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Zimbabwe media's coverage of 16 Days of Activism
campaign Against Gender-Based Violence

Media reports the tip of an iceberg

February 2012

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Introduction

ACCORDING to Care, a leading humanitarian organisation fighting global poverty, violence against women and girls is one of the most widespread but least recognised human rights abuses in the world. While the frequency of gender-based violence (GBV) varies with location, the World Health Organisation (WHO) 2005 Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women, states that globally, one out of three women will be beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime with rates reaching 70 percent in some countries (Care 2010)¹.

This finding is in line with an earlier study by researchers Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller (1999), *'Ending Violence Against Women'*², which shows that at least one in three of the world's female population has been physically or sexually abused at some time in her life.

There is no single definition or form of GBV. The term is widely used as a synonym for violence perpetrated by males against females.

The Interagency Gender Working Group³ – a network that promotes gender equity – says the violence may take many forms, such as sexual abuse, physical violence, emotional or psychological abuse, verbal abuse, or beatings during pregnancy.

In its 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women⁴, the world governing body, the UN, defines GBV in Article 1 as ***"Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."***

Further, Article 2 of the Declaration posits that the definition should incorporate and not be limited to acts of physical, sexual and psychological violence in the family, community, or perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs. These acts include: spousal battery; sexual abuse,

¹ WHO, 2005. *Multi-country study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women* in: Care, 2010. *Bringing an End to Gender Based Violence*, retrieved from http://www.care.org/get_involved/advocacy/pdfs/policybrief_genderbasedviolence.pdf

² Heise, L., M. Ellsberg, and M. Gottemoeller. 1999. *"Ending Violence Against Women."* *Population Reports*. Series L. No. 11. Baltimore, Maryland: Population Information Program, Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.

³ Interagency Gender Working Group of USAID. 2006. *Addressing GBV through USAID's Health Programmes: A guide for Health Sector Programme Officers*. www.prb.org/igwg_media/GBVGuide08_English.pdf (Accessed 30/11/11).

⁴ UNFPA. 2005. *The Promise of Equality: Gender Equity, Reproductive Health and Millennium Development Goals*. New York: UNFPA.

including of female children; dowry-related violence; rape, including marital rape; female genital mutilation/cutting, and other practices harmful to women; non-spousal violence; sexual violence related to exploitation; sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in school and elsewhere; trafficking in women; and forced prostitution.

The 1995 Beijing Platform for Action expands this UN definition.

It clearly identifies violence against women as including violations of the rights of women in situations of armed conflict, including systematic rape, sexual slavery and forced pregnancy; forced sterilization, forced abortion, coerced or forced use of contraceptives; prenatal sex selection and female infanticide. It also recognizes the particular vulnerabilities of women belonging to minorities: the elderly and the displaced; indigenous, refugee and migrant communities; the disabled; women living in impoverished rural or remote areas, or in detention.

Thus, the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence became one of several initiatives, mainly by feminists, to raise awareness and eliminate GBV in the world. It came out of the Global Campaign for Women's human rights.

In June 1991 the Centre for Women's Global Leadership with participants from the first Women's Global Institute on Women, Violence and Human Rights (a forum involving 23 women from 20 countries) called for a Global Campaign of 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence from November 25 to December 10 in order to symbolically link violence against women and human rights, and to emphasize that such violence is a violation of human rights⁵.

Notably, the campaign period encompasses four significant dates:

- The International Day Against Violence Against Women (November 25);
- World AIDS Day (December 1);
- December 6, The Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre (when 14 women engineering students were gunned down for being feminists; and
- December 10 – Human Rights Day.

Since then, activists at the local, national, regional and international levels have observed the campaign every year globally, including in Zimbabwe.

In commemoration of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, MMPZ assessed how Zimbabwe's mainstream media fared in raising awareness of GBV as a serious human rights violation and how they contributed to keeping it on the agenda of the country's authorities and policy makers.

⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2005. *16 Days of activism against gender violence*. Available at: www2.ohchr.org/english/events/16_days/index.htm (Accessed 25/11/11)

Legislative framework in Zimbabwe

IN 2007 the Zimbabwean government passed into law the Domestic Violence Act which was hailed as a progressive step in providing remedies, and ensuring stronger legal enforcement, against GBV. The aim of the law is basically to provide relief and ensure protection for survivors of domestic violence, as well as long-term measures for the prevention of domestic violence. Various forms of abuse against women are clearly defined crimes in the law, including emotional, verbal and psychological abuse; economic abuse; intimidation; harassment and stalking. The law also outlaws forced virginity testing; female genital mutilation; pledging of women or girls for purposes of appeasing spirits; forced marriages; child marriages; forced wife inheritance and sexual intercourse between fathers-in-law and newly married daughters-in-law.

In 2009, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development launched the Anti-domestic Violence Council in terms of Section 16 of the Domestic Violence Act. The council, which comprises representatives of the judiciary, religious and NGO sectors among others, was mandated to monitor the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act in Zimbabwe⁶.

In addition, the Gender Ministry also attempted to transform the annual 16 Days of Activism into a continuous, all-year campaign in order to intensify efforts to eradicate GBV⁷.

Scope of the report and Methodology

THE research covers the period from November 25, 2011 (when the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV kicked off) to December 10 2011, when the campaign ended. Zimbabwe's mainstream media were monitored, both private and public media. See Fig 1 (Below).

⁶ www.preventgbvafrica.org

⁷ www.zbc.co.zw

Fig 1: Media monitored

Stable	Status of media	Name of publication/station	Type of media
Zimpapers'	Public	<i>The Herald</i>	Newspaper (daily)
Zimpapers'	Public	<i>Chronicle</i>	Newspaper (daily)
Zimpapers'	Public	<i>The Sunday Mail</i>	Newspaper (weekly)
Zimpapers'	Public	<i>Sunday News</i>	Newspaper (weekly)
Zimpapers'	Public	<i>Manica Post</i>	Newspaper (weekly)
Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC)	Public	ZTV 1	TV station
ZBC	Public	Spot FM	Radio Station
ZBC	Public	Radio Zimbabwe	Radio Station
Alpha Media Holdings	Private	<i>NewsDay</i>	Newspaper (daily)
Alpha Media Holdings	Private	<i>Zimbabwe Independent</i>	Newspaper (weekly)
Alpha Media Holdings	Private	<i>The Standard</i>	Newspaper (weekly)
Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe	Private	<i>Dailynews</i>	Newspaper (daily)
The Zimbabwean	Private	<i>The Zimbabwean</i>	Newspaper (weekly)
The Zimbabwean	Private	<i>The Zimbabwean on Tuesday</i>	Newspaper (weekly)
The Zimbabwean	Private	<i>The Zimbabwean on Thursday</i>	Newspaper (weekly)
The Zimbabwean	Private	<i>The Zimbabwean on Sunday</i>	Newspaper (weekly)

The research employed both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The quantitative approach enabled and facilitated a systematic and statistical enquiry, while the qualitative aspect provided the tool for a contextual analysis to identify themes, trends and develop meaningful conclusions.

Findings

THE findings are presented in two sections: the first section presents an overall statistical overview of the media's coverage of the 16 Days Activism Against GBV, while the second part presents a qualitative analysis of the issue.

Wide publicity for the campaign

THE 16 Days of Activism Against GBV, including other gender related developments that took place in the period under review, received wide publicity in Zimbabwe's mainstream domestic media. These were covered in 233 reports, almost equally divided between the public media (116 reports) and the private media (117).

Limited self-generated media content during the campaign

HOWEVER, the study shows that the media relied more on outsourced content, which comprised 55 percent (127) of their 233 reports on the 16 days campaign against gender-based violence, than from self-initiated resourcefulness. Only 106 (45%) of the 233 reports they carried on the subject in the period under review were self-generated. However, this figure was heavily distorted by news of the acrimonious marriage saga of Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai to Locadia Tembo Karimatsenga that hit the headlines during the 16 days campaign.

