children. However, I-62 'Alleged serial killer 'boasted about ex girlfriend's rape' demonstrates a conflicting narrative; while the article aims to protect the survivor's identity by protecting the identity of the confidential source, it employs confusing language that detracts from this goal. Overall, these examples illustrate a troubling inconsistency in *IOL's* approach to privacy and identity, highlighting a failure to adhere to ethical standards that protect vulnerable individuals in reporting.

In the *News24* reporting associated with Kirsten Kluyt's murder, the accused's identity is revealed in N-29 as Bafana Mahungela, who "allegedly murdered" the teacher. In N-24, the identity of the accused is again protected, justifying this decision by stating: "The student can no longer be identified until he has pleaded in court to a sexual offences charge." Despite this, the article provides indirect identifying details, such as describing the accused as a "second-year student at Varsity College in Sandton" and mentioning their hometown, which can still potentially reveal their identity. This contrast highlights ethical challenges in balancing the protection of privacy [46]for the accused with the public's right to know, especially when reporting on cases involving serious crimes like murder and sexual offences.

Similarly, the *IOL* sample illustrates significant concerns regarding the perpetrator's identity. In I-93, 'New lawyer for high school teacher accused for rape,' the report states: "The 55-year-old man, who cannot be named as he has not pleaded yet…". This indicates an intention to protect the perpetrator's identity due to legal protocols; however, the subsequent details provided, such as "... teacher at a high school in Clermont ..." and "... been teaching at the school since 2006 …" undermine this anonymity. By disclosing specific information about the perpetrator's profession and the length of his employment, the reporting risks allowing community members to determine his identity, thus compromising the intended protection.

[46] Again, the researcher is aware that privacy is not just an ethical matter, but a legal issue too as the law is clear on identifying an alleged perpetrator before they have plead.

This practice raises ethical questions about the balance between informing the public and preserving the rights and dignity of the accused individual, who has yet to be formally convicted.

Additionally, although not a regular occurrence, there are clear indications of intruding on private grief, particularly in the callousness with which these news sites can report on how GBV influences the way society views personal tragedy. While *News24* aims to protect the identities of survivors and approach cases with sensitivity, N-09 'Community on tenterhooks over the murder of Gugulethu CPF chair, Lulama Dinginto' highlights an issue that is not explicitly addressed in other reports. The phrase "[the] media was barred from attending [her funeral]" suggests a lack of consideration for the grieving family, as it implies the media believed they had a right to be present at the funeral. This attitude can be seen as insensitive and intrusive, disregarding the family's need for privacy during a vulnerable time. Similarly, in the *IOL* sample, regarding the case of a teen found murdered in Steenberg (I-113), her grandmother expressed frustration, stating:

> *People decided to announce the murder on Facebook even before her family were made aware of it. I didn't like that because we didn't want it publicised like that.*

This serves as an indication that repeated intrusion on private grief has resulted in assuming this intrusion is natural and normal. Neither publication is necessarily to blame for this phenomenon, but it is present in their reporting. Such lapses in sensitivity reflect broader challenges in media ethics, particularly in the context of reporting on traumatic events. The researcher emphasises through the framework that using the authentic voices of communities should not be at their expense. Thus, although the voices of the families should always at least be considered, this does not allow the journalist to intrude on private grief.

5.2.8.1 Summary

News24 follows the SA Press Code by protecting survivors' identities, as seen in the UWC student assault case. However, inconsistencies arise, such as in N-43, where both the accused and survivor are identifiable, undermining confidentiality. Some articles also include details that risk revealing identities or show insensitivity towards grieving families. While *News24* strives to meet ethical standards, these lapses reveal challenges in consistently safeguarding privacy and dignity in GBV reporting.

The *IOL* sample exhibits significant shortcomings in upholding privacy and dignity as mandated by the SA Press Code. Disclosures of sensitive personal information about survivors, including mental health conditions and medical details, compromise their safety and violate ethical standards. While some efforts to protect perpetrator identities were noted, specific details about their professions undermined this intent. Overall, *IOL's* reporting reflects a troubling inconsistency in safeguarding the privacy and dignity of GBV survivors and perpetrators, highlighting the need for stricter adherence to ethical guidelines.

5.2.9 Protecting children

Section 8 of the SA Press Code, based on Section 28.2 of the Bill of Rights, urges journalists to exercise exceptional care when reporting on minors and the ultimate recommendation is not to minimise harm but to avoid harm altogether. Retief (2013b:100) notes that Section 8 of the SA Press Code is the only section that combines the words "exceptional" and "care and consideration," which implies journalists should be taking the clause very seriously. Thus, the journalist should exercise exceptional caution in minimising harm and protecting the privacy and dignity of minors. This includes protecting the identity of children affected by sexual violence.

News24 portrays a perceived commitment to protecting the identities of children involved or affected by crime, as exemplified by N-35, 'Cape Town judge tries to shake up law on GBV by protecting property rights of victim's child', where all names of individuals were redacted to uphold the child's privacy. This adherence to ethical standards is primarily consistent throughout the sample. However, in some articles such as N-08 'Nicoleen Swart speaks out a year after that awful abuse video went viral', there are indications of insensitivity, as it includes details that could potentially identify minors such as their parents' names. Although this is very limited within the sample, it is generally considered a lousy transgression within journalism.

The *IOL* sample demonstrates a concerning pattern of violating the privacy of minors in its reporting. Several instances reveal how the identities of children are inadvertently disclosed through the naming of their parents or the provision of specific details. For example, in I-11 'Femicide accused fled to healer's in Eastern Cape,' the ages and full names of the minors' parents are provided, which effectively exposes the children's identities. In other examples such as I-06 'Infidelity thought to be the reason why soldier killed wife' explicitly identifies children by associating them with their parents. Additionally, I-133 'NPA secures conviction in Oscar Pistorius-like Durban murder case' includes a detailed account of court proceedings that further intrudes on the private grief of a minor by naming a 16-year-old son and details his testimony. These breaches highlight a failure to uphold the ethical standards outlined in the SA Press Code, which mandates protecting minors' identities in sensitive situations. Such reporting not only compromises the dignity of the individuals affected but also raises grave ethical concerns regarding the treatment of vulnerable populations in these publications.

5.2.9.1 Summary

Overall, while *News24* shows an effort to maintain the confidentiality of children's identities in its reporting on GBV cases, some violations of this ethical principle reveal a need for greater sensitivity to ensure comprehensive protection. In contrast, reporting in *IOL* aligns with the ethical standard of protecting minors to a limited degree, as the sample reveals significant shortcomings in safeguarding the

identities of minors. Despite the imperative for exceptional care, the reporting frequently discloses minors' identities through the naming of their parents or other specific details.

5.3 Conclusion

Within this chapter, the researcher focused on analysing the reporting practices of *News24* and *IOL*, focusing on the 16 Days Campaign in 2023. By doing this, the researcher answered the third and fourth specific research questions, namely:

- SRQ3: *To what extent did News24 practise ethical journalism in the context of GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024)?*
- SRQ4: *To what extent did IOL practise ethical journalism in the context of GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024)?*

In answering SRQ3, it can be stated that *News24's* reporting on GBV during the research period demonstrates a partial alignment with ethical journalism principles, showing commitment to accuracy and truthfulness while falling short in representing marginalised voices, contextualising issues, and consistently safeguarding the dignity of survivors. While *News24* shows a commitment to ethical journalism principles in its GBV reporting, there is significant room for improvement. The reliance on authoritative sources, limited engagement with community voices, and inconsistencies in contextualisation and survivor-centred reporting hinder its effectiveness in fully practising ethical journalism, as suggested by the proposed ethical framework. *News24* thus aligns with ethical reporting within the proposed framework to a moderate extent.

In answering SRQ4, it can also be concluded that *IOL's* reporting during the research period demonstrates partial alignment with ethical journalism principles, revealing a commitment to accuracy but hindered by over-reliance on authoritative sources, underrepresentation of community voices, headlines that could be seen as misleading because it does not accurately reflect the content of the story, and significant violations of privacy and dignity for GBV survivors. Based on the analysis, the researcher found that *IOL* complies with the proposed ethical framework from a limited to moderate extent.

