

The Media and Gender-Based Murders of Women: notes on the cases in Europe and Latin America¹

Patsilí Toledo and Claudia Lagos²

Introduction

Violence against women, especially its most severe form, femicide/feminicide, is caused by many factors, such as social constructs and the symbolic violence of what it means to be a man or a woman in different societies. In contemporary societies, mass media plays a fundamental role in these constructs due both to the content, language and narrative used, and to audience consumption.

This article analyses the connections between gender-based murders of women and the media coverage of these murders, particularly in Europe and Latin America. What effect, if any, does the broadcasting and coverage of murders of women have on the victims and perpetrators, and on society as a whole? What role can or should journalism and the media play in violence against women? Is regulation necessary and/or legitimate?³

I. Female homicide and gender-based violence

Homicide is a serious crime everywhere. It violates an individual's right to life and has terrible consequences for society as a whole, in the form of the suffering which the loss of a loved one causes and the feelings of public insecurity that homicide provokes, which in turn erode social and human capital and undermine community development (Ganpat et al, 2011: 10). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2011) confirmed that there has been a decrease in homicides at global level in the last few decades, but this decrease does not apply to female homicides. While they still represent a minority of total homicides, women are the main victims of domestic or intimate partner violence, crimes which are not decreasing over time⁴. Nearly 40% of women murdered all over the world have died at the hands of their intimate partners (WHO, 2013). Despite the

¹ This article was commissioned by the Heinrich Böll Foundation. The authors thank the foundation for its support, as well as journalist Ricardo Ramírez for his support in the literature review.

² Patsilí Toledo has a PhD in Constitutional Law from the Autonomous University of Barcelona. Claudia Lagos has a Master in Gender Studies from the University of Chile.

³ To this end, articles published over the last five years in specialist journals on communication, journalism studies and gender studies were reviewed. Relevant manuals produced by the industry, professional associations and other bodies related to the prevention of violence against women and human rights in general, both globally and locally, were also taken into consideration. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that the cases mentioned are not exhaustive and they are used to illustrate the objectives of this article as opposed to giving a complete report of this problem. Media representations in fiction and entertainment programmes have not been considered in this article. Nevertheless, their social significance does need to be addressed, particularly fiction programmes (series and soaps) and entertainment (e.g. reality shows) which are very important due to the audience consumption and appropriation/resignification. Future papers should investigate their significance.

⁴ “[I]n contexts of decreasing overall homicide levels, the share of men among all homicide victims gradually decreases over time, while the share of female victims goes up” (UNODC, 2011: 59).

significance of the phenomenon, in many countries information on the relationship between the perpetrator and victim is not recorded, or is only partially recorded (WHO, 2013).

Female homicides have gained more social and media attention in recent decades. From the reporting of cases of disappearance, sexual violence and murders of women in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, the use of the expression feminicide or femicide has been extended in Latin America to refer to gender-based homicides of women, including cases where women are killed by their partners or former partners. These cases, called intimate femicides, make up the majority of female homicides at global level, as indicated by the UNODC.

Europe too, has started to pay more attention to femicides, particularly those committed by partners or former partners, under a variety of official terms: feminicide/femicide, domestic violence, mortal victims of gender-based violence, and male violence against women, among others. Although in the majority of countries there are no regular statistics in this respect, in countries where they have been evaluated, e.g. in Germany, it has been found that half of the women murdered were killed by their partners or former partners⁵. In France, the number of women murdered due to “domestic violence” increased by more than 20% between 2001 and 2012⁶ and in Italy, the feminist organisations that record these deaths have reported a sustained increase in the murders of women in recent years⁷. In Spain, there has been an official record of mortal victims of gender-based violence⁸ since 2003⁹. These records confirm that intimate femicide is usually the corollary of previous violence by partners or former partners against women, i.e. they are not isolated violent incidents. This underlines the role that policies regarding gender-based violence in intimate relationships may have in preventing femicide and protecting women.

In Latin America, women’s organisations from various countries started to record these cases over a decade ago, and in recent years limited official statistics have also been available. While the real situation in the continent is heterogeneous, several countries present alarming rates of femicide/feminicide¹⁰. In general, the number of gender-based female homicides in Latin America

⁵ According to figures from the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) for 2011: of 313 women murdered, 154 died at the hands of their partner or former partner. The report for 2011 (published in 2012) is the first in which the BKA has provided information on the relationship between victim and murderer in homicides.

⁶ Rising from 122 women killed through domestic violence in 2011 to 148 in 2012, according to figures from the Ministry of the Interior published in June 2013.

⁷ Rising from 84 cases in 2005 to 120 in 2011, according to cases reported by the press.

⁸ In Spain, “gender-based violence” is considered to be violence “exercised against women by their present or former spouses or by men with whom they maintain or have maintained analogous affective relations, with or without cohabitation, as an expression of discrimination, the situation of inequality and the power relations prevailing between the sexes” (Art. 1 of Organic Law 1/2004, 28 December, on Comprehensive Protection Measures against Gender-based Violence).

⁹ Statistical information on gender-based violence. Summary of mortal victims. Annual data. Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, Government of Spain. Available at <http://www.msssi.gob.es/ssi/violenciaGJanuary/portalEstadistico/fichaResumen/home.htm> (Accessed on 18 January 2014).

