

**CENTRE FOR CIVIL  
INITIATIVES POREČ**

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**PERCEPTION OF SEXIST  
MEDIA CONTENT AND  
REPORTING ON GENDER-  
BASED VIOLENCE  
AMONG WOMEN WHO  
HAVE EXPERIENCED  
GENDER-BASED  
VIOLENCE.**



**RESEARCH  
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Centar za  
Građanske  
Inicijative  
Poreč

## About the project

The Centre for Civic Initiatives Poreč has been running the “Our Daily Sexism” page on Facebook and Instagram since 2017. On these platforms, we publish examples of sexism and homo/bi/transphobia from the media, from individuals in positions of power, and from advertising campaigns. A particular issue we have identified is media reporting on gender-based violence and femicide. This issue has been further intensified by cases of violence and femicide in Croatia and the region that were particularly brutal or involved testimonies of public figures. Media reporting often includes sexist and stereotypical portrayals of women, which contributes to the normalization of violence and the further stigmatization of victims.

From 30 years of experience working with women victims of violence, we have deep insight into the issues women face, starting from the fact that some do not even recognize that they are living in violence, as they receive messages from society and the media that “it is normal for a husband to sometimes hit you, that it is a woman’s role to remain silent and endure, that she chose it herself, that this is how it is in marriage, that she must be subordinate to a man”; if they do recognize the violence, they then read in the media that “he was jealous, he was drunk, he always greets the neighbors” or that he is “in love and cannot control himself, hormones got the better of him” and similar, which sends a direct message to women victims of violence that such behavior by men is expected and should be tolerated. Perpetrators are justified because the media blame jealousy and alcohol for the violence instead of holding the perpetrator accountable, thereby contributing to the justification and continuation of violence against women. Furthermore, by promoting stereotypical gender roles and the idea of women’s inferiority, the media reinforce the mentality and attitudes of the general population that normalize and accept violence as a common occurrence, blame the victim who “provoked it,” and justify perpetrators. Victims are also discouraged by low penalties for perpetrators, as well as by frequent secondary victimization, systematic victim-blaming, media questioning of the victim’s responsibility, justification of perpetrators, romanticization and trivialization of violence, and hateful comments on social media.

The media, as one of the main creators of public opinion, through unethical and unprofessional reporting on gender-based violence and femicide, further discourage victims from reporting violence, indirectly carry out secondary victimization by trivializing and romanticizing violence and justifying perpetrators, contrary to all laws and codes, including [guidelines for media reporting on violence and femicide](#). It is not only problematic reporting by certain media outlets on gender-based violence and femicide that contributes to this issue. The broader media environment of some outlets, which reduces women to sexual objects, dehumanizes them, trivializes their views and opinions, and promotes gender stereotypes and prejudices, also contributes to a climate that supports and promotes violence against women. Through this research, we aimed to examine the extent to which harmful media reporting affects women victims of gender-based violence.

Our efforts are aligned with the GREVIO Baseline Evaluation Report on legislative and other measures giving effect to the provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. In paragraph 81, GREVIO urges measures to prevent all forms of violence against women covered by the scope of the Istanbul Convention, in particular by promoting changes in the attitudes and mentalities of the general population that contribute to the justification and continuation of violence against women, and by addressing structural inequalities between women and men as the root causes of such violence. The media are key creators of public opinion and play a major role in promoting changes in attitudes and mentalities of the general population, and they are also one of the structural components of the system that supports violence against women. For this reason, the media are among the key actors that must be influenced—not only to eliminate sexism from their practices, but also to take on an active role in promoting equality

and non-violence. The need to combat sexism, sexist norms and behaviors, and sexist speech is also explicitly stated in Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Council of Europe “Preventing and Combating Sexism,” which is based on the Istanbul Convention and the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. These documents recognize the close link between gender stereotypes, gender inequality, sexism, and gender-based violence against women and girls. Acts of everyday sexism, in the form of seemingly inconsistent or minor sexist behavior, may appear harmless; however, everyday sexism is part of a continuum of violence that creates an environment of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion, and insecurity, limiting opportunities and freedom. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by such behavior, as sexism is based on the idea of their inferiority or on stereotypical roles of men and women. Sexism persists and intensifies when individuals or groups fail to condemn violations of women’s human rights or ignore sexist behavior out of fear that they will not be taken seriously, that they will be excluded, or even considered responsible. The internet provides a new dimension for the expression and transmission of sexism, although the roots of sexism do not lie in technology, but in persistent gender inequalities. Sexism in the media is particularly harmful due to its wide reach and influence in shaping public opinion, contributing to an environment that tolerates and trivializes everyday sexism.

## Conclusion

Sexist media content often normalizes controlling behaviors towards women, romanticizing relationships that include elements of control or aggression. It portrays violence as a romantic or passionate element of a relationship, thereby normalizing and justifying violent behavior in the name of love or passion. The objectification of women and their reduction to physical appearance and sexual attractiveness further contribute to the dehumanization of women and the reduction of empathy for their experiences. All of the above creates a social context in which violence against women can be perceived as normal or justified, making it more difficult to address the problem and create the necessary social changes towards an equal and safe environment for women. In addition, sexist media often contribute to the stigmatization of victims of violence, placing them in a negative context or blaming them for their own abuse. This further complicates victims’ ability to cope with the problem, often leading to feelings of shame or guilt, making it more difficult for victims to speak out and seek support. Such an approach also supports myths about violence, creating the belief that victims contribute to their own abuse. Sexist media not only reflect patriarchal values but also actively participate in their maintenance and reinforcement, thereby supporting gender-based violence and hindering the achievement of gender equality.

Everyday sexism in the media (sexual objectification of women, trivialization of their views and opinions, harmful reporting on gender-based violence and femicide, promotion of gender stereotypes) undermines not only the position of women in society but also the possibility of breaking the cycle of violence. It affects women’s mental health, including increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Therefore, it is necessary to combat sexism in the media space in order to create an environment of support, understanding, and equality for all women, and especially for women victims of gender-based violence.

Through this project and research, we aimed to:

- Clearly demonstrate the link