

Sexism, homophobia and transphobia in Croatian media

Quantitative–qualitative analysis of the
NO SH/T network database for the year 2023



1 Introduction

In this analysis, **the concept of discrimination is used as an umbrella term** encompassing various forms of unequal, stereotypical, or degrading representations of specific social groups. **Sexism** is understood as a specific form of discrimination directed against women, based on the assumption of their social inferiority or lesser value, and is manifested through sexualization, trivialization, stereotyping, and the diminishment of their social role.

Homophobia and transphobia refer to discriminatory patterns directed towards LGBTIQ+ persons, which manifest in the media space through stereotypes, stigmatization, and ideological framing.

Over a ten-month period during 2023, the NO SH/T network – Against Sexism, Homophobia and Transphobia (previously known as the Informal Network for Combating Sexism in the Media and Advertising Industry) conducted systematic monitoring of local and national media with the aim of documenting and analysing discriminatory patterns in media reporting. During this period, a total of 4,463 examples of sexist, homophobic, and transphobic articles were collected, making this database an exceptionally valuable empirical resource for understanding how Croatian media reproduce gender hierarchies, discrimination, and social inequality.

The importance of this database lies not only in its size, but also in the insight it provides into the structure of the problem. In other words, it does not merely show that there is a large amount of discriminatory content, but also how it is distributed and what the dominant patterns of discriminatory reporting are.

In this sense, the analysis of this database is important not only as an overview of problematic articles, but also as an indicator of a broader social process: the ways in which the media participate in shaping perceptions of women and LGBTIQ+ persons, in legitimising stereotypes, and in normalising discrimination.

2 Research framework and sample



The analysis is based on a sample of 4,463 media items, recorded during a ten-month period of monitoring local and national media in 2023. The database includes various types of media content and different sections, including news, entertainment, lifestyle, sports, crime reporting, and socio-political topics.

Various forms of discriminatory reporting were recorded and classified, and based on the available data, the following categories were identified:

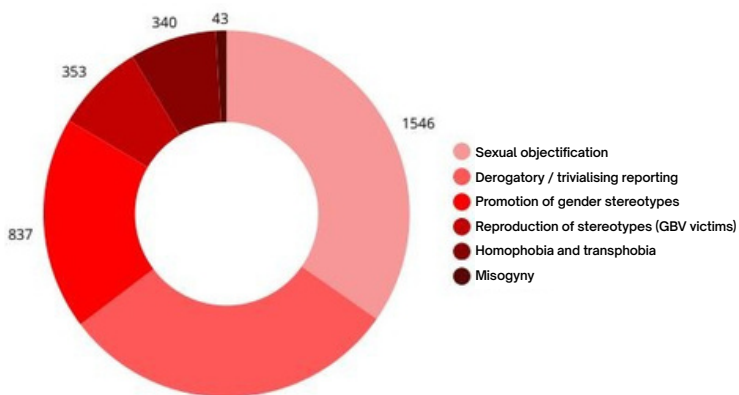
- sexual objectification of women – 1,546 cases
- derogatory and/or trivialising reporting on women’s appearance and/or behaviour instead of discussing their views and opinions – 1,336 cases
- promotion and endorsement of gender stereotypes – 837 cases
- reproduction and maintenance of gender stereotypes in relation to victims of gender-based violence – 353 cases
- homophobia and transphobia – 340 cases
- misogyny / hate speech against women – 43 cases

The distribution of these categories itself reveals one of the key characteristics of the database: the majority of discrimination does not appear through overt and easily recognisable hostility, but rather through everyday, routinised, “soft” forms of sexism.



This analysis is based on the assumption that the media do not function merely as a reflection of society, but as active participants in shaping social norms and power relations. For this reason, the aim is not only to determine how much discriminatory content exists, but also to understand how it is produced, in what forms it appears, and what social effects it generates.

It is important to note that the database includes exclusively identified examples of discriminatory reporting, rather than the entire output of the observed media. Therefore, the analysis does not allow for an assessment of the proportion of such content within the total number of published articles, but rather provides insight into its forms, frequency, and patterns of occurrence within the recorded corpus.



Types of sexist reporting in 49 local and national media



3 Quantitative overview: what the numbers show

When individual categories are examined in relation to the total of 4,463 recorded articles, a clear picture of the distribution of the problem emerges:

- sexual objectification of women accounts for approximately 34.6% of the total corpus
- derogatory and/or trivialising reporting on women accounts for approximately 29.9%
- promotion and endorsement of gender stereotypes account for approximately 18.8%
- reproduction of stereotypes in relation to victims of gender-based violence accounts for approximately 7.9%
- homophobia and transphobia account for approximately 7.6%
- misogyny / hate speech against women accounts for approximately 1%

These data clearly show several important points:

First, sexism is the dominant form of discriminatory reporting within the analysed corpus. When the three largest categories - sexual objectification, trivialisation of women, and the promotion of gender stereotypes - are combined, they account for more than four-fifths of all recorded cases. This means that the majority of the problem relates precisely to the media treatment of women: the ways in which they are represented, evaluated, commented on, and positioned in the public sphere.