¹⁰ For example, the rates of female homicide in several countries in Central America (such as El Salvador and Guatemala) and some regions of Mexico are around 10 per 100,000 women. In contrast, these rates in countries like Chile and Argentina are lower than 1.4 per 100,000 women.

where the perpetrators were the women's partners is the third highest worldwide, after Southeast Asia and Africa (WHO, 2013).

Regional differences can be explained by the differences in homicide patterns in general and according to the degree of cultural tolerance toward violence against women.

II. The media and violence against women

As when talking about violence against women and the cultural contexts in which it takes place, when referring to the media, it should be noted that there are also major differences between the media systems in different countries and regions (Hallin and Mancini, 2012 and 2004; Waisbord, 2000)¹¹. Certain cultural matrices are particularly important to consider and are central to the subject at hand.

Different television cultures can offer differing narratives and propose disparate visions of society. In this way, the narrativity of the news varies depending on the countries and their cultures: in some European countries, there is no room for the narrative techniques of fiction (music, close-ups, reiteration, melodrama), which are central to the narrative structure of the media in more sensationalist Latin America¹².

The role of the media in the production and reproduction of gender stereotypes, and particularly of gender-based violence, has been a source of concern in feminist studies for many decades (Mattelart, 2003).

This concern has given rise to research into the place of women, and especially violence against them, in areas such as media production processes, gender representations in the media and debates and content in general in the media, among others¹³.

With regard to news production, we can note the low proportion of women working in editorial offices and in high-level editorial positions (IWMF, 2010)¹⁴. Furthermore, various studies demonstrate that hegemonic news values continue to correspond to a male-dominated culture which permeates

¹¹ The main differences are given due to their relationships with political systems (depending on how closely they are positioned to the political parties and the government), with society's intermediary organisations and with commercial and market mechanisms.

¹² A major precursor to popular mass culture sensationalism is the sensationalism of the religious imagery of the Catholic Church, used as an instrument of propaganda (a dramatic/symbolic aesthetic) at a time when the church was losing its power in the Christian world. Later on, the media of the popular mass culture (and particularly the newspapers) would use the same resources to achieve the same effect: appealing to primary instincts (fear, emotion, pain, suffering, joy, etc.) to try to cause sensation, i.e. to make an impact (Sunkel, 1985: 50).

¹³ Since 1995, the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) has been investigating female presence and representation in the news in more than one hundred countries. The results of the 2010 monitoring showed that there has been a sustained increase in the presence of women in the media at global level, but it is nowhere near being equal to men (GMMP, 2010).

¹⁴ As has been documented in other industries, the *glass ceiling* phenomenon can also be confirmed in the media. This concept has been used since the 1980s in studies in different countries, in all regions, to refer to invisible – but nonetheless real – barriers that women come up against in the workplace.

journalistic routines in newsrooms (Tsui and Lee 2012; Zeldes, Fico and Diddi, 2012; Ross and Carter, 2011; Zeldes and Fico, 2010; Vega, 2010a and 2012, cited in CNTV, 2013).

Furthermore, different studies in various countries have noted an over-representation of violence and discrimination against women and girls in news content¹⁵, especially news that is broadcast on television (Rovetto, 2013, on CNTV, 2013: 25).

Possible effects of news coverage of femicide/feminicide:

a) Presenting violence against women as an individual or relationship problem:

Four frames have been identified in the media coverage of femicide/feminicide and violence against women: 1) a police frame or “just the facts”; 2) a frame indicating that these events happen to people who are different to “us”; 3) a frame that blames the victims and/or excuses the perpetrator; 4) a frame that implies shock at how “normal” the perpetrator identified appears (Gillespie et al, 2013).

Police frames or “just the facts” favour a sensationalist view, where gruesome details – such as the number of times that victim was stabbed - or other specific details of the attack are highlighted. This frame is frequent in Latin America but it also exists in Europe¹⁶. The media often refers to jealousy¹⁷ or the use of drugs or alcohol, uncritically justifying the actions of the perpetrator of the crime, or including expressions like “from love to murder” or “crime of passion”, portraying the homicides as “love stories”¹⁸.

¹⁵ This is not to say that the media gives more coverage to these cases than what really occurs, but rather that current news constructs exacerbate certain cases and certain viewpoints, and, as a result, reinforce violence.

¹⁶ “Grenoble. Un homme tue sa femme de neuf coups de couteau” [A man murders his wife by stabbing her nine times] www.ouest-france.fr, 15 November 2013. Available at <http://www.ouest-france.fr/grenoble-un-homme-tue-sa-femme-de-neuf-coups-de-couteau-1714146> (Accessed 18 January 2013).