GBV emerges as a secondary concern in the media

THE media did not show much inclination in independently raising awareness about GBV issues during the 16 days of activism as only 30 (28%) of their 106 self-generated reports on the issue were about GBV and other rights gender-related violations, mainly committed by men against women. Both the public and private media appeared fixated on Tsvangirai's marriage saga, which comprised 76 (72%) of the 106 reports these media originated in their attempts to raise understanding of the GBV scourge. Even then, these media reports on Tsvangirai's alleged marriage to Tembo were primarily from the perspective of the political connotations on the public image of the Prime Minister than on gender-based dissonance.

Outsourced material dominates media coverage

MOST of the media's reports (127 or 55%) monitored in the period under review were mainly based on events commemorating the 16 days campaign (including supplements and advertorials) and court reports on gender-based violence.

This was particularly so in the private media. Sixty-three of their reports were mainly events, court and supplement-based compared to 54, which were self-generated (See Fig 2).

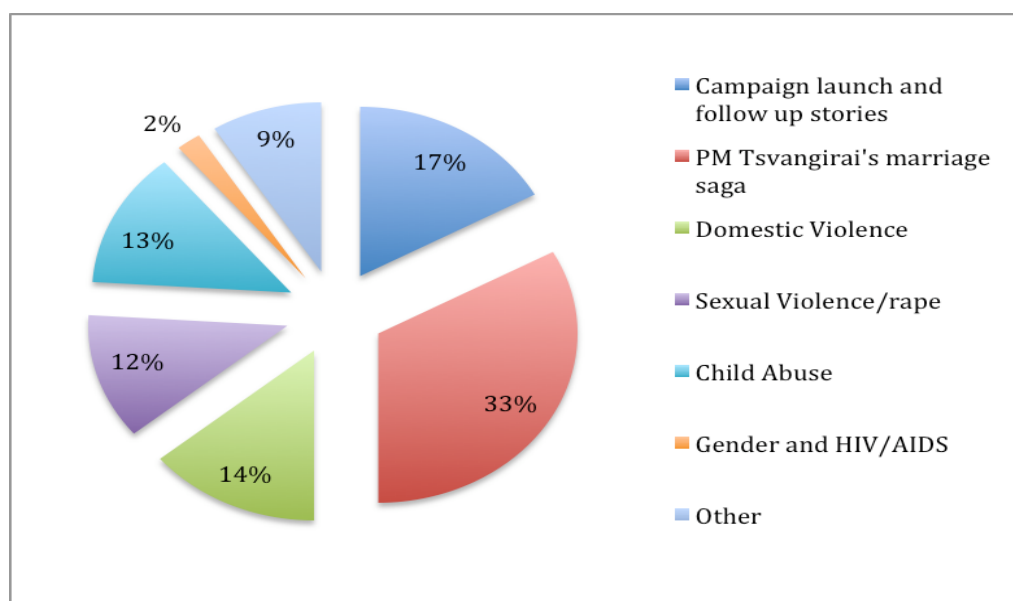
Fig 2: Origination of media reports in their coverage of 16 Days of Activism

Media	Self-generated	Event based	Court based	Supplements and advertorials	Total
Public media	52	33	32	0	116
Private Media	54	25	9	28	117
Total	107	58	41	28	233

Various facets of GBV highlighted

HOWEVER, despite the distraction of Tsvangirai's marriage saga, the media did widely cover the launch of the 16 Days of Activism Campaign Against Gender-Based Violence and the various dimensions of the scourge. As illustrated in Fig 3, the media's coverage during the campaign focused on various facets of GBV, such as child abuse, domestic violence, the launch of the campaign itself, and Prime Minister Tsvangirai's marriage controversy. Other reports also focused on gender specific issues like women's empowerment and equality.