Through this study, the researcher challenges the South African media's reliance on episodic, event-based coverage, which neglects the country's colonial history of GBV, fails to contextualise it as a pervasive social issue, reinforces patriarchal power structures, and perpetuates stereotypes about victims and perpetrators (Buthelezi, 2006:502; Brodie, 2020:137; Bhattacharjee, 2021:132; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021:13; Pröll & Magin, 2022:118; Amisi *et al.*, 2022). The researcher identified critical shortcomings in the sampled reporting through content analysis, particularly its failure to align with the proposed ethical framework. The researcher is particularly concerned about the lack of 'minimising harm and maintaining

social harmony' as a standard within the proposed ethical framework (see 6.4), which can be seen in the lack of authentic community voices, content warnings and survivor-centred approaches such as providing prevention and support. Additionally, the proposed ethical framework emphasises the importance of contextualisation (see 6.2.2.3). However, both publications frequently omitted the social context — and, indeed, the historical context — thereby reducing GBV to a mere crime or court story. This approach neglects the complex identities of survivors and victims, diminishing their personhood and experiences in the process (see 5.4). By addressing these deficiencies in ethical GBV reporting, the proposed ethical framework seeks to remedy the identified gaps within the analysed media coverage.

This chapter is the foundation for the conclusion and final thoughts in Chapter 6. The final chapter will provide a comprehensive summary of the research findings, reflecting on how the study's objectives were met and addressing the research questions. Furthermore, in Chapter 6, the researcher discusses the significance of the results in the broader context of the field of study, drawing conclusions based on the data gathered. The chapter will also highlight the study's limitations, offering a candid evaluation of any constraints encountered. Moreover, it should present recommendations for future research, suggesting areas where further investigation is necessary to deepen understanding. Finally, the chapter outlines the practical implications of the findings and potential applications in relevant fields.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, the researcher first provides a synopsis of the study and an overview of the aims, which leads to answering the general research question: *What constitutes ethical journalism in cases of gender-based violence (GBV) within the framework of social responsibility and postcolonial media theory as reported in News24 and IOL during the 16 Days Campaign 2023?*

This is followed by the general discussion, suggestions for the academic and professional application of the framework, the study's challenges, and recommendations for future research and the conclusion.

6.2 Study synopsis and overview: Research aim and objectives

This study examined what would constitute ethical, socially responsible journalism in the context of GBV reporting in the country. To this end, research questions and aims were formulated. In Table 6.1 below, the questions, corresponding aims, methods and chapters in which the research questions were answered, are presented:

Table 6.1: Specific research questions, aims, research methods, and chapters

Specific research question	Specific research aim	Research method	Chapter
SRQ1: How do social responsibility- and postcolonial media theories contribute to defining ethical journalism in South Africa regarding GBV?	SRA1: To determine how social responsibility theory and postcolonial media theory contribute to defining ethical journalism in South Africa in terms of GBV.	Literature review	3
SRQ2: What expectations does the Press Code place on journalists in the context of reporting GBV?	SRA2: To determine what expectations the Press Code places on journalists in the context of reporting GBV.	Literature review	3
SRQ3: What key elements should a framework for gender-based violence news reporting includes to align with social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory, and the guidelines of the South African Press Code?	SRA3: To develop an ethical framework for GBV reporting in South Africa by analysing the contributions of social responsibility theory, postcolonial critique, and the SA Press Code to journalistic practice through literature review.	Literature review	3
SRQ4: To what extent did *News24* practise ethical journalism in the context of GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024)?	SRA4: To determine the extent to which *News24* practised ethical journalism on GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024) through content analysis.	Qualitative content analysis	5

SRQ5: To what extent did *IOL* practise ethical journalism in the context of GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024)?	SRA5: To determine the extent to which *IOL* practised ethical journalism on GBV during the research period (14 October 2023-21 January 2024) through content analysis.	Qualitative content analysis	5

Table 6.2 provides the theoretical statements formulated in Chapter 1 (see 1.5), with the corresponding chapters.

Table 6.2: Theoretical statements and corresponding chapters

Theoretical statement	Chapter
TS1: Social responsibility theory is a normative media theory that prescribes ethical frameworks and professional standards for journalists, emphasising their obligation to serve the public interest (Ekweonu, 2020:5; Igyuve *et al*., 2021:28). Social responsibility theory outlines key ethical principles for journalists, highlighting their role in serving the public good within a democratic society (Fourie, 2011:29; Ward, 2015:369). Ethical journalism within social responsibility theory requires the following journalistic ethical principles: accuracy and comprehensiveness, contextualisation, representation, public interest, serving as a social watchdog, independence, professional ethics, minimising harm, and journalism as a public platform (see 3.3.3)	3
TS2: A postcolonial critique argues the media should be aware of its biases and actively promote diverse voices (Rao & Wasserman, 2007:41). This perspective emphasises challenging power structures, recognising cultural identities, and the media's role in social change (Wasserman, 2006). In South Africa, colonial legacies embedded in media perpetuate gender inequalities. Postcolonial theory suggests the following journalistic ethical principles from postcolonial theory: deconstructing colonial influences and power, expanding the watchdog role, redefining public interest, respectful listening and empowerment, balancing accountability and harmony, and focusing on communal relationships and ethical communication (see 3.4.2)	3
TS3: Although not explicitly stated, the SA Press Code (2022) provides a clear framework of ethical expectations about GBV reporting. Beyond the fundamental tenets of journalism – accuracy, fairness, acting independently, and a variety of perspectives – ethical GBV reporting demands special attention to vulnerable groups such as marginalised communities still experiencing the aftermath of colonial gender hierarchies. Guidelines include ethical standards regarding privacy, dignity and reputation, discrimination and hate speech, children, violence and graphic content, and confidential sources.	3

▪

In **Chapter 1**, the researcher explored the contextual background of journalistic ethics (see 1.1.1) and GBV reporting in South Africa (see 1.1.2) and found that GBV is often underreported and portrayed as isolated incidents rather than systemic issues, neglecting its historical and social context (see 1.1). These challenges pave the way for a more nuanced, socially responsible media approach. However, given the limitations of Western interpretations of normative ethical frameworks such as social responsibility theory (see Rao & Wasserman, 2007:37; Fourie, 2011:35), the researcher explored the need for localised ethical frameworks that reflect South Africa's unique socio-historical contexts. Postcolonial media theory is suggested as a critical approach to understanding these dynamics better (see Rao & Wasserman, 2007:37; Fourie, 2011:35). Consequently, under the umbrella of journalistic ethics, the study used social

responsibility theory, postcolonial critique, and the SA Press Code as theoretical points of departure to determine what constitutes ethical GBV reporting (see 1.5).

In **Chapter 2,** a nuanced understanding of GBV within South Africa's postcolonial context was explored to comprehend how historical and social power structures, imposed by colonial rule, continue influencing how gender and violence is understood and how GBV is portrayed in the media (see 2.2.1; 2.2.2). By grounding GBV within these historical contexts, the study challenged the oversimplified narrative that GBV only affects women, highlighting that GBV is experienced across the gender spectrum and is linked to rigid social expectations (see 2.3). The following operational definition for GBV was formulated (see 2.3): *GBV is an extreme manifestation of gender inequality, referring to any form of physical, sexual, psychological, or financial violence or abuse linked to gender identity, corresponding social expectations, and opportunities related to the family, general community, or structural violence. GBV can be categorised as violence against women, violence against children and violence against others*.

Building on the above background, the literature study in **Chapter 3** sought to determine the responsibilities of South African journalists reporting on GBV, defining ethical reporting based on the standards presented in the social responsibility theory (see TS1), postcolonial critique (see TS2), and the journalistic ethical guidelines in the SA Press Code (see 3.1; TS3). Through the literature review, the researcher answered the first three specific research questions, thereby reaching the corresponding research aims (see Table 6.1). The proposed ethical framework emphasised specific ethical considerations, as informed by the SA Press Code (see TS3 in Table 6.2), was formulated. Thereby the third specific research objective was reached.

In **Chapter 4,** the qualitative research approach was discussed and the research design, theoretical statements, concepts and constructs, research methods, sampling, and measuring instruments were outlined.