¹⁷ “Vieux-couple-au-lit Un homme de 83 ans tue sa femme de 80 ans par jalousie” [An 83-year old man kills 80-year old wife out of jealousy], [Direct.cd](http://www.direct.cd), 10 November 2013. Available at <http://www.direct.cd/2013/11/10/un-homme-de-83-ans-tue-sa-femme-de-80-ans-par-jalousie.html> (accessed 18 January 2014). “Après un faux profil facebook: le fiancé jaloux la tue” [Opens a false Facebook account: jealous boyfriend kills], [today.it](http://www.today.it), 28 December 2013. Available at <http://www.today.it/cronaca/nunzio-proscia-omicidio-francesca-milano-gioia-del-colle.html> (accessed 18 January 2014). In Chile, on 26 November 2013, website www.emol.com ran the headline “Detienen a sujeto acusado de violar y embarazar a su hijastra en San Ramón” [Man arrested for raping and impregnating his step-daughter in San Ramón], with the epigraph “El hombre aprovechaba que su pareja iba a trabajar para mantener relaciones sexuales con la adolescente, las que habrían sido consentidas” [The man waited for his partner to go out to work to have sexual relations with the teenager, which were consensual], which was a contradiction considering that this situation constitutes rape in Chilean legislation. Shortly after its publication, the site changed the epigraph, removing the last phrase. Available at <http://www.emol.com/noticias/nacional/2013/11/26/631662/detienen-a-sujeto-acusado-de-violar-y-embarazar-a-su-hijastra-en-san-ramon.html> (accessed 20 January 2014). Also in Chile, on 6 November 2013, *Las Últimas Noticias* ran on the front page “La triste confesión del marido de la cajera perdida” [The sad confession of the missing cashier’s husband] about the case of a cruel femicide. The newspaper was accused by women’s organisations of advocating violence. Available at <http://www.cooperativa.cl/noticias/pais/mujer/observatorio-de-genero-y-equidad-acusa-a-diario-de-apologia-a-la-violencia/2013-11-07/101523.html> (accessed 20 January 2014). In Spain, in November 2013, a television station illustrated with a meat mincer the dismemberment of a woman, news that was described as sensationalist, humiliating, offensive, morbid and distasteful by several organisations. Available at http://www.huffingtonpost.es/2013/11/13/descuartizamiento-mujer-toledo_n_4264884.html (accessed 20 January 2014).

¹⁸ “Sursis pour un mari qui a tué sa femme malade d’Alzheimer” [Suspended sentence for a man that killed his wife who had Alzheimer’s disease], *Le Figaro*, 20 June 2012. Available at <http://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/2012/06/20/01016-20120620ARTFIG00440-alzheimer-le-meurtre-d-un-mari-desespere.php> (accessed 20 January 2014).

These frames maintain a critical disconnection between femicides/feminicides, presented as isolated, individual cases, and domestic violence as a broader social problem (Gillespie et al, 2013). A recent study carried out in Sweden shows that the majority of news studied describes violence as the result of imbalances in the family system, placing the focus of the problem at individual level, which prevents violence being considered a social problem (Halili, 2013).

In Italy, feminist organisations recently reported the inappropriate treatment in the press of femicide/feminicide cases, for instance, cases that are described as family tragedies and not as violence against women, or that indicate depression due to the loss of a job as a justification, or that insist on interviewing neighbours only to show that the murderer was a good man¹⁹.

In the United Kingdom, as a result of the Leveson investigation²⁰, various women's organisations presented information on news coverage of violence against women in 2012 described as either "intrusive, inaccurate, which misrepresented or which were misogynistic, victim-blaming or condoning of VAWG", giving several examples²¹.

b) *The copy-cat effect*

A particularly significant aspect in the field of mass communication research is whether the media can affect individuals' behaviour. There is evidence that this has occurred in cases of youth suicide (Malmuth and Briere, 1986).

The *copy-cat* effect is mentioned in various reports in relation to cases of women burned with acid in countries like Bangladesh, India and Cambodia, where it is maintained that the increase in cases of women burned in this way may be due to the *copycat* effect (Kalantry and Kestenbaum, 2011: 10).

The case of Cambodia is of special interest: on 5 December 1999, singer Tat Marina was attacked with acid and the case was highly publicised²². Before this case, the number of acid attacks recorded was relatively low, but since then there has been a sharp increase in these types of attacks (Kalantry and Kestenbaum, 2011). Between December 1999 and May 2000, there were 15 attacks, six of which also took place in December (LICADHO, 2003: 5). The Tat Marina case stirred up great media attention as did the fact that the alleged perpetrator and accomplices were not arrested or sentenced. While it is possible that the number of cases of women burned has not increased and that it is just that the media has shown more interest in reporting each case, it is also possible that the

¹⁹ "Il "Corriere della Sera" non conosce il femminicidio né le sue cause", published in blog *Un altro genere di comunicazione*, 2 January 2014. Available at <http://comunicazionedi genere.wordpress.com/category/cronaca-2/femminicidio-cronaca/> (Accessed 20 January 2014).

²⁰ The investigation of the House of Lords, headed by Lord Leveson, took place after confirming that journalists and high executives had been bugging the phones of victims of violent crimes and bribing police to "get information". The investigation concluded with the Leveson Inquiry into the Culture, Practices and Ethics of the Press, published in November 2012.

²¹ "End Violence Against Women Coalition, Final Submission to the Leveson Inquiry", January 2012. Available at: <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/End-Violence-Against-Women-Coalition-Submission.pdf> (Accessed 18 January 2014).