Second, the data show that discrimination rarely takes the form of explicit hatred alone. Overt hate speech against women appears in a smaller number of cases, but this is precisely why the analysis points to something sociologically more significant: the main issue is not only extreme and easily recognisable incidents, but also the widespread, everyday forms of degradation that have become almost invisible because they appear “normal.”

Third, although homophobia and transphobia are numerically less prevalent than sexism, their presence is by no means negligible. On the contrary, 340 recorded cases over ten months demonstrate that LGBTIQ+ persons in the Croatian media space remain frequent targets of stereotyping, ideological framing, and dehumanising representation.

4 Most common forms of discrimination: what dominates the media space

4.1 Sexual objectification of women as the dominant pattern

The most represented category in the entire database is the sexual objectification of women, with a total of 1,546 cases. This is not an incidental or marginal pattern, but a central way in which women are portrayed across a large part of the media space.

In this type of content, women are reduced to their bodies, body parts, sexual attractiveness, or visual desirability. In the examples from the database, this is visible through headlines and images that emphasise breasts, buttocks, “curves,” “tiny bikinis,” “provocative outfits,” or “sex appeal,” where the visual representation often has no real informational connection to the content of the article. For example, in some articles about weather, sports, or general news, the featured image primarily serves as a sexualised visual lure rather than as an illustration of the topic. This is clearly evident in the database in texts where the focus is on “thongs,” “buttocks in the foreground,” or “attractive looks,” even though the actual subject of the article is entirely different.

It is important to emphasise that sexual objectification is not merely a matter of “taste” or tabloid style. It has a clear social function: it reduces women to objects of the gaze, and turns their bodies into a media resource for attracting attention. In this sense, sexualisation is not just a content choice, but an editorial tool for capturing attention and generating clicks, and therefore profit.

Additionally, it is useful to observe the distribution of this form across individual media outlets. According to the collected data, the portals with the highest number of articles involving the sexual objectification of women are:

- Net.hr – 565
- Dnevno.hr – 381
- Slobodna Dalmacija – 241
- 24sata.hr – 178
- Dnevnik.hr – 84

This finding is important because it shows that this is not only a widely распространён phenomenon, but also one characterised by recognisable patterns within specific media outlets. In other words, certain portals do not publish only occasional problematic articles, but develop a relatively stable content profile in which the sexualisation of women is one of the dominant strategies for attracting audiences.

4.2 Trivialisation of women and focus on appearance instead of action

The second most represented category, with 1,336 cases, refers to derogatory and/or trivialising reporting on women's appearance and/or behaviour instead of discussing their views and opinions.

This category is particularly important because it shows that media discrimination does not operate only through explicit sexualisation, but also through a systematic shift in focus. Women who are athletes, artists, politicians, or public figures are often not presented through their ideas, work, achievements, or social roles, but through their appearance, age, weight, clothing, “transformation,” behaviour, or private lives.

In the database, this is evident through numerous examples in which female athletes are described as “the sexiest Olympians,” athletes' wives as “the greatest support” or “beautiful women,” TV hosts through their cleavage, and public figures through whether they have “shined,” “looked younger,” “shown off their figure,” or “shocked with their appearance.”

This pattern has serious consequences—it actively produces the message that the social value of women does not primarily stem from competence, but from appearance and desirability.

“I don’t mind that my husband sleeps with other women while I clean the house. What matters is that he is happy.”

4.3 Promotion and endorsement of gender stereotypes



The third most frequent category, with 837 cases, refers to the promotion and endorsement of gender stereotypes. This includes content that reinforces traditional notions of “appropriate” roles for women and men, most often through seemingly harmless lifestyle, entertainment, or advice formats.

Such texts suggest to women that their value is tied to caring for a man, physical attractiveness, submissiveness, domestic work, or adapting to a partner. The database also includes examples of content advising women on how to keep a man, how to look, what to do to prevent a partner from cheating, or how to be “desirable,” in which gender inequality is presented as natural rather than socially constructed.

For this reason, this category requires careful analysis. At first glance, it may appear less aggressive than overt misogyny, but it is highly effective in the long term because it functions as a soft mechanism of discrimination. It does not necessarily insult directly, but it shapes expectations, legitimises hierarchy, and normalises inequality.