In **Chapter 5,** the researcher described the findings of the qualitative content analysis that was conducted using the proposed framework as baseline. Measured against the multi-theoretical perspective of the framework, GBV reporting on the news sites *News24* and *IOL* were found lacking in many areas, mainly where the contextual background of GBV and the humanity of survivors and communities are concerned. In this chapter, the researcher concluded that a focused ethical framework for GBV reporting could contribute to impactful coverage. The researcher thus reached SRA4 and 5 (see Table 6.1).

6.3 Ethical framework for socially responsible GBV reporting

The ethical guidelines in the SA Press Code do not include specific reference to GBV, although several general guidelines can also be applied to the topic. The proposed ethical framework fills the gaps in the

Press Code by tackling the complications and intricacies of GBV reporting reflected in the reality of the societal fabric of South Africa. The framework includes guidelines that support justice, inclusivity, and social cohesion by emphasising the contextual nuances. The proposed ethical framework's essential components are:

Table 6.3: Description of ethical standards within the proposed ethical framework

Ethical principle:	**Description**
Accuracy and comprehensiveness with deconstructed power	Journalists are ethically bound to publish accurate, comprehensive information on public matters grounded in truthfulness and objectivity. This requires transparent use of headlines, captions, and quotes, alongside an awareness of personal biases and a commitment to amplify diverse voices, particularly from marginalised communities. Ethical GBV reporting should ensure factual precision and thoroughness but not rely on Western power structures to present a balanced narrative. This means seeking alternative perspectives, such as local marginalised communities, understanding how colonialism's legacy still fuels GBV, and avoiding stereotypical narratives that silence marginalised voices.
Contextualisation and respectful listening	Providing relevant social context allows audiences to understand the complete picture behind reported events. Stories should be framed within relevant socio-political contexts, with respectful and considerate engagement with sources. Ethically engaging with survivors and communities requires informed consent, protecting their dignity and respecting their agency.
Representativeness and redefining public interest	Reporting should capture a broad range of voices and perspectives to present a representative view of society. This involves publishing diverse content, reflecting multiple viewpoints, and avoiding stereotypes of perpetrators and victims/survivors. Coverage should expand the concept of public interest to incorporate marginalised voices and varied perspectives.
Expanded watchdog role	Journalists are urged to scrutinise and hold accountable all abuses of power contributing to GBV, including the roles of legal systems, social services, and cultural norms in perpetuating it. This includes monitoring systemic issues and reporting emerging GBV trends such as cyber harassment. They should also bring attention to under-reported forms of GBV, such as domestic violence, which reflect the lived realities of South African communities.
Minimising harm and maintaining social harmony	Reporting should be mindful of its potential social consequences, avoiding content that incites violence or reinforces harmful stereotypes. Balanced discussions on sensitive topics can be encouraged if done responsibly and with proper context. The focus should be on honouring communal relationships rather than maximising welfare or adhering to norms. Reporting should thus minimise sensationalism, prioritising harm reduction and societal cohesion instead.
Professional ethics and decolonising communication	Journalists are expected to follow professional codes and ethical guidelines, which outline minimal standards of ethical practice, ideal conduct, and accepted behaviours. These guidelines should ideally be

Ethical principle:	Description
	developed through public consultation and regularly updated. Adherence to these ethics should also include a commitment to decolonising narratives and reporting practices without replacing professional ethics. The postcolonial theory advocates for "ethical communication," which fosters human interaction and respect rather than rigid codes of conduct. This approach aligns with African communal ethics, prioritising relationships over individual accountability.
Utilising journalism as a public platform and promoting decolonised media	Journalism should serve as a platform for public engagement, promoting community storytelling. Online news platforms should thus be accessible to marginalised communities. Journalists should actively collaborate with community leaders to curate stories that resonate with local realities. This includes creating multilingual platforms or fostering community-led storytelling initiatives, ensuring equitable access and representation for rural or marginalised groups.

6.4 Discussion

A multi-layered ethical framework allows for a nuanced and comprehensive analysis of journalism ethics within the context of GBV reporting in South Africa. Each theoretical component, namely the social responsibility theory, postcolonial media theory and the SA Press Code, was carefully selected and integrated to encompass the different dimensions of the research problem. This framework creates the opportunity for journalists to meaningfully engage with the complexities of the topic (see Chapter 2).

At its core, the study is the product of the researcher's commitment to social justice. The researcher advocates that GBV is not merely an abstract statistic or an event-based news item; it is a pervasive and deeply entrenched systemic issue, shaped by South Africa's socio-historical realities, which should reflect in media coverage.

Noteworthy is the distinction between postcolonial critique and decolonial practices. The use of the term *decolonial* in the final framework reflects a deliberate engagement with the postcolonial framework (see 3.4.2) rather than a conflation of concepts. Rather than being interchangeable, these perspectives are positioned in dialogue alongside one another to deepen the study's critical engagement with journalism ethics and social responsibility. The study explicitly states: *"While postcolonial theory does not have a single, codified set of ethical principles, it offers a framework for ethical considerations that challenge traditional Western perspectives. Wasserman (2006:83) identifies three central norms: surveillance of power, affirmation and recognition of cultural identity, and the media's role in transforming society (page 53)."* Given the absence of a codified ethical framework within postcolonial theory, the study expands on these ideas by integrating discussions from Section 3.4.2 on ethical principles, incorporating insights from decolonial thought where relevant. This approach strengthens the theoretical foundation by addressing

gaps in postcolonial theory while maintaining conceptual clarity. The insights gained were instrumental in addressing issues like the interpretation of professional ethics in a postcolonial society (see 3.5.1.6) and the role of media as a public platform (see 3.5.1.7). This informed the proposed ethical framework, which emphasises community-led storytelling through authentic representation (see Table 6.3).

Journalistic guidelines, frameworks and models often reflect an *ideal* as opposed to reality, as is the case with the proposed framework. Nevertheless, striving towards an ideal is not to be faulted. The contemporary focus on social justice should serve as an indication that journalism as a practice should address issues such as GBV with greater contextualisation and sensitivity.

The researcher aims to emphasise the principle of 'Contextualisation and respectful listening', as outlined in the proposed ethical framework, since the sample exhibited a noticeable limitation in this area. The content analysis did indeed point to an event-driven approach to GBV reporting. Figure 5.1 shows a notable increase in the average number of articles published during the 16 Days Campaign. A shift in reporting was not merely observed in the increase in the number of articles, but also the type. For example, during the campaign, *News24*'s reporting shifted from a narrow focus on GBV as a crime to a broader critique of structural violence through the lens of expert sources who added vital context. While this represents an admirable journalistic approach, it reinforces the researcher's concern that systemic dimensions of GBV are only foregrounded during activism periods, limiting sustained public engagement with the issue. This cyclical attention pattern risks reducing GBV discourse to a periodic event rather than an ongoing societal crisis.

A notable gap in coverage within the sample is the lack of reporting on violence against men (see 2.2) and children. As echoed in numerous studies, violence against women (VAW) emerged as the most prominently reported form of GBV (see 2.3). However, in conflict with previous studies (such as Bhattacharjee, 2021) the sample showed a particular focus on crimes related to domestic or intimate partner violence. So, although the results confirm a limited view of gendered violence in South Africa, the reporting within the sample does acknowledge the most common forms of violence. This may indicate a conscious effort by the media to reflect the reality of gendered crime in South Africa.

On the other hand, the absence of nuanced discussions on GBV in queer communities also serve as a concern as multiple studies have illustrated these communities are especially vulnerable to GBV (see 2.2; 2.3). Researchers emphasise that corrective rape is performed as a corrective function within a heteropatriarchal against non-conforming genders and sexualities (see Judge, 2018; Orgeret, 2018; Gouws, 2021), yet the matter was not reflected in the sample at all. The omission shows that reporting practices often neglect the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender identity in shaping experiences of

violence. The absence of queer stories further drives the idea that only certain people are victims of GBV, and that this violence is supposed to 'look a certain way'. The concept of 'representativeness and redefining public interest', as suggested in the proposed ethical framework, is thus an ideal the media can still strive towards.