²² "Acid-Laced Vengeance", *The Cambodia Daily WEEKEND*, 5-6 February 2000. Available at http://www.camnet.com.kh/cambodia.daily/selected_features/acid_laced_vengeance.htm (Accessed 18 January 2014).

Marina case contributed to the increase in attacks, in the sense that more people might think that throwing acid was not a crime that would be punished by law and would therefore end in impunity (LICADHO, 2003: 6). Concern that media coverage of these cases may lead to other acts of violence is also present in countries like Uganda (Acid Survivors' Foundation Uganda, 2011: 16).

In Spain, the risk of a possible *copy-cat* effect was brought into debate especially by forensic doctor Miguel Lorente²³, who stated that seeing a violent reality confirmed may encourage many perpetrators and fuel the fear that many abused women experience (Lorente, 2010: 19). Aware that men only consider homicide as a last resort, probably when violence does not have a controlling effect, he stated that seeing how another man had killed his wife in the media could reinforce his decision to commit the crime as he would be able to find aspects in common and identify with the feelings.

A study carried out in relation to media news on cases of intimate partner femicide in Spain allows us to identify a certain *copy-cat* effect when we compare the days when there are news on femicide cases and days that there are not. The conclusion is that televised news on cases of intimate partner femicides would appear to increase the possibility of death by femicide by between 32% and 42% (Vives, Torrubiano and Álvarez, 2009).

One case that proved the *copy-cat* effect in Latin America in recent years was the case of Wanda Taddei in Argentina. In Buenos Aires, on 10 February 2010, Wanda Taddei suffered serious burns caused by alcohol set alight by her husband, Eduardo Vázquez. She died after 11 days of agony and Vázquez remained at liberty until 4 November of the same year, because for months the justice believed his version that it was a domestic accident. On 14 June 2012, Eduardo Vázquez was sentenced to 18 years in prison for the crime.

The case had huge media coverage due to both the cruelty of the attack and because Eduardo Vázquez was a member of a rock band involved in a nightclub fire where nearly 200 people had died in 2004 for which all the band members were declared responsible and sentenced in 2012²⁴. As a result, the case was talked about extensively in news programmes and magazine shows.

According to the reports of the “La Casa del Encuentro” organisation²⁵, there has been an increase in the number of femicide cases in Argentina in recent years, reaching a peak in 2011. Furthermore, the number of cases where women are set alight have become more common since 2010, when Wanda Taddei was murdered, rising from 2.6% of the total number of femicides in 2009 (6 women set alight) to reach 10.28% of cases in 2011 (29 women set alight).

²³ Lorente was the Government's Delegate for Gender-Based Violence in the already disappeared Ministry of Equality in Spain.

²⁴ While the sentence of the Court of First Instance acquitted the band members (who had thrown a flare into the crowd), in April 2011 the Court of Cassation revoked the sentence, convicting all the members as necessary participants of the fire. On 17 October 2012, the Criminal Court of Cassation confirmed the conviction and ordered the sentence to be carried out.

²⁵ The lack of official statistics on femicide has led the women's movement in various Latin American countries to implement systems to record these crimes. In Argentina, these records have been carried out by the organisation “La Casa del Encuentro” since 2008.

Since Wanda Taddei's death in 2010 until the first half of 2013, 66 women have been burnt to death in Argentina²⁶. However, in addition to these cases of femicide, there have also been numerous cases of women attacked with fire: in the three years following the death of Wanda Taddei, 132 women were set on fire by men in Argentina, and nearly half of these women died²⁷.

By September 2010, women's organisations²⁸ and some media were already warning about a repeat pattern in attacks on women and the far lower media interest in those other cases²⁹. Reference to the "Wanda Taddei effect" is currently generalised at media level in Argentina to refer to the multiplication of femicide cases committed by burning since that case³⁰.

c) Increase of fear in women

The connection between violent narratives in the media and fear of crime has been studied in recent years and is the major focus of the *cultivation theory* (Morgan and Shanahan, 2010, cited by Custers and Van den Bluck, 2013: 99). The cultivation theory understands that the representation of crime and violence in the media may constitute a threat to democracy, as frightened people are more dependent, and more easily manipulated and controlled.

The media plays an important role in the level of fear of crime in general, and in particular in women. The press tends to over-represent women as victims (Greer, 2003; Reiner et al, 2003; Peelo et al, 2004, Custers and Van den Bluck, 2013) and homicides are more often reported in the press when the homicide victims are women (Peelo et al, 2004). News that focuses on the body of women who suffer gender-based violence is built on the concept of victims that need protection and assistance, and women from other cultures are linked to prostitution and gender-based violence (Martínez-Lirola, 2010, on CNTV, 2013: 25).

²⁶ "Efecto Wanda, son 66 las mujeres que murieron quemadas luego de Wanda Taddei" [Wanda Effect, 66 women have been burnt to death since Wanda Taddei], *Sala de Prensa*, 11 July 2013. Available at <http://www.saladeprensa.net/inf/efecto-wanda-son-66-las-mujeres-que-murieron-quemadas-luego-de-wanda-taddei/> (accessed 18 January 2014).