Fig 3: Issues on gender-based violations covered in the media



The public and private print media widely outlined the key aspects of the 16 Days Activism Against Gender-based Violence and contextualized the global campaign within a local framework. This was mirrored in their news analysis, features, editorials and supplements. These highlighted activities held in commemoration of the event, the theme and its local relevance; the nature, extent and shifting trends of gender-based violence; traditional, cultural and legal interventions and their deficiencies; and the long-term social, psychological and developmental cost of GBV.

GBV cuts across all classes and victims are mainly women

THE media highlighted that while both sexes commit violence, women and children are the main victims and males are mainly perpetrators. For example, *The Herald* (28/11) cited UNFPA statistics showing that 95 percent of victims of GBV are female while 99 percent of the perpetrators are male.

GBV was also reported as affecting all classes of women from the caregiver, to the entrepreneur, nurses, teachers, mothers and so on.

Men as 'silent' victims

THE media showed that despite women and children being the major victims of gender-based violence, men are also not immune from abuse. The *Sunday News* (27/11) quoted Women Affairs Minister, Gender and Community Development Olivia Muchena quoting statistics by gender-based violence watchdog Msasa Project, showing that only four men in Bulawayo had come forward to report abuse over a three-month period, compared to 600 women. The minister, and the media in general, interpreted the statistics as an indicator that men are silent victims of intimate-partner violence due to societal attitudes, which view men abused by women as weaklings. However, the depth of the problem remained unexplored.

Other reports in the media publicised debate on the issue of sexual violence against men. They chiefly cited the trial of three women accused of sexually assaulting men across the country. (Spot FM 28/11, 8pm; SW Radio Africa 28/11; *The Herald* 29/11 and *NewsDay* 7/12).

Men as stakeholders in ending violence

THE media did not just portray men as perpetrators, but also as stakeholders in ending the violence. This was through publicity for campaigns by organisations such as Padare Men's Forum aimed at promoting peace in the home and in the world by raising awareness of GBV among boys and men (ZTV 8/12, 8pm & Radio Zimbabwe 7/12, 8pm).

Economic, social and health consequences of GBV highlighted

THE media carried reports that drew attention to the negative economic, social, and health consequences of GBV. Although there was no statistical evidence given, the reports expressed concern about the economic and health burden of GBV in the form of pressure on the overstretched health system, medical bills, work absenteeism due to injuries and pressure on the judicial system to process court cases, among others.

The social costs of GBV highlighted by the media include children as young as two months old being left orphaned in some of the fatal cases (*The Herald* 28/11 and *The Standard* 4/12).

Effectiveness of GBV support systems questioned; loopholes highlighted

THE media questioned the effectiveness of GBV prevention and response strategies (like the Domestic Violence Act and the 16 Days of Activism Campaign) in light of the continued "skyrocketing" of the scourge. They blamed the persistence of GBV to cultural beliefs, legal loopholes and economic dependency of victims on the perpetrators, among other factors.

Some of the shortcomings of the Domestic Violence Act in the provision of protection and relief to victims of GBV were identified as inadequate training and limited manpower of the police, social workers, and magistrates.

A *Daily News* editorial (8/12) noted concerns by women's interest groups about procedural barriers in accessing justice under the Domestic Violence Act. It pointed out the prerequisite filling in of a lengthy (protection order) form and the requirement for money, processes that may prove daunting to a traumatized, sometimes illiterate and financially poor user. The paper noted: ***"Imagine a woman who has just escaped from her husband's abuse and has nothing but her baby on her back, only to come face-to-face with a form heavy with legal jargon that she does not understand."***

The Herald (10/12) echoed these concerns. It quoted Zimbabwe Women Lawyers' Association Information Officer, Merit Rumema, saying a protection order document is 16 pages long, something that may prove overwhelming, even to a literate user. The report also looked at cultural beliefs impeding the eradication of violence against women as well as the legal loopholes hindering effective implementation of domestic violence legislation.