The study supports the findings of previous researchers that femicide was the most frequently reported crime. Additionally, the argument by Hunt and Jaworska (2019) and Boonzaier (2023) that the media disproportionately emphasise the 'ideal' victim (2.4), was seen in the emphasis on, for example, the femicide of schoolteacher Kirsten Kluyts. In contrast, individuals, such as the woman who was found in her freezer, who did not fit this ideal, were reduced to the state of their body in particularly gruesome deaths. This selective visibility contributes to a skewed public perception of GBV, reinforcing societal biases regarding victimhood and worthiness of justice. For example, Kluyts' murder continuously portrayed her death as an event that does not belong in the wealthy suburbs of Johannesburg worthy of media attention and citizen concern (see 5.2.5.1). Busisiwe Mthethwa, whose body was found in her freezer, was portrayed as a victim of circumstance (see 5.2.4.2.3). The implication is that a woman's socio-economic status guarantees her safety. This is simply not true. Victims/survivors of GBV deserve equal attention, irrespective of social status, sexual orientation, or factors such as race.

Reporting on more than one (often unrelated) topic in a story about GBV, could divert attention from the core issue (See 5.2.1.2). The research acknowledges this common journalistic practice, however, in the context of the proposed framework, combining GBV as explained, should be avoided. This again highlights the need for principle of 'Contextualisation and respectful listening' as proposed within the study. Where communities are concerned, considering that not all news can be investigative or reported on in depth, and that different communities may require different forms of media engagement, every community deserves to have its stories told with accuracy, dignity, and an awareness of broader systemic realities (see 3.4.2). When reporting lacks context, it risks reinforcing stereotypes, perpetuating victimisation, and contributing to societal indifference (see 1.1). Journalists and media organisations should regularly assess their practices and adapt their approach to emerging challenges. By prioritising ethics and responsibility, the South African press can create a media landscape contributing to a more just and equitable society.

Ethical GBV journalism, therefore, is not merely a professional aspiration—it is a moral and social imperative.

6.5 Application of the framework

The study addressed a critical research gap, as no previous studies combined the chosen theoretical and contextual backgrounds. Earlier South African studies on the media's role in the 16 Days Campaign (Media

Monitoring Project, 1998; Harries & Bird, 2005; Buthelezi, 2006) are now nearly two decades old, employ different theoretical frameworks, and cover only brief periods.

The content analysis of the chosen publications confirms that ethical lapses in GBV reporting are not merely theoretical. This highlights a theoretical and practical gap that could be filled by a comprehensive framework to guide ethical and socially aware GBV reporting.

The study's significance is thus not merely academic but could also yield insight into how practising journalists could improve GBV reporting within the South African context. The proposed framework could be adopted and developed further by organisations such as the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF). Through addressing issues in South African GBV reporting, such as limited survivor-centred practices, lack of contextualisation of sociohistorical factors that contribute to GBV, underrepresented community voices, and the lack of standard ethical practices such as the protection of privacy and use of content warnings, could serve as an addendum to existing guidelines in the SA Press Code (see 3.6). Such an inclusion could promote responsible, context-specific journalism, ensuring journalists are held to higher standards of ethical conduct regarding GBV reporting.

The framework could be particularly useful in higher education and professional training initiatives akin to trauma-informed journalism programmes (e.g., Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma; ethics training programmes of The Poynter Institute), ensuring aspiring and professional journalists/editors are equipped with the necessary sensitivity and expertise. In addition, a gender-based violence beat could be to ensure the matter receives the essential contextualisation required in the South African context. Additionally, establishing sustained collaborations between survivor-led advocacy groups, media groups and universities could further enhance ethically accountable reporting by integrating perspectives from those directly affected, fostering more accurate, respectful, and contextually nuanced journalism. This will enable young journalists to report more sensitively when they approach GBV stories.

6.6 Research challenges

This study is limited by several factors that warrant consideration. Firstly, scholarly work on the application of postcolonial critique within media studies in South Africa is limited (see Wasserman, 2006; Wasserman, 2010; Rao, 2010; Fourie, 2011 in 4.5.1). A recent development in African *communication* studies is the shift towards decoloniality (see Chiumbu, 2013; Moyo, 2020; Rodny-Gumede, 2022; Chiumbu, 2022 in 4.5.1), a perspective challenging Western-centric approaches to knowledge production and power structures (see 3.4.1). The researcher observed that decoloniality has received significantly more attention and more recent focus than postcolonial approaches. However, this study contends that for decolonial media theory to be impactful in South Africa, it must build upon postcolonial discourse to

address enduring colonial legacies rather than disregarding established frameworks (see 3.4.1). Although decoloniality holds potential, it risks oversimplification and cultural essentialism if pursued in isolation, a critique also directed at some normative African ethical frameworks (see 3.4.1). Consequently, this study emphasises a postcolonial foundation, recognising its suitability for addressing historical and global influences on media ethics while allowing for further exploration of the subject matter within a decolonial framework.

As no prior research has applied the specific theoretical intersection of social responsibility theory and postcolonial critique (see 3.3) to the ethical media coverage of GBV, this study faced challenges in grounding its findings within an established scholarly context. Given the novelty of this approach, aligning the frameworks to analyse GBV coverage required interpretive flexibility, potentially introducing subjective biases in the analysis. This was mitigated through source triangulation and reviewing African-centric approaches such as Ubuntu (see 2.2.1).

Furthermore, the study's period was restricted, focused on news items published between 14 October 2023 and 21 January 2024. This period was chosen intentionally to align with the study's objectives. However, this potentially limits capturing broader or long-term shifts in media portrayals and trends related to GBV coverage. This limitation affects the extent to which the study's conclusions can account for evolving media practices over time, particularly as they relate to the influence of public and institutional discourse, which fell outside this study's scope. However, as the study did not solely focus on the 16 Days Campaign, it gives valuable insights into reporting practices by the chosen online news sites outside of an event-driven environment.

Moreover, the study focused exclusively on *News24* and *IOL*, which limits the generalisability of the findings. However, the nature of these publications and their readership still ensures the findings are authoritative within the South African media landscape. Analysing these two news sites confirmed a gap for a more ethical GBV reporting framework. The focus on the overarching editorial policies of *IOL* and *News24* and excluding possible internal practices of constituent newspapers, could impact journalists' daily reporting, potentially causing discrepancies between policy and practice. *IOL* specifically, although also publishing its own news, depends on newspapers published by Independent Media (IOL, 2025). However, the focus on the parent companies' stated policies provides a valuable baseline understanding of the ethical landscape within which these various publications operate. It is important to note that even with diverse internal practices, journalists are still bound by the overarching editorial policies of the parent company, which sets the ethical framework for all its publications. Future studies could investigate these intra-outlet variations for a more nuanced understanding of journalistic ethics.

A key limitation of this study is that the search strategy, while intentionally restricted, excluded articles discussing GBV without explicitly labelling it as such. As Brodie (2020) notes, GBV-related reports are often classified under broader crime categories such as 'murder,' 'assault,' or 'rape.' However, this limitation was necessary to ensure the inclusion of articles specifically addressing the 16 Days Campaign and to maintain a manageable dataset.

Lastly, the substantial sample size, while providing a comprehensive dataset, posed challenges for a sole researcher. Manually analysing an extensive dataset independently may have limited the researcher's capacity to perform in-depth, nuanced analyses, and some specific trends or details may not have been fully explored. However, the breadth of the sample enriches the findings and enhances the study's overall robustness.

6.7 Recommendations

Specific recommendations can be made for future academic research to enhance or build upon the outcome of this study – the proposed ethical framework. Firstly, incorporating more publications over extended periods would provide a more comprehensive view of how societal perceptions, ethical standards, and journalistic practices evolve and what media reporting on GBV looks like within the broader South African context. This could lead to a refined, more comprehensive ethical framework.

Moreover, the proposed ethical framework would benefit from deeper exploration into how media ownership structures, commercialisation, digitisation, political affiliations, and internal regulatory policies influence media content and the implementation of ethical standards regarding GBV. This would mean extending the research to include expert interviews with editors, copy tasters and journalists. The expanded focus could provide actionable insights for policy reforms.