²⁷ From 10 February 2010 to 10 February 2013. "Desde la muerte de Wanda Taddei hubo 132 mujeres quemadas" [Since the death of Wanda Taddei, 132 women have been set on fire], *El Tribuno Salta*, 16 February 2013. Available at <http://www.tribuno.info/salta/252481-Desde-la-muerte-de-Wanda-Taddei-hubo-132-mujeres-quemadas.note.aspx> (accessed 18 January 2014).

²⁸ See "La muerte de Wanda Taddei, y la impunidad" [The death of Wanda Taddei and impunity], http://www.lacasadelencontro.com.ar/descargas/wanda_taddei.pdf (accessed 18 January 2014).

²⁹ "Mujeres quemadas" [Women set on fire], *Page 12*, 25 September 2010. Available at <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/sociedad/3-153788-2010-09-25.html> (accessed 18 January 2014).

³⁰ "Una grave forma de violencia que crece desde el caso Taddei" [A serious form of violence that has been growing since the Taddei case], *Elclarin.com*, 4 February 2011. Available at http://www.clarin.com/sociedad/grave-forma-violencia-crece-Taddei_0_421157984.html (accessed 18 January 2014); "Efecto Wanda", son 66 las mujeres que murieron quemadas luego de Wanda Taddei [Wanda Effect, 66 women have been burnt to death since Wanda Taddei], *Sala de Prensa*, 11 July 2013. Available at <http://www.saladeprensa.net/inf/efecto-wanda-son-66-las-mujeres-que-murieron-quemadas-luego-de-wanda-taddei/> (accessed 18 January 2014).

It is necessary to recognise that “violence against women and girls is both an extreme manifestation of gender inequality and discrimination and a deadly tool used to maintain women’s subordinate status” (UN Women, 2011: 32). In this way, fear of becoming a victim of violence, often fuelled by the press³¹, is a mechanism that contributes to ensuring the subordination of women.

d) Protective effect

The news has also been found to provide a protective effect when it focuses on initiatives against violence towards women and femicide (related to laws, statements from and interviews with politicians and key figures in the field of violence against women, or public acts that condemn this type of crime) instead of focusing on the crimes themselves. In the case of Spain, this effect was noted during the period when there was an increase in this type of news due to the passing of a new law on violence against women while the study was being carried out. (Vives, Torrubiano and Álvarez, 2009).

Similarly, when the Law to Penalise Violence against Women was passed in 2007 in Costa Rica, there was a significant drop in the number of femicide cases, nearly half that of previous years, which can only be explained by the entry into force of the Law and the extensive media attention it received³².

III. Regulatory and self-regulatory proposals

With regard to regulatory aspects, various international instruments – such as the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belem do Pará)³³, the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action³⁴ and the Convention of Istanbul, at European level³⁵- have stressed the need for guidelines related to the treatment of violence against women in the media in order to contribute to its prevention and eradication.

³¹ For example, in a study of Belgian media and its audience, an indirect link between watching television and a fear of sexual violence is detected (Custers and Van den Bluck, 2013). However, it is necessary to consider the cultural contexts in each case, as it is likely that programmes and content that provoke fear in one country or society will not necessarily provoke it in another.

³² Nevertheless, this effect was lost later on when it was seen that the Law was not being applied (Sylvia Mesa, researcher at the Research Centre for Women’s Studies, University of Costa Rica, personal communication, 1 November 2010)

³³ Article 8, Letter G, states that states shall undertake all measures likely to “encourage the communications media to develop appropriate media guidelines in order to contribute to the eradication of violence against women in all its forms, and to enhance respect for the dignity of women”

³⁴ Section J on “Women and Media” states that the media can contribute to the advancement of women and that the majority of communications media do not offer a balanced image of women and promote violent content.

³⁵ Article 11 states: The Parties shall encourage the private sector, the ICT sector and the media, respecting their independence and freedom of expression, to participate in the development and application of policies, as well as to establish self-regulatory guidelines and norms to prevent violence against women and to reinforce respect for their dignity.

In national legislation, however, laws do not expressly lay down how the media should address news on violence against women. In some laws regarding the press as well as in initiatives under discussion³⁶, there are related general provisions to prevent discriminatory content³⁷ or content that incites discrimination based, among others, on gender.³⁸ Additionally, some national laws on violence against women include general references to the role of the media³⁹.

The Spanish Law on Gender-based Violence has been more specific – possibly due to cases where the media has played a role in triggering attacks on women⁴⁰-, and it states that “reports concerning violence against women, within the requirements of journalistic objectivity, shall do the utmost to defend human rights and the freedom and dignity of the female victims of gender violence and their children. In particular, they shall take special care in the graphic treatment of such items”⁴¹.

These regulations, however, do not impose direct obligations on the press which, under the principle of freedom of expression and press freedom, is subject only to the self-regulation of professional camera people, of business associations and specific media. In the case of Spain, for example, legal regulations have resulted in the creation of media observatories in some autonomous

³⁶ In recent years, concern for the representations of minority groups and social problems, such as women and violence against them, has been included within the framework of the discussion on comprehensive reforms to the communications systems in various countries. Some examples under discussion are those in Uruguay and Brazil, in the Southern Cone.