The Sunday Mail (4/12) also called for the refinement of the Domestic Violence Act, noting that while the law may protect women against gender violence, it ultimately fails to protect the marriage as, in some instances, women are thrown out after reporting their husbands.

However, the media also highlighted initiatives to overcome barriers and empower victims. For example, ZTV (28/11, 7am & 8pm) reported a programme by SAFAIDS, aimed at involving communities and creating support networks for GBV victims through a three-year programme in five Southern African countries including Zimbabwe, ***“to break the silence and ensure that victims are heard”***, as GBV is largely sustained by silence.

Global campaign localised

THE Zimbabwean (8/12) clearly situated the global campaign as well as the year's theme, which was centred on GBV and militarism, within a local context. The report noted that although political violence is on the increase as a constitutional referendum and elections approach, activism by civil society for security sector reforms could create a safe and secure environment for women to participate in the democratisation process.

However, the Zimbabwe Lawyers For Human Rights believed this year's international theme on GBV, *From peace in the home to peace in the world – let's challenge militarism and end violence against women*, had somehow been ***“censored and stripped of its substance”*** by local organisers following the adoption of the national campaign: *From peace in the home to peace in our nation, let's challenge all forms of gender-based violence* (ZTV 27/11, 8pm; *The Zimbabwean* 28/11).

The rights group cited the ***“arbitrary arrest and detention of women human rights defenders”*** and the ***“violation of women's rights when they are victimised as part of a political process – during election times for example”***, as evidence of the international theme's relevance, which appeared to have been watered down in the national campaign.

National prevalence of GBV

THE media gave wide publicity to the global prevalence of GBV, highlighting estimates by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) that one in every three women has been a victim of GBV (ZTV 28/11, 7am & 8pm), but during the 16 Days of Activism window, Zimbabwe's media devoted less investigation into analyzing what appeared to be startling national prevalence rates.

While noting that many cases of GBV go unreported, the media largely relied on police statistics showing a dramatic increase in the epidemic over the years.

For example, *The Herald* (28/11) and the *Sunday News* (4/12) cited police statistics, indicating that the law enforcement agency had attended to 1,940 cases of GBV in 2008, which shot to 3,193 in 2009 and had more than doubled to 7,628 in 2010. And in the first three months of 2011 the media reported the police as having already dealt with 2,536 cases of GBV, almost a third of the cases they recorded in 2010.

However, these media did not investigate the nature of these violations, beyond reporting the police saying the vast majority involved “physical abuse”, which represents just one aspect of the much bigger GBV issue where they would most likely have been categorized under the section dealing with “domestic violence”.

Also, are the police statistics the result of a growing public awareness of a legal recourse to justice that has resulted in more cases being reported to them?

While the increase in the police figures is a source for serious concern, how many of these cases are likely to have been victims of political gender-based violence? How many of them are likely to have been the result of psychological violence? How many more cases have families dealt with without recourse to the police? And how many cases of GBV have Zimbabwe’s various civic support groups handled without police intervention? These figures remain unknown – and uninvestigated by Zimbabwe’s mainstream media.

Bringing these statistics together is not an easy exercise, but it is surely one of the most important stories about Zimbabweans’ social inter-action that remains untold. Clearly though, the police statistics merely represent the tip of an alarming iceberg.

The disturbing trend reflected in the official police figures prompted Vice-President Joice Mujuru to question **“the increasing cases of domestic violence despite the numerous awareness campaigns being conducted in both urban and rural areas”**. Mujuru was speaking at the launch of the 16 Days Activism campaign in Bulawayo where she also urged stakeholders to establish the real causes of GBV **“and not only the symptoms”** in order to root out the problem (*Chronicle* 28/11).