Additional theories that could be explored adjacent to or expanding the proposed ethical framework include decoloniality or decolonial media theory, media responsibility theory, communitarian media theories, and agenda-setting and framing theories. This will allow even more theoretical depth and insight. For example, future research could refine the search strategy by using the proposed ethical framework as a foundation and incorporating framing and agenda-setting theory to assess whether articles align with the operational definition of GBV, even when not explicitly labelled as such. Expanding search parameters to include broader terms like 'rape' and 'assault' would enhance the dataset's comprehensiveness, capturing the systemic nature of gendered violence beyond crime or court reporting. Additionally, a multi-method approach, complemented by computational techniques, could facilitate a more in-depth content analysis. This would enable researchers to identify which stories are more likely to

be classified as gendered violence and explore the reasons others are not. This approach could also shed light on the issue of underreporting and how that might reflect in media reporting.

The role of linguistic and cultural diversity in shaping media narratives, especially concerning GBV, could be investigated. Understanding how different communities perceive and represent ethical journalism could enrich media practice and make reporting more inclusive of South Africa's diverse population. Collaboration with the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, political science, and psychology could provide broader insights into the societal, psychological, and cultural dimensions of GBV-related media practices, enriching the overall analysis. The proposed ethical framework can thus be enhanced by interviewing diverse communities and experts, contributing to developing a more comprehensive and community-focused framework of ethical GBV reporting.

Additionally, as digital media and social media platforms such as TikTok are increasingly influential in shaping public perception, examining GBV representation on these platforms would provide insights into the broader digital media landscape. Research could investigate the role of digital media in perpetuating or challenging colonial narratives regarding GBV, especially in reaching younger and more diverse audiences.

6.8 Concluding remarks

This study challenges the South African media's reliance on episodic, event-based coverage of GBV (see 6.1), and advocates for a more sophisticated approach informed by a social responsibility and postcolonial perspective. The outcome of the research is an ethical, socially responsible framework for GBV reporting that takes the colonial history, unique South African context and journalism ethics into account. The framework emphasises a survivor-centred approach, including authentic community voices in news coverage, the use of content warnings, and practical support or prevention measures (see 6.4).

The proposed ethical framework thus addresses theoretical and practical gaps, offering a professional guideline to improve GBV journalism. Its emphasis on contextualisation, representation, and harm minimisation provides a roadmap for fostering ethical and impactful reporting. By adopting this framework, the media can move beyond episodic coverage to tackle the systemic nature of GBV with greater depth and responsibility.

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ANNEXURES A:

Table of variables drawn from the coding book.

Variable	Headline	Journalist	Date
I-01	Soldier who allegedly shot and killed his wife abandons bail	Nomonde Zondi	18 Jan 2024
I-02	Man wanted in connection with rape of girl, 14, in uMhlanga Rocks	Thobeka Ngema	16 Jan 2024
I-03	Mpumalanga cop who gunned down wife and fled with children in lover's car, expected in court	Se-Anne Rall	16 Jan 2024
I-04	Mom, sons of murdered woman fear future	Anelisa Kubheka	14 Jan 2024
I-05	Premier orders probe after KZN awards chairperson's 'slurs' against mothers go viral	Se-Anne Rall	11 Jan 2024
I-06	Infidelity thought to be reason why soldier killed wife	Nomonde Zondi	11 Jan 2024
I-07	Military man accused of gunning down wife in Pinetown home, appears in court	Se-Anne Rall	10 Jan 2024
I-08	Botlokwa police investigate the gruesome discovery of the body of an 18-year-old woman	Anita Nkonki	10 Jan 2024
I-09	Radio personality says working with Kini Shandu on Gagasi FM was the 'worst year' of her career	Thobile Mazibuko	10 Jan 2024
I-10	Durban court denies bail to man accused of bludgeoning ex-girlfriend to death	Se-Anne Rall	09 Jan 2024
I-11	Femicide accused fled to healer's in Eastern Cape	Anelisa Kubheka	09 Jan 2024
I-12	Calls for justice after dismembered woman's body was found in freezer	Anita Nkonki	09 Jan 2024
I-13	Man who allegedly murdered his girlfriend and stuffed her dismembered body in freezer to appear in court	Robin-Lee Francke	09 Jan 2024
I-14	Wife slain: SANDF member 'a violent man'	Nomonde Zondi	09 Jan 2024
I-15	Long road ahead for Zondo in sex trial	Zelda Venter	08 Jan 2024
I-16	No bail for man who 'confessed' to killing ex	Phindile Nqumako	08 Jan 2024
I-17	Teen mom, babies pay the price	Zoubair Ayoob	06 Jan 2024
I-18	Oscar Pistorius released on parole after eight years behind bars	Vuyile Madwantsi	05 Jan 2024
I-19	Oscar Pistorius is back home	Zelda Venter	05 Jan 2024

Variable	Headline	Journalist	Date
I-20	Pinetown woman gunned down in alleged domestic dispute	Se-Anne Rall	03 Jan 2024
I-21	Samora Machel man arrested after woman's chopped-up remains discovered in freezer	Mandilakhe Tshwete	03 Jan 2024
I-22	Decomposed body of suspected rape victim found	Thobeka Ngema	03 Jan 2024
I-23	Further assessments for cop who murdered his three children before parole hearing consideration	Genevieve Serra	31 Dec 2023
I-24	Limpopo police launch operation to safeguard women, children, and the elderly after disturbing rape in Tshidzini Village	Yasmine Jacobs	31 Dec 2023
I-25	Boyfriend due in court after woman's bloodied body found in Havenside home	Se-Anne Rall	30 Dec 2023
I-26	#PoeticLicence: How did we get here?	Rabbie Serumula	30 Dec 2023
I-27	Police condemn acts of GBV after the rape of an 84-year-old woman	Anita Nkonki	28 Dec 2023
I-28	12500 babies born to schoolgirls	Siyabonga Sithole	23 Dec 2023
I-29	Over 25 000 domestic cases in six months	Mayibongwe Maqhina	22 Dec 2023
I-30	Gauteng MEC devastated by death of Echibini learner	Siyabonga Sithole	19 Dec 2023
I-31	Two bodies found at Mitchells Plain beach	Byron Lukas	18 Dec 2023
I-32	Five life imprisonment sentences for KZN rapists	Thobeka Ngema	17 Dec 2023
I-33	Hamas in SA during 16 Days of Activism against GBV	Letter to the Editor	16 Dec 2023
I-34	Abused children suffer secondary trauma due to delays	Siyabonga Sithole	15 Dec 2023
I-35	Ex cop gets life for ex-girlfriend’s murder	Okuhle Hlati	14 Dec 2023
I-36	I feel like I am living in a nightmare, says Ferrel Payne's alleged sexual harassment victim	Francesca Villette	13 Dec 2023
I-37	Case postponed against man who slit his wife's throat: 'I take it one day at a time'	Marsha Dean	12 Dec 2023
I-38	Numsa concerned about increasing incidence of abuse of women and children	Siyabonga Sithole	12 Dec 2023
I-39	Domestic violence increases over the festive season - here's how to get help	Staff reporter	10 Dec 2023
I-40	Sonke Gender Justice staffer accused of sexual assault, suspended	Sihle Mlambo	08 Dec 2023
I-41	State mulls mental evaluation for Amanzimtoti husband accused of killing pastor wife	Se-Anne Rall	08 Dec 2023