In Uruguay, a draft bill for Audiovisual Communication Services (Servicios de Comunicación Audiovisual) has been under discussion for nearly a year, which includes a mandate to not promote gender-based stereotypes, a proposal for protected time slots (Art. 31) and the use of precaution in advertising (Art. 32) (See http://www.ifex.org/uruguay/2013/07/17/model_for_lat_am/es/). Likewise, in Brazil, a draft bill for Democratic Media (Lei da Mídia Democrática) is under discussion, which aims to regulate some articles of the 1988 Constitution to guarantee diversity and plurality in the media, preventing monopolistic or oligopolistic opportunities. Social organisations that promote social participation on the subject, for example, include guaranteeing non-discrimination based on gender as one of their primary concerns. (See <http://www.paraexpressaraliberdade.org.br/index.php/2013-04-30-15-58-11>)

³⁷ In recent years, reforms in various countries have been implemented in the field of broadcasting and telecommunications, particularly radio and television, which require certain levels of respect for all social actors, irrespective of gender, race, social condition or religion. These regulations are based on the public good and scarce radio spectrum.

³⁸ In Argentina, Law No. 26,522 on Audiovisual Communication Services; the *Communication Act* 2003 in the United Kingdom,

³⁹ In Argentina, Law 26,485 on Comprehensive Protection for Women establishes obligations for different public bodies, including the Secretariat for Communications Media of the Presidency (Secretaría de Medios de Comunicación de la Nación). These obligations exist to prompt the broadcast of ongoing campaigns and messages of sensitisation and awareness on the right of women to live a life free of violence, promoting respect for the human rights of women and the treatment of violence from a gender perspective in the mass media, encouraging the elimination of sexism in the news, etc. In addition, Article 8 of the Maria da Penha Law (2006) includes that social media are to avoid stereotypical roles that legitimise or exacerbate domestic and family violence among the guidelines for comprehensive protection measures.

⁴⁰ The case of Ana Orantes, who in 1997 reported the violence that she was suffering at the hands of her partner on a television programme and was subsequently murdered by her ex-husband thirteen days later, was followed by other comparable cases in 1998, 1999 and 2007. (Source: <http://www.lavozdegalicia.es/espana/2007/11/22/00031195735083733946925.htm>, accessed 20 January 2014). Similarly, in Peru in September 2012, Ruth Thalía Sayas was murdered by her former partner who said that he felt humiliated that she had broadcast on the television programme *El valor de la verdad* that she had cheated on him. Available at <http://peru21.pe/actualidad/confesion-asesino-ruth-thalia-sayas-drogue-y-mate-golpes-2043589>

⁴¹ Article 14 of Spanish Organic Law 1/2004.

regions, news writing guidelines and recommendations on the treatment of gender-based violence in the media⁴². These mechanisms depend, however, on the willingness of the media itself to apply the guidelines. For example, the annual reports of the Asociación de Mujeres Periodistas de Cataluña [Association of Women Journalists of Catalonia] show that the media persists in presenting cases of gender-based violence from a merely “informative” perspective, with little contextualising and an excessive use of adjectives that only seek to further dramatise the facts⁴³.

At international level, various bodies have developed minimum standards to address the production of content and development of cultural industries from a gender perspective. In this regard, national and international guides have been prepared with suggestions on how to produce content with a gender perspective, to avoid stereotypes and to extend the type and number of specialised news sources that the media usually uses (IFJ, s/f; Alberti et al, 2010). There are also projects within the media itself⁴⁴ that have driven gender policies, which include style guides (IPS, 2010; RTVE, 2002)⁴⁵.

For example, in the case of *Radio y Televisión Española*, there is a full section with recommendations on how to cover issues related to violence against women. Among others, it includes respecting the victim’s identity and pain, identifying the perpetrator, not confusing morbid curiosity with social interest, taking special care in the use of sources and the use of adjectives and providing useful information⁴⁶. In the case of Inter Press Service, a global news agency, it has a section specially dedicated to covering gender-based violence⁴⁷, as well as a style guide and a glossary of terms on gender, development and equity which now has various editions⁴⁸.

UNESCO has also promoted actions to encourage this debate and to implement actions on different levels, in association with various stakeholders. In December 2013, the *Global Forum on Media Gender*⁴⁹ was held in Bangkok, as part of the Global Alliance for Media and Gender.

These tools, however, face some obstacles: they are often international, local or association regulations promoted without the participation of the media and/or media professionals, which leads to low level of uptake: compliance monitoring is non-existent or poor and they lack specific regulatory entities.

⁴² For example, the Consell de l’Audiovisual de Catalunya, *Recomendaciones sobre el tratamiento de la violencia machista en los medios de comunicación* [Catalan Broadcasting Council, Recommendations on the treatment of male violence in the media] (November 2009).

⁴³ The 2012 report is available at http://www.adpc.cat/new_site/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2012_AnalisiViolencia.pdf

⁴⁴ International agencies, such as Inter Press Service, or publicly-owned such as Radio y Televisión Española or the BBC (*Editorial Guidelines*, Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/>, accessed 20 January 2014).

⁴⁵ The style guide of Radio y Televisión Española (RTVE) is available online at <http://manualdeestilo.rtve.es/> (accessed 19 January 2014).