The *Daily News* (10/12) publicised **“stunning”** research findings by the University of Zimbabwe in conjunction with the international health agency, Medicins Sans Frontiers, indicating that 24 percent of women in the high density suburb of Mbare had been subjected to sexual violence at some point in their lives. Earlier, the paper (8/12) claimed that GBV had increased **“100 percent”** within the space of **“one year”** from **“1200 to 2 500”** cases without attributing the source of its information or specifying the time period of the findings, or the area under study.

‘Physical violence most prevalent form of reported abuse’

THE Herald (28/11) cited police records showing that most reported cases of GBV were those of physical abuse but that **“sadly most of the cases are withdrawn before going to court or while in court”**. The report also cited *The Multiple Indicator Monitoring Survey of 2009* – a UNICEF and government-led study designed to obtain strategic information relevant for policy-makers as they make decisions on development priorities and budgets – indicating that in Mashonaland Central Province, women are beaten for allegedly simple things like burning a pot of sadza, refusing to have sex and going out without telling their husbands, among other “offences”.

Stereotypes and decontextualized reporting persist

STEREOTYPICAL and decontextualized reporting undermined the media’s critical role in transforming attitudes towards violence against women. This could be seen in coverage that portrayed women as vixens; passive and weak victims; or treated sexual violence against women as more of a crime against common decency rather than the violation of a fundamental human right.

For instance, coverage of Prime Minister Tsvangirai’s marriage saga tended to alternate between portraying the ‘jilted’ bride, Locadia, as just one of many hapless and passive victims of a powerful, sexually predatory male politician, or a scheming woman trying to trap the most ‘eligible bachelor’ into marriage, without according her any right of reply, or regard for her personal dignity and privacy.

This was typified by a ZBC (7/12, 8pm) story. It quoted ‘Harare’ women condemning the way Prime Minister Tsvangirai **“has treated Locadia and other women he has jilted despite having sired children with (them)”**.

In another story, SW Radio Africa (29/11) alleged that Tembo slept outside Tsvangirai’s house for three days **“in an apparent attempt to force him into marrying her”**; and **“travelled to Buhera at the weekend to meet Tsvangirai’s mother, without the knowledge and consent of the Prime Minister”**. Hence **“Tsvangirai was said to be seething with anger”**.

Decontextualized reporting also continues. This is seen in reports in which the victim is either completely missing from the story, which focuses on the powerful, usually male, offender, or lacks a gendered and human rights perspective.

For example, a *Chronicle* (28/11) report on the **“brutal stabbing”** of a high school headmistress by a male colleague reinforced the stereotypical portrayal of women by simply depicting her as a ‘victim’ of male aggression without adding a human rights and gendered perspective to the report. The media can achieve this through seeking comment from relevant stakeholders like gender organisations.

While the media consistently referred to targets of sexual violence as “victims” rather than “survivors”, gender activists argue that this identification reinforces negative stereotypes of women as passive and weak.

One way in which the media can ensure gender sensitive coverage is through the incorporation of the views of relevant stakeholders.

Trivialization of violence against women in the media

TRIVIALIZATION of GBV occurred in coverage that belittled or cast doubt on the prevalence of the scourge while endorsing inequalities. This was reflected in a *NewsDay* opinion piece ‘*Role of Women in violence*’ (6/12). The article endorsed patriarchy as both a “***biblical and traditional***” system that has a “***permanent place in our lives***” while arguing that “***the commercialization of gender issues and the exaggeration of statistics by feminists cannot be over emphasized***”. The article queried:

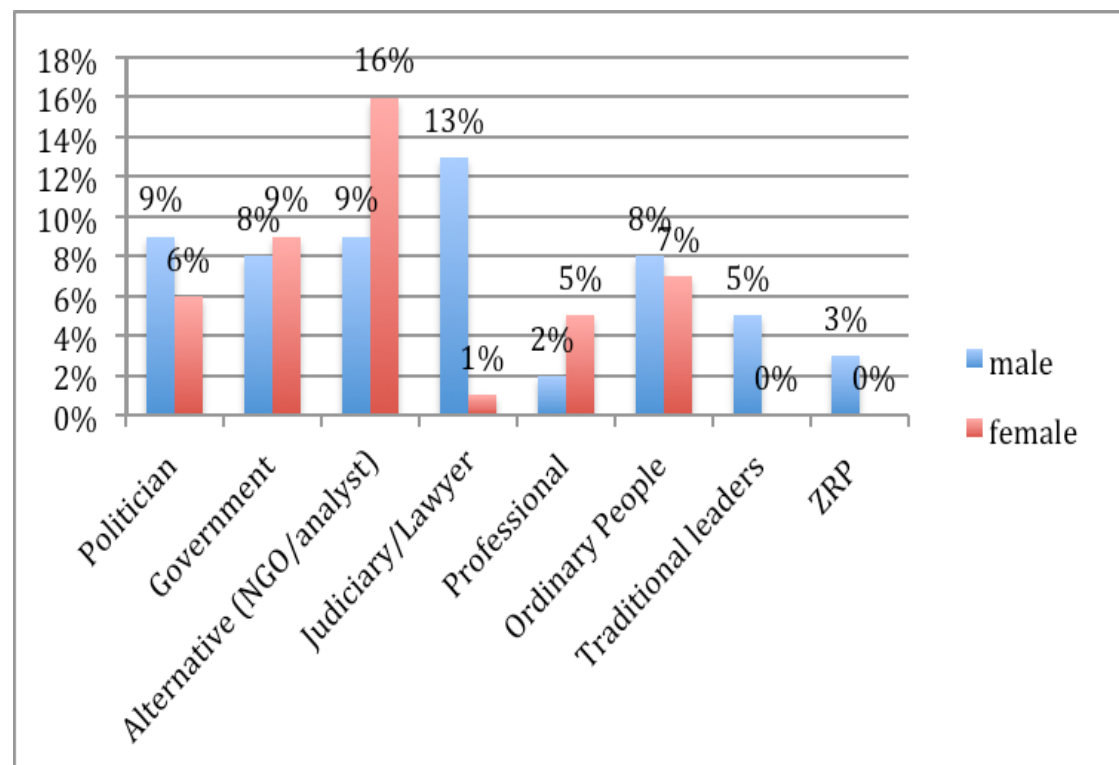
“Can someone do the nation a favour by revealing how many of all families in Zimbabwe are affected by violence and how many can come out and confess. Do the numbers of affected families justify the existence of so many feminist organizations?”

VOICE SOURCING PATTERNS

Male sources dominate

ALTHOUGH women’s voices in their diverse roles were fairly reflected in the media during the campaign period, they still played second fiddle to men, constituting 98 (44%) of the 222 voices recorded. The remaining 124 voices (56%) belonged to men, who were recorded commenting on GBV in their broad spectrum of roles. This is reflected in Fig 4:

Fig 4: Voice sourcing patterns in the media



Conclusion

THE 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence received widespread publicity in the media. However, most of the media content on GBV carried in the period under review was outsourced material (77%) as compared to just 13%, which these media originated on their own. This shows continuing apathy in the media in independently exposing and raising awareness about the negative ramifications of GBV.

MMPZ's regular monitoring of gender issues in the media also show that there is frequent but not holistic coverage of gender-based violence in the media. Thus, while gender-based violence receives general attention throughout the year, it is usually presented in a manner that reinforces stereotypes by narrowly portraying women as victims of usually horrendous violence like murder and rape and domestic violence.

This media attitude undermines the very spirit of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, which seeks to awaken society to the fact that GBV is a serious human rights violation rather than just a sensational news commodity that helps them to sell their news products.

MMPZ therefore urges the media not to treat the 16 days of activism against GBV as just a one-off event that is commemorated once a year, but as an ongoing awareness exercise that should spur society to reconfigure its perceptions and moral compass on issues of GBV. As the police figures suggest, this issue demands a much more concerted investigation by Zimbabwe's mainstream media.

Ends/