Variable	Headline	Journalist	Date
I-42	Sonke Gender Justice suspends staffer over sexual offence allegations	Nicola Daniels	08 Dec 2023
I-43	Government wasted R11m on unused GBV shelters'	Mayibongwe Maqhina	08 Dec 2023
I-44	Another business robbery and rape probed by Durban cops	Thobeka Ngema	07 Dec 2023
I-45	Abused Mom's plea: 'What must I do to be heard?'	Chevon Booysen	06 Dec 2023
I-46	Hunt for throat slasher: Arthur Sass a wanted man after alleged attack on estranged wife	Mahira Duval	06 Dec 2023
I-47	GBV victim still awaiting justice	Zelda Venter	06 Dec 2023
I-48	Free State police search for kidnapper after missing teen's body found in field	Se-Anne Rall	05 Dec 2023
I-49	Charges against man accused of pregnant girlfriend's murder dropped after he dies in custody	Se-Anne Rall	05 Dec 2023
I-50	Self-proclaimed 'charmer' killer, Kyle Ruiters, handed down life imprisonment	Staff reporter	04 Dec 2023
I-51	PSA concerned about the rape of three security officers at Merebank Department of Transport	Yogashen Pillay	03 Dec 2023
I-52	Female traditional leader murdered in her KZN home - Cogta	Karen Singh	03 Dec 2023
I-53	Rape victim Ntombesintu Mfunzi races past scourge to victory of motherhood	Matshelane Mamabolo	03 Dec 2023
I-54	Violence in South Africa is a menace in many forms and against many people	Opinion	03 Dec 2023
I-55	KZN cop sentenced for wife's murder after finding out she and new lover were planning to kill him	Se-Anne Rall	03 Dec 2023
I-56	Rape case postponed 46 times as teen victims suffers	Mandilakhe Tshwete	30 Nov 2023
I-57	Life in jail for family murderer	Anelisa Kubheka	30 Nov 2023
I-58	Addressing gender-based violence: shifting focus to shape the future through honest conversations with young men and boys	Anita Nkonki	30 Nov 2023
I-59	Eight arrested for rape of security guards at Merebank office	Yogashen Pillay	30 Nov 2023
I-60	Killer' contracted brother after he talked about murdered Lerato Kale	Staff reporter	29 Nov 2023
I-61	Manhunt launched for suspects who kidnapped and gang-raped a 19-year-old learner in Limpopo	Anita Nkonki	29 Nov 2023
I-62	Alleged serial killer 'boasted about ex-girlfriend's rape	Chevon Booysen	29 Nov 2023
I-63	Outrage over light sentence for murder of make-up artist	Nicola Daniels	29 Nov 2023

Variable	Headline	Journalist	Date
I-64	Suspects arrested for house robbery and rape appear in court	Thobeka Ngema	28 Nov 2023
I-65	Husband arrested for wife's murder, three years after he allegedly bludgeoned her to death and buried her next to a pit toilet	Se-Anne Rall	28 Nov 2023
I-66	Turning the toxic tide of GBVF	Opinion	28 Nov 2023
I-67	Women and children abused despite 16 Days of Activism period'	Thobeka Ngema	28 Nov 2023
I-68	Knife-attack UWC student on the waiting list at Valkenberg Psychiatric Hospital	Okuhle Hlati	28 Nov 2023
I-69	UWC student charged with attempting to kill his wife sent to Valkenberg	Madilakhe Tshwete	28 Nov 2023
I-70	Double life sentence for toddler rapist, murderer	Chevon Booysen	28 Nov 2023
I-71	Husband charged for KZN Reverend Liezel de Jager's murder	Se-Anne Rall	27 Nov 2023
I-72	Criminal syndicate targeting Department of Transport offices allegedly rape security officers in Durban	Thobeka Ngema	27 Nov 2023
I-73	Crime expert believes the brutal murder of a Joburg school teacher was premeditated	Ntombi Nkosi	27 Nov 2023
I-74	Cops cuff rape victim on ride with suspect	Nervyn Naudoo	27 Nov 2023
I-75	16 days of Activism: Deadly attacks on three Cape women mark start of non-violence campaign	Mandilakhe Tshwete	27 Nov 2023
I-76	Specialised police unit cracks two-year-old case of slain Kwa-Zulu priest, Liezel de Jager	Se-Anne Rall	27 Nov 2023
I-77	Man arrested for conspiracy to kill police major-general	Daily News Reporter	26 Nov 2023
I-78	Cop who killed his three children seeks parole	Genevieve Serra	25 Nov 2023
I-79	Palesa Malatji; Grieving family still awaiting DNA test results frrom cops as they seek justice from matric pupil's unsolved murder	Robin-Lee Francke	25 Nov 2023
I-80	Oscar Pistorius has 'not been rehabilitated': Reeva Steenkamps's mother, June	AFP	24 Nov 2023
I-81	Oscar Pistorrius in fresh parole bid decade after murderr of Reeva Steenkamp	AFP	24 Nov 2023
I-82	16 days of no violence against women children: 881 women and 293 children were killed in SA in just three months	Jolene Marriah-Maharaj	24 Nov 2023
I-83	Oscar Pistorius's lawyer hopes killer paralympian will be 'home for Christmas' following parole hearing	Se-Anne Rall	23 Nov 2023
I-84	GBV can be eradicated if the country can stop destructive masculine behaviour in its tracks, says founder of NPO 'Father A Nation'	Sameer Naik	23 Nov 2023
I-85	Police hunt for husband after nurse gunned down outside Richards Bay clinic	Se-Anne Rall	23 Nov 2023

Variable	Headline	Journalist	Date
I-86	Violence survey unveils promising trends but increasing number of men are victims of gender-based violence	Lee Rondanger	23 Nov 2023
I-87	Life imprisonment for rape of mentally challenged women	Anelisa Kubheka	22 Nov 2023
I-88	Dismay at bail for man who allegedly killed mom in front of children	Anelisa Kubheka	22 Nov 2023
I-89	Oscar Pistorius could be freed by the weekend	Zelda Venter	22 Nov 2023
I-90	Editorial: Harsher penalty needed for GBV	Opinion	22 Nov 2023
I-91	Lorch gets suspended sentence after being found guilty of assaulting ex-girlfriend	Anita Nkonki	21 Nov 2023
I-92	Bail for dad who allegedly stabbed and killed mom in front of children	Anelisa Kubheka	21 Nov 2023
I-93	New lawyer for high school teacher accused for rape	Anelisa Kubheka	21 Nov 2023
I-94	Court to decide accused child killer's 'criminal capacity'	Chevon Booysen	21 Nov 2023
I-95	Orlando Pirates star Thembinkosi Lorch sentenced after being convicted of assault of ex-girlfriend	Staff reporter	21 Nov 2023
I-96	UWC student accused of attempting to kill his wife had pending rape case	Mandilakhe Tshwete	21 Nov 2023
I-97	Why language matters in the fight against GBV	Opinion	20 Nov 2023
I-98	Pathologist describes manner in which Vredenburg toddlers were killed as overkill	Mahira Duval	18 Nov 2023
I-99	The net is closing on online child sexual predators in South Africa	Ntombi Nkosi	18 Nov 2023
I-100	More than 881 women, 293 children killed in second quarter	Siyabonga Mkhwanazi	17 Nov 2023
I-101	Funeral for woman murdered by husband 3 years ago	Anelisa Kubheka	17 Nov 2023
I-102	GBV in the e-haling sector is a concern	Opinion	15 Nov 2023
I-103	Over 100 cops assaulted their partners in past 3 years - Bheki Cele	Mayibongwe Maqhina	14 Nov 2023
I-04	Parliament calls for multi-pronged approach to GBV after student violently stabs partner in Western Cape	Kailene Pillay	14 Nov 2023
I-105	Married UWC student charged for 'trying to kill' his wife, has a pending rape case	Madilakhe Tshwete	14 Nov 2023
I-106	UWC student accused of attempting to kill his wife had pending rape case	Okuhle Hlati	14 Nov 2023
I-107	This is why GBV cases are not taken seriously in South Africa, fans react to DJ Maphorisa posting Thuli P	Anita Nkonki	14 Nov 2023