⁴⁶ Point 5.5., available at <http://manualdeestilo.rtve.es/cuestiones-sensibles/5-5-tratamiento-de-la-violencia-contra-las-mujeres/> (accessed 20 January 2014).

⁴⁷ Available at <http://www.ipsnews.net/news/gender/gender-violence/>

⁴⁸ “Domestic violence”, “Gender-based violence”, “Rape”, “Sexual assault”, “Violence against women” (IPS, 2010: 25, 35, 52, 56, 64)

⁴⁹ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/crosscutting-priorities/gender-and-media/global-forum-on-media-and-gender/homepage/>

In terms of self-regulation, it is important to point out that the business associations that make up the media, for example, as well as professional journalist and communicators associations have formulated codes of news ethics and treatment. Furthermore, there are projects in relation to media or in particular media group style guides⁵⁰. In general, these refer to issues regarding sources, sensationalism, violence and sexual crimes and minimum standards (of the least damaging possible, for example, or respect to victims) which are relevant to covering violence against women and femicide (Taufic, 2004).

One of the problems of codes of ethics and style guides, however, is that in some countries these are not made public and have restricted access. Therefore, it is not possible to know the commitment of the media to its audience, thereby hindering the monitoring of the role of the media and journalists⁵¹.

To the above-mentioned, we must add that various professional organisations and women's organisations have edited and promoted news coverage guides in these matters (Alberti et al, 2010; PAR, 2008; IJF, s/f)⁵². Nevertheless, the impact and specific application of the guides is unknown and depends on the culture of *accountability* of the media industry in each specific society, as well as its journalistic culture.

III. Conclusions

Media coverage of violence against women and femicide/feminicide is one of a multiplicity of social factors that affect these phenomena. Although it is difficult to conclusively determine the extent of the effect or how it relates to other factors, its impact is nonetheless undeniable.

The studies analysed in this document at least enable us to establish that media coverage in these cases can have an impact on violence against women. This may occur in cases where, added to other factors, the media can influence potential perpetrators, women – the potential victims of violence – and society as a whole, through both male and female symbolic constructs as well as constructs regarding the relationships between men and women, thereby possibly contributing to consolidate a higher or lower tolerance to violence against women.

⁵⁰ Such as the above mentioned RTVE, BBC and IPS. The following also have similar texts: El País, the EFE agency, The Guardian, The Daily Telegraph, Público, The Associated Press, Reuters, La Prensa de Panamá, O Estado de Sao Paulo, El Comercio de Perú, among many others.

⁵¹ This occurs in Chile, for example.

⁵² In Chile, the Association of Journalists (Colegio de Periodistas) approved the establishment of a special commission to address the type of language that the media uses in femicide cases and in particular the treatment of images of women. In Colombia, one of the training organisations which seeks to improve the quality of journalism in the continent is the Foundation for a New Approach to Journalism in Ibero-America (Fundación para un Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano). Under its strategic development plan, it has included objectives with a gender perspective both in its institutional tasks and in the training of journalists in the continent, which is its main work programme in the region.

With regard to the obligations of states to prevent and eradicate violence against women, the influence of the media, even if it is relative, needs to be taken into consideration, and therefore the mechanisms that promote and favour appropriate information must be consolidated.

With regard to mass media, good practices need to be promoted that contribute to improving quality standards when covering violence against women, coherent with corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies which are slowly being incorporated at global level.

With regard to the press, journalists and communicators, high ethical and professional standards need to be put into practice when covering violence against women. For both the media and the press, these ethical, professional and social responsibility challenges need to be included in association and institutional instruments that provide guides to address this problem which, as we have seen, has an enormous impact on women's rights and public health at global level.

Even though these instruments such as legislation, guides, directives and guidelines exist to a greater or lesser extent in both Latin American and European countries, it is essential **that they have the appropriate mechanisms to ensure their effectiveness**. Communication channels and monitoring devices are necessary so that these frameworks first reach those who have to implement them, and then are complied with. This means that the media and press themselves have to be involved, both in their own specialist media and in their professional associations. Additionally, civil society actors can supervise the international and legal obligations and/or agreements examined here.

More progress is needed in the debate, formulation and dissemination of these types of legal (obligatory) or editorial and ethical guidelines. Finally, it is essential that the gender perspective, especially raising awareness of violence against women, is included in graduate and post-graduate journalism and communications courses. In these areas, however, there is still a long way to go.

IV. References

- Alberti, G., Lagos, C., Maluenda, M. T., Uragna, V. (2010) *Por un periodismo no sexista: Pautas para comunicar desde una perspectiva de género en Chile* [Towards non-sexist journalism: Guidelines for communicating from a gender perspective in Chile], OREALC-UNESCO: Santiago de Chile.
- Anastasio, Phyllis and Diana Costa (2004) "Twice hurt: How newspaper coverage may reduce empathy and engender blame for female victims of crime", in *Sex Roles*, Vol. 51, No. 9/10, p. 535-542.
- Ganpat, Soenita; Granath, Sven; Hagstedt, Johanna; Kivivuori, Janne; Lehti, Martti; Liem, Marieke and Nieuwbeerta, Paul (2011). *Homicide in Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden. A First Study on the European Homicide Monitor Data*. Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, National Research Institute of Legal Policy and Institute for Criminal Law and Criminology at Leiden University.