4.4 Reporting on gender-based violence and stereotypes about victims

The category of reproducing and maintaining gender stereotypes in relation to victims of gender-based violence, with 353 cases, is particularly serious.

It includes content in which violence against women is sensationalised, trivialised, or presented through stereotypes about the victim and the perpetrator. Instead of focusing on the responsibility of the perpetrator, the social context of violence, and the protection of the victim, such texts often convey “shocking details,” statements from neighbours, speculation about motives, comments about the victim, or narratives that relativise the seriousness of the act.

The database particularly highlights examples in which rape allegations are framed as a “problem” for an athlete or their team, as well as cases in which victims of revenge pornography are re-exposed through sensationalist portrayals of their private content. This type of reporting shows that the problem is not only in poorly chosen words, but in a deeper media logic: violence is shifted from the sphere of social responsibility into the sphere of spectacle, gossip, and content consumption. In doing so, the media not only fail to protect the victim, but actively contribute to a culture in which violence is relativised, trivialised, romanticised, and diminished.

THE HORROR IN THE VILLAGE NEAR KOPRIVNICA LASTED FOR MONTHS

A peaceful farmer paid a girl (12) for sexual services! She filmed everything...

NEIGHBOURS IN SHOCK

Details of the horror in Zaprešić: He stabbed his wife and injured himself? "He had surgery, lost a lot of blood"

MODEL HUMILIATED

‘He put something in my drink and then raped me!’ A well-known footballer drugged his ex and treated his friends: She lost consciousness, and now her mother is also threatening her

4.5 Homophobia and transphobia as an ideological pattern



The category of homophobia and transphobia, with 340 cases, is numerically smaller than the dominant forms of sexism, but qualitatively highly significant. These types of content often carry a stronger ideological charge and portray LGBTIQ+ persons not only in stereotypical ways, but also as a social problem, a threat, or a moral deviation.

“MostarkiĆ Gobbo: Being a responsible parent amid the bombardment of LGBT content”

Intersex: An LGBTIQ metastasis that is spreading

Gender ideology is spreading from the ‘progressive’ West: Undermining traditional values and creating lifelong patients

The database shows that certain media outlets systematically produce such content, particularly through sections dealing with society, family, politics, or values. In such texts, LGBTIQ+ topics are presented through moral panic, distortion of facts, ridicule, or openly hostile framing. In the case of transphobic content, there is also a tendency to use trans identity as an additional element of sensationalism or stigmatization, for example when, in texts about violence or transition, a person’s identity is treated as a “problem” in itself.

It is important here to highlight the difference between two basic patterns revealed by the database. While tabloid sexism primarily operates within the commercial logic of clicks, homophobia and transphobia in parts of the media space exhibit characteristics of consistent ideological positioning. This means that they are not necessarily just a by-product of sensationalism, but part of the editorial identity of certain media outlets.

Delusional ideology: The ‘Zagreb Woman of the Year’ award will be given to a woman who decided to do a feticide

4.6 Misogyny and hate speech against women



Although the number of recorded cases of misogyny and hate speech against women is relatively low—43 cases—this does not mean that the problem is negligible. On the contrary, it further confirms that media discrimination against women in most cases does not primarily operate through overt verbal hatred, but through more sophisticated and socially acceptable forms of degradation.

For this reason, it is important to avoid the mistaken conclusion that a lower number of explicitly misogynistic content indicates a lesser problem. The database shows the opposite: the main issue is not only the extremes, but normalised sexism.



5 Qualitative analysis: what the database reveals beyond the numbers

Numbers are important because they show the scale of the problem, but the full meaning of the database becomes visible only when we examine how discrimination operates.

5.1 Discrimination as a normalised media language

One of the most striking findings of the database is that discrimination in Croatian media very often appears through the language of everyday life. This is not necessarily the language of overt insult, but rather a language that appears banal, entertaining, and supposedly harmless: “fatal,” “sexy,” “attractive,” “showed off her figure,” “on fire,” “outshined,” “provocative outfit,” “looks like a bomb.”

It is precisely in this banalisation that one of the greatest strengths of discrimination lies. Such language is rarely perceived as problematic because it is deeply embedded in media routines. However, its constant repetition produces an effect: women are repeatedly positioned as bodies to be looked at, evaluated, and commented on, rather than as carriers of experience, knowledge, and public relevance. The analysed database is filled with precisely such formulations.

5.2 Unequal media treatment of women and men

The database also reveals a clear pattern of unequal media treatment/representation of women and men. Men more often appear in the media as actors, experts, political subjects, athletes, or agents—that is, as individuals whose actions form the core of the story. Women, in contrast, far more often appear as objects to be looked at, evaluated, or commented on.