Variable	Headline	Journalist	Date
I-108	A unified faith-based response to GBV	Opinion	13 Nov 2023
I-109	UWC suspends student in stabbing attack	Staff reporter	13 Nov 2023
I-110	Minister Nzimande urges Higher Health to implement measures to curb GBV amidst CPUT stabbing	Kamogelo Moichela	13 Nov 2023
I-111	CPUT said it is working with SAPS and NPA after student stabbed in GBV attack	Yasmine Jacobs	13 Nov 2023
I-112	Attacked CPUT student on the mend	Okuhle Hlati	13 Nov 2023
I-113	CPUT students traumatised after man openly stabbed his partner 11 times in front of students	Mandilakhe Tshwete	13 Nov 2023
I-114	Guards' actions against women tenant slammed	Mbali Khanyile	13 Nov 2023
I-115	Two stabbing incidents in Gauteng and Western Cape left South Africans shocked at the brutality	Ntombi Nkosi	13 Nov 2023
I-116	Female CPUT student recovering in hospital after GBV stabbing outside residence	Zintle Mdaka	12 Nov 2023
I-117	Woman survives being shot, robbed and pushed out of vehicle after requesting e-hailing service	Genevieve Serra	12 Nov 2023
I-118	Family reeling after son 'wrongfully' accused of rape dies	Thakasani Khumalo	09 Nov 2023
I-119	Accused killer's ex relives ordeal in court	Chevon Booysen	09 Nov 2023
I-120	Pathologies says performing examinations of slain siblings was upsetting: 'It was overkill'	Mahira Duval	09 Nov 2023
I-121	Survivor of notorious Boland killer speaks in the Western Cape High Court	Mahira Duval	08 Nov 2023
I-122	Vredenburg mom recounts horror murders of her two young children allegedly by her ex	Mahira Duval	07 Nov 2023
I-123	Laaiplek in shock as slain woman discovered near harbour	Chevon Booysen	06 Nov 2023
I-124	Trial of man accused of killing wife allegedly in front of daughter drags on 8 years later	Genevieve Serra	04 Nov 2023
I-125	Farmer accused of attacking a 13-year-old with a rifle gets bail	Mahira Duval	03 Nov 2023
I-126	Man in identikit could help solve case involving knife-wielding alleged rapist	Thobeka Ngema	02 Nov 2023
I-127	Laingsburg cop sentenced to 10 years for raping suspect	Chevon Booysen	02 Nov 2023
I-128	Trial of well-know jazz musician facing rape charges gets delayed, again	Mandilakhe Tshwete	01 Nov 2023
I-129	Child rapist, 67 gets life, 6 years for sexual grooming	Okuhle Hlati	01 Nov 2023

Variable	Headline	Journalist	Date
I-130	Mpumalanga man to spend life behind bars for raping a fifteen-year-old boy	Sibuliso Duba	31 Oct 2023
I-131	Teen found murdered in Steenberg	Mandilakhe Tshwete	31 Oct 2023
I-132	Man arrested for allegedly beating his 21-year old wife to death at Free State farm	Molaole Montsho	30 Oct 2023
I-133	NPA secures conviction in Oscar Pistorius-like Durban murder case	Anelisa Kubheka	29 Oct 2023
I-134	Police arrest-22-year-old neighbour for raping and assaulting elderly women	Sisipho Bhuta	28 Oct 2023
I-135	Two arrested after woman raped at Durban beachfront	Jehran Naidoo	27 Oct 2023
I-136	Dunoon man sentenced for rape and attempted murder after infecting child victim with HIV	Staff reporter	26 Nov 2023
I-137	Arrest warrant issued for man suspected of threatening girl at knifepoint and raping her	Thobeka Ngema	26 Nov 2023
I-138	Man gets two life sentences plus 15 years for killing girlfriend and rape, murder of his child	Zelda Venter	25 Nov 2023
I-139	Accused killer tried to get rid of victims' belongings, court told	Chevon Booysen	25 Nov 2023
I-140	Father slapped with two life sentences and 15 years for rape and murder of daughter and girlfriend	Ntombi Nkosi	24 Oct 2023
I-141	Limpopo man gets three life sentences for raping 12-year-old niece	Sibuliso Duba	23 Oct 2023
I-142	Plettenberg Bay uncle caught red-handed attempting the rape of nephew sentenced	Staff reporter	23 Oct 2023
I-143	Father accused of allegedly raping daughter for 24 years, trial begins nearly 10 months after arrest	Genevieve Serra	21 Oct 2023
I-144	Camps Bay killer happy that his leave to appeal has been granted	Genevieve Serra	21 Oct 2023
I-145	Family fuming after Candice's case is struck off court roll	Athandile Siyo	19 Oct 2023
I-146	Free State man handed 20 years of direct imprisonment for raping a girl	Sibuliso Duba	18 Oct 2023
I-147	Newborn's dead body found on the roadside in Durban	Thobeka Ngema	18 Oct 2023
I-148	13 witnesses to be called in trial for suspected Queensburgh serial rapist	Anelisa Kubheka	18 Oct 2023
I-149	Murderer sentenced to 25 years in prison after killing lover during heated argument	Sisipho Bhuta	18 Oct 2023
I-150	Man sentenced for rape as accomplice escapes arrest	Daily News Reporter	18 Oct 2023
I-151	Gauteng man to spend life behind bars for brutal murder of girlfriend in front of her son	Sibuliso Duba	17 Oct 2023

Variable	Headline	Journalist	Date
I-152	Warrant of arrest issued for porter who allegedly raped psychiatric patient at medical facility	Thobeka Ngema	17 Oct 2023
I-153	WCED records 32 cases of sexual harassment, abuse from January to September	Nomalanga Tshuma	17 Oct 2023
I-154	Man sentenced to life and 43 years imprisonment for rape, robbery, kidnapping and sexual assault	Daily News Reporter	17 Oct 2023
I-155	A 45-year-old Mphumalanga man handed life behind bars for murdering his girlfriend	Sibuliso Duba	16 Oct 2023
I-156	MP Sibusiso Kula's murder case moves regional court	Molaole Montsho	16 Oct 2023
I-157	Man wanted in connection with rape of woman in an uMhlanga hotel	Thobeka Ngema	16 Oct 2023
I-158	Teen, 18, in court over rape of 7-year-old girl	Vukani Langa	15 Oct 2023
N-01	Bhekisisa Mncube | Tackling GBV and dismantling toxic masculinity's grip on men	Bhekisisa Mncube	14 Jan 2024
N-02	Jukulyn: The place called hell where residents are haunted by violence, crime	Abram Mashego	07 Jan 2024
N-03	There'll never be enough justice for Reeva' says June Steenkamp after Pistorius' release	Palesa Dlamini	05 Jan 2024
N-04	The Prison Files: The thought of never apologising to Reeva's parents 'killing' Pistorius inside	Karyn Maughan	05 Jan 2024
N-05	Oscar Pistorius' early release sends the wrong message to victims and perpetrators of GBV	Mbali Mbatha	04 Jan 2024
N-006	ANC chief whip Pemmy Majodina demands answers for Lindiwe Zulu about GBV centre and wasted R100m	Norman Masungwini	20 Dec 2023
N-07	Student accused of Kirsten Kluyts murder admits to stripping her and wearing her clothes	Alex Patrick	18 Dec 2023
N-08	Nicoleen Swart speaks out a year after that awful abuse video went viral	Elri Boucher	15 Dec 2023
N-09	Community on tenterhooks over the murder of Gugulethu CPF chair, Lulama Dinginto	Unathi Obose	14 Dec 2023
N-10	I took her clothes, but did not kill her - Kluyts murder accused	Alex Patrick	13 Dec 2023
N-11	Domestic violence spikes during this time here's how victims can get help	Bonolo Sekudu	13 Dec 2023
N-12	Justice served for Sinathi Mangqazana: Ramba sentenced to life imprisonment	Bianca Du Plessis	13 Dec 2023
N-13	Guglethu CPF deputy chairperson shot and killed in an ambush at her home	Unathi Obose	11 Dec 2023
N-14	How Lindiwe Zulu bungled R100m fund meant to empower survivors of GBV	Norman Masungwini	10 Dec 2023