- Gillespie, Lana; Tara Richards, Eugena Givens and Dwayne Smith (2013) "Framing Deadly domestic violence: why the media's spin matters in newspaper coverage of femicide", in *Violence against women*, Vol. 19, No. 22, p. 222-245.
- HALLIN, Daniel and MANCINI, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2004.
- HALLIN, Daniel and MANCINI, Paolo, *Comparing Media Systems Beyond the Western World*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2012.
- HALLIN, Daniel and PAPATHANASSOPOULOS, Stylianos, "Political clientelism and the media: southern Europe and Latin America in comparative perspective", in *Media Culture & Society*, vol. 24, No. 2, 2002, p. 175-195.
- HAMPTON, Mark, "Media studies International Women's Media Foundation [IWMF] (2010). *Global report on the status of Women in the News Media*, International Women's Media Foundation. Washington D.C.: IWMF.
- Lorente, Miguel (2010). *Violencia de género: Cuándo y cuánto* [Gender violence: When and how much]. In: Fernández Arribas, Javier and Noblejas, Myriam, *Cómo informar sobre violencia contra la mujer en las relaciones de pareja* [How to report on violence against women in intimate relationships]. Spain, 2010, p. 19. Available at <http://www.apmadrid.es/images/stories/Violencia%20contra%20la%20mujer%20Web.pdf>
- Malamuth, Neil and John Briere (1986) "Sexual violence in the Media: indirect effects on aggression against women", in *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 42, No. 3, p. 75-92.
- Mattelart, M. (2003-2004). *Femmes et medias. Retour sur une problématique*. Réseaux, 120, 23-51.
- MELLADO, C. & LAGOS, C., (2013) "Redefining comparative analyses of media systems from the perspective of new democracies", *Communication & Society/Comunicación and*
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2011), *Global Study on Homicide 2011*. Trends, contexts, data.
- Global Media Monitoring Project [GMMP] (2010). *Who makes the news? 2010 Report*, 2010 Global Media Monitoring Project, World Association for Christian Communication. Accessed 25 September 2013 at http://www.whomakesthenews.org/images/reports_2010/global/gmmp_global_report_es.pdf
- Sociedad, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2013, p. 1-24.
- Sunkel, G. (1985). *Razón y pasión en la prensa popular. Un estudio sobre la cultura popular, cultura de masas y cultura política* [Reason and passion in the popular press. A study about popular culture, mass culture and political culture]. Santiago de Chile, ILET.
- Vives, C., Torrubiano, J. y Álvarez, C. (2009) *The effect of television news items on intimate partner violence murders*, *European Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 19, No. 6, 592–596.
- WAISBORD, Silvio, *Watchdog Journalism in South America: News, Accountability and Democracy*, Columbia University Press, NY, 2000.
- WHO World Health Organization (2013) *Global and regional estimates of violence against women: prevalence and health effects of intimate partner violence and non-partner sexual violence*. WHO, Switzerland.

Halili, Jennie (2013) Relationsbråk eller samhällsproblem - En kritisk diskursanalys av hur nyhetsmedia skildrar mäns våld mot kvinnor. Thesis at Gothenburg University, Göteborgs Universitet / Institutionen för Socialt Arbete.

AN INQUIRY INTO THE CULTURE, PRACTICES AND ETHICS OF THE PRESS REPORT

The Right Honourable Lord Justice Leveson November 2012

Kalantry, Sital and Kestenbaum, Jocelyn Getgen, "Combating Acid Violence in Bangladesh, India, and Cambodia" (2011). Avon Global Center for Women and Justice and Dorothea S. Clarke Program in Feminist Jurisprudence. Paper 1. http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/avon_clarke/1

Cambodian League for the Promotion of Human Rights (LICADHO), (2003) Living in the Shadows: Acid attacks in Cambodia, p. 5. <http://www.licadho-cambodia.org/reports/files/41acid%20report%20English.pdf>

Acid Survivors' Foundation Uganda (2011), Acid Violence in Uganda. A Situational Analysis, p. 16; http://www.acidviolence.org/uploads/files/Uganda_ASFU_Situational_Analysis_Report_FINAL_Nov2011_1.pdf

Sala de Prensa, 11/07/2013, "Efecto Wanda", son 66 las mujeres que murieron quemadas luego de Wanda Taddei, ["Wanda Effect", 66 women have been burnt to death since Wanda Taddei] <http://www.saladeprensa.net/inf/efecto-wanda-son-66-las-mujeres-que-murieron-quemadas-luego-de-wanda-taddei/>

La Casa del Encuentro (organisation) (2010), La muerte de Wanda Taddei y la impunidad, [The death of Wanda Taddei and impunity], http://www.lacasadelencontro.com.ar/descargas/wanda_taddei.pdf

UN Women, Progress of the World's Women 2011-2012: In Pursuit of Justice (2011), p. 32. <http://progress.unwomen.org/pdfs/SP-Report-Progress.pdf>

IPS <http://www.ips.org/mdg3/GenderandDevelopmentGlossary>.