Even when an article is nominally about a woman, it is often not about her actions, but about her appearance, private life, clothing, age, or relationship to a man. In this way, the media do not only distribute attention, but also symbolic authority. In other words, they determine whose opinion matters and whose presence is considered sufficient in itself.



5.3 Discrimination transcends individual media sections

Another important finding is that discrimination does not appear only in so-called light, entertainment, or tabloid content. It transcends the boundaries of individual sections, confirming that this is not a problem of a single editorial niche, but of a widely embedded media culture. In this sense, the database shows that discrimination does not occur merely as an isolated phenomenon, but is manifested through recurring patterns of media reporting.

5.4 Typology of media practices

The database also allows for another important conclusion: certain media outlets develop recognisable discriminatory profiles. Some lead in the sexual objectification of women, others in trivialisation and commentary on appearance, others in the stereotyping of victims of violence, and still others in homophobic and transphobic patterns.

Tabloid and commercial media such as Net.hr, Dnevno.hr, 24sata.hr, and Slobodna Dalmacija lead in the sexual objectification and trivialisation of women, while outlets such as Narod.hr clearly exhibit an ideological pattern through homophobic and transphobic content. At the same time, some media, particularly Dnevno.hr, combine multiple forms of discrimination, which points to stable editorial practices rather than isolated cases.

This finding shows that the problem lies not only in “bad articles,” but in recurring patterns of content production. In this way, the database provides insight not only into the frequency of discrimination, but also into the ways in which it is systematically shaped and reproduced in the media space.

6 Examples that confirm the patterns

The qualitative strength of the database is particularly evident through concrete examples.

Across numerous articles, it is clear that women are sexualised even when the topic of the text is entirely unrelated to their appearance—for example, in articles about weather or sports, where the featured image or headline sexualises a woman and serves as clickbait.

Female athletes are frequently portrayed through their appearance, using formulations such as “the sexiest Olympian,” while athletes’ wives are presented as “the greatest support,” “beautiful wife,” or “attractive partner,” reducing them to relational and aesthetic status.

In examples related to violence against women, the focus is often shifted away from the victim and the perpetrator’s responsibility towards reputational damage, “details of horror,” or sensationalist retelling, which is particularly evident in cases of rape and revenge pornography.

In transphobic examples from the database, trans identity is used as a tool for heightened sensationalism or moral alarm, instead of approaching the person with respect and contextual accuracy.

These examples are not important only illustratively. They confirm that the database does not record abstract categories, but very concrete and recurring practices that produce harmful social effects.

WHAT NEXT WITH THEM?

Big, gigantic, hers! She showed how much her breasts have grown from 2019 until today and the scene will leave you shocked

GOT A TON OF QUESTIONS

She finally publicly showed everyone how it’s done with huge breasts: And only when the skirt lifted, oh did it reveal too much



7 Patterns of discrimination in individual media outlets

A more detailed insight into the database shows that discriminatory content is not distributed randomly across media outlets, but follows recognisable and relatively stable editorial patterns. In other words, individual portals differ not only in the quantity of problematic content, but also in the type of discrimination they predominantly produce.

7.1 Tabloid–commercial model: sexualisation as a strategy for attracting attention

The first clearly observable pattern relates to portals in which the sexual objectification of women dominates as a key tool for attracting audiences. This model is characterised by a strong connection between visual content, headlines, and the logic of “clickability.”

In media outlets that lead in this category, sexualisation is not an exception but a routine editorial practice. The female body is used as a universal visual resource, often without any substantive connection to the topic of the article. In the database examples, this is reflected in headlines and descriptions such as “in a tiny bikini,” “buttocks in the foreground,” “showed off her curves,” “the sexiest,” “provocative outfit,” as well as in images that fragment the body and emphasise sexualised parts.

What is particularly important is that such patterns also appear in content that has no thematic connection to sexuality—for example, in articles about weather forecasts, sports, or general news. This confirms that sexualisation is not merely an aesthetic choice, but a tool for attracting attention and generating clicks, where the female body is used as a means of increasing readership.

7.2 Trivialisation and lifestyle stereotypes: a “soft” model of maintaining gender roles

The second pattern, often intertwined with the first, relates to portals that produce a large volume of content in which women are portrayed through their appearance, private life, emotional relationships, and social desirability, rather than through competence or action.