Variable	Headline	Journalist	Date
N-15	OPINION | Mia Malan and Tanya Pampalone: From Oscar to Diepsloot - why do men become violent?	Mia Malan and Tanya Pampalone	07 Dec 2023
N-16	OPINION | 'A world free from violence': Miss World SA's call for men to join GBV fight	Dr Claude Mmakgaka Mashego	07 Dec 2023
N-17	Gender-based violence activists turn the focus to women working in informal sectors	Promise Marupeng	06 Dec 2023
N-18	Abuse is abuse': Legal expert shares 5 types of abuse and how to spot the signs	Bonolo Sekudu	04 Dec 2023
N-19	Justice still fails Nakita Kalubi months later	EXpress	04 Dec 2023
N-20	Bhekisisa Mncube | Embracing forgiveness and healing in the face of familial abuse	Bhekisisa Mncube	03 Dec 2023
N-21	Public Protector launches probe into the collapse of social development's GBV command centre	Norman Masungwini	01 Dec 2023
N-22	Public Protector probes Ekurhuleni chief police for alleged assault and corruption	Nkululeko Ncana	30 Nov 2023
N-23	Minister Lindiwe Zulu and her deputy face off about the GBV command centre's collapse	Norman Masungwini	30 Nov 2023
N-24	OPINION | How we talk to young boys is key to curbing the GBV scourge in South Africa	Ntombifikile Mtshali	30 Nov 2023
N-25	Gugulethu residents call on government to impose severe penalties on gender-based violence offenders	Unathi Obose	30 Nov 2023
N-26	Detaching myself from his daggers': GBV survivor shares her story of love, abuse and faith through it all	Bashiera Parker	29 Nov 2023
N-27	Pass laws ending gender pay gaps to fight GBV, Ramaphosa tells Africa	Khaya Koko	28 Nov 2023
N-28	Paul Mashatile | We are as culpable as perpetrators of GBV if we remain silent	Paul Mashatile	28 Nov 2023
N-29	UPDATE | Kristen Kluyts murder: Alleged killer trembled in the dock	Alex Patrick	28 Nov 2023
N-30	Cape Town student caught on camera allegedly stabbing wife to undergo mental evaluation	Marvin Charles	27 Nov 2023
N-31	How states's GBV call centre collapsed	Norman Masungwini	26 Nov 2023
N-32	OPINION | Here we go again, 16 Days of Activism? Really!	Bonolo Sekudu	25 Nov 2023
N-33	Njabulo Ngidi | Thembinkosi Lorch's conviction will test SA football's conviction	Njabulo Ngidi	23 Nov 2023
N-34	Thembinkosi Lorch dodges three years in prison for assault on ex-girlfriend	Nompumelelo Magagula	21 Nov 2023
N-35	Cape Town judge tries to shake up law on GBV by protecting property rights of victim's child	Jenni Evans	21 Nov 2023

Variable	Headline	Journalist	Date
N-36	Cape Town student caught on camera allegedly stabbing wife abandons bail bid	Marvin Charles	20 Nov 2023
N-37	Kirsten Kluyts killing: Joburg teacher's attacker put on her clothes before he left running trail	Alex Patrick	20 Nov 2023
N-38	Calls for suspension of GBV perpetrators at universities in wake of CPUT stabbing	Lusalee Solomons	18 Nov 2023
N-39	Nechama Brodie | Paper planes: No safe spaces for South African women	Nechama Brodie	17 Nov 2023
N24_0040	Amanda Gouws | Imagine going for a run and ending up dead	Amanda Gouws	17 Nov 2023
N-41	Nthabi Nhlapo | Women are killed, raped every day in SA and no one is batting a eyelid	Nthabi Nhlapo	17 Nov 2023
N-42	Kristen Kluyts killing: Slain Joburg teacher was raped and strangled to death	Alex Patrick	17 Nov 2023
N-43	CPUT stabbing incident sparks demands for specialised police units on GBV	Thapelo Lekabe	16 Nov 2023
N-44	Joanne Joseph | Turning the toxic tide of violence against women and children	Joanne Joseph	14 Nov 2023
N-45	Melanie Verwoerd | When will South Africa be a place where women are safe and free?	Melanie Verwoerd	14 Nov 2023
N-46	UWC student who stabbed a CPUT student appeared in court for attempted murder	Nielen de Klerk	13 Nov 2023
N-47	There's no place for GBV in our society' - Blade Nzimande, after husband stabs student	Yamkeleka Manjeya	13 Nov 2023
N-48	NGOs speak out against gender-based violence in Khayelitsha, calling community to unite	Unathi Obose	09 Nov 2023
N-49	Soccer supporters slammed for rewarding convicted abuser Thembinkosi Lorch	Njabulo Ngidi	09 Nov 2023
N-50	27th conviction puts man who killed his girlfriend behind bars	Jenni Evans	16 Oct 2023

ADDENDA A:

Ethics approval letter of study as awarded by the NWU Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC) on 23 October 2024. The approval followed a reapplication as the scope of the study was amended.

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Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)

Faculty of Humanities Ethics Office for Research, Training and Support
Tel: 018 285 2457

Email: Erhabor.Idemudia@nwu.ac.za

Senate Committee for Research Ethics
Tel: 016 103 4446
Email: Feziwe.Mseleni@nwu.ac.za

28 October 2024

ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY

Based on approval by the **Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (BaSSREC)** on **23/10/2024**, the Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee hereby **approves** your study as indicated below. This implies that the North-West University Senate Committee for Research Ethics (NWU-SERC) grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: The 16 Days of Activism: Media ethics in news reporting of gender-based violence on News24 and IOL.

Study Leader/Supervisor (Principal Investigator)/Researcher: Dr. T. Swanepoel and Ms. S. Solomons

Student/Research Team: E. A. Jordaan (31775292)

Ethics number:

N	W	U	-	0	0	9	5	6	-	2	4	-	A	7
Institution				Study Number						Year			Status	

Status: S = Submission; R = Re-Submission; P = Provisional Authorisation; A = Authorisation

Application Type: Single study

Commencement date: 23/10/2024 **Risk:** No risk

Expiry date: 23/10/2025

Approval of the study is initially provided for a year, after which continuation of the study is dependent on receipt and review of the annual (or as otherwise stipulated) monitoring report and the concomitant issuing of a letter of continuation.

Special in process conditions of the research for approval (if applicable):

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, the following general terms and conditions will apply:

- *The study leader/supervisor (principal investigator)/researcher must report in the prescribed format to the BaSSREC:*
  - *annually (or as otherwise requested) on the monitoring of the study, whereby a letter of continuation will be provided, and upon completion of the study; and*

- *without any delay in case of any adverse event or incident (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the study.*

- *The approval applies strictly to the proposal as stipulated in the application form. Should any amendments to the proposal be deemed necessary during the course of the study, the study leader/researcher must apply for approval of these amendments at the BaSSREC, prior to implementation. Should there be any deviations from the study proposal without the necessary approval of such amendments, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *Annually a number of studies may be randomly selected for an external audit.*
- *The date of approval indicates the first date that the study may be started.*
- *In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-SCRE and BaSSREC reserves the right to:*
  - *request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;*
  - *to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process;*
  - *withdraw or postpone approval if:*
    - *any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;*
    - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the BaSSREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;*
    - *submission of the annual (or otherwise stipulated) monitoring report, the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and / or*
    - *new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.*
- *BaSSREC can be contacted for further information or any report templates via* BaSSREC-Admin@nwu.ac.za.

The BaSSREC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the BaSSREC or the NWU-SCRE for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Prof E. Idemudia

Chairperson NWU Basic and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Original details: (22351930) C:\Users\22351930\Desktop\ETHICS APPROVAL LETTER OF STUDY.docm
8 November 2018

File reference: 9.1.5.4.2

ADDENDA B:

Language Practice Declaration and Certification

2024-10-16

Document ID: The 16 Days of Activism: media ethics in news reporting of gender-based violence on News24 and IOL

This document is issued to E. A. Jordaan to certify that it has undergone thorough editing and proofreading according to Northwest University's academic standards.

Editor: Cornelia van Biljon
Date of Editing: 15 October 2024 and 23 November 2024

Scope of Language Practice:

The editing process adhered to Northwest University's academic standards, encompassing a meticulous review of language usage, adherence to academic conventions, and refinement of grammatical structure. The aim was to align the document with the university's expectations for scholarly communication. The editing and proofreading processes were designed to enhance the overall quality of the document, focusing on language use, coherence, and clarity.

Confirmation:

I hereby affirm that the edited document (Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3, Chapter 4, Chapter 5) has been brought into conformity with the academic standards prescribed by Northwest University. The language practice undertaking ensures that the document meets the rigorous linguistic and scholarly criteria required by the institution. I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the document returned to the owner has undergone a thorough check for accuracy and conformity. The editing and proofreading processes were diligently conducted to ensure that the document aligns with the specified standards and meets the required criteria. I explicitly state that I do not accept any changes made after the editing process that may affect the quality of the delivered product. Any alterations introduced without my approval post the editing phase are not endorsed and may compromise the accuracy and conformity of the document.

Purpose of Language Practice:

This language practice declaration is provided to certify that the document has been meticulously edited and proofread, aligning with the academic standards of Northwest University. This declaration serves to communicate that the document, in its current state, has been thoroughly reviewed, and any subsequent changes may impact the quality and integrity of the initially delivered product.

In witness whereof, I, Cornelia van Biljon, undersigned, have executed this Language Practice Declaration and Certification on26 November 2024.

Cornelia van Biljon