This model is particularly visible in:

- lifestyle and magazine sections
- sports content (especially when it concerns female athletes or athletes’ partners)
- entertainment and celebrity formats

In these texts, women are described as “fatal,” “attractive,” “shining,” “shocking with their appearance,” “showing off their figure,” or “outshining others,” thereby continuously tying their value to aesthetic criteria. The database contains numerous examples in which female athletes are portrayed as “the sexiest Olympians,” and athletes’ wives as “beautiful partners” or “the greatest support,” while their own achievements are marginalised.

This pattern can be understood as a “soft” form of discrimination, as it does not operate through overt hatred, but through everyday, seemingly benign framing. Precisely for this reason, it is particularly effective: it does not necessarily provoke resistance, but gradually shapes expectations and normalises gender inequality.

7.3 Sensationalist model: violence as content

The third pattern relates to portals that more frequently reproduce problematic patterns in reporting on gender-based violence, particularly through sensationalism and trivialisation.

This model most commonly appears in:

- crime reporting
- general news
- portals with a strong clickbait approach
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In such content, violence is presented through “shocking details,” emotionally charged headlines, statements from neighbours, or speculation about circumstances, where the focus is often not on the responsibility of the perpetrator and the protection of the victim, but on the dramatic nature of the event. This mode of reporting shows that violence is not only misinterpreted, but is transformed into a media product, thereby blurring the boundary between informing and exploitation.

7.4 Ideological model: homophobia and transphobia as an editorial position

Unlike the previous patterns, which are predominantly linked to commercial logic, the fourth pattern relates to ideologically framed reporting, particularly in the area of homophobia and transphobia.

Within this category, Narod.hr stands out, as the database clearly shows that discriminatory content is not sporadic, but systematically produced and thematically consistent.

In these texts, LGBTIQ+ persons and topics are presented through:

- moral panic
- constructions of “threats” to children and the family
- the discourse of “gender ideology”
- ridicule, delegitimation, or stigmatisation

Examples from the database include headlines that portray trans persons as a social problem or threat, as well as texts that frame LGBTIQ+ topics within an ideological conflict.



Unlike tabloid sexism, which primarily serves to attract audiences, this represents a systematic mode of reporting with a clear ideological background. In other words, discrimination in this case is not a by-product, but part of the editorial identity.

7.5 Correlation between type of discrimination and type of section

The analysis of the database further shows that different forms of discrimination are systematically associated with specific types of content:

- news / show / lifestyle / entertainment / sports → sexual objectification and trivialisation of women
- crime reporting / news → stereotypes and the relativisation of gender-based violence
- socio-political sections → homophobia and transphobia

This correlation shows that discrimination is not an exception, but a mode through which media content is produced.





7.6 Conclusion: discrimination as a structured pattern, not a coincidence

What this typology clearly indicates is that discriminatory content in Croatian media is not the result of isolated mistakes or individual shortcomings, but the consequence of different, yet stable editorial models.

- Some media produce discrimination through the commercialisation of the female body
- others through the normalisation of gender stereotypes
- others through the sensationalisation of violence
- and others through ideological discourse directed against LGBTIQ+ persons

In this sense, the database shows not only that discrimination exists, but also that it is structured, predictable, and deeply embedded in the way the media system operates.



Conclusion

Based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the database, several conclusions can be drawn:

First, discriminatory reporting in Croatian media is not sporadic, but numerically significant and recurring.

Second, the dominant forms of discrimination are not primarily overt hatred, but sexualisation, trivialisation, and stereotyping, which means that the problem is deeply embedded in what is often perceived as “normal” media language.

Third, women are systematically treated in a large part of the media space as objects of the gaze, rather than as full members of society.

Fourth, reporting on gender-based violence often contributes to its relativisation and spectacularisation.

Fifth, homophobia and transphobia in parts of the media space do not operate as isolated incidents, but as consistent ideological positioning.

Sixth, the database shows that discrimination operates not only through content, but also through the distribution of social value: who is presented as an actor, who as decoration, and who as a threat.

The most important finding of this analysis is that discrimination in Croatian media (sexism, homophobia, and transphobia) does not operate merely as a deviation from professional standards, but appears through recognisable and recurring patterns of content production. For this reason, its social impact lies not only in individual offensive articles, but in routine, repetition, and apparent banality. What is constantly repeated ceases to appear as a problem, and this is precisely the mechanism through which discrimination becomes socially sustainable.

The NO SH/T network database is therefore important not only as an archive of problematic articles, but also as a document of a broader social process: a process in which part of media content does not merely reflect existing inequalities, but actively shapes, reinforces, and normalises them.

Centar za građanske inicijative Poreč / Centre for Civil Initiatives Poreč



Partizanska 2d, 52440 Poreč, Croatia



cgiporec@cgiporec.hr



www.cgiporec.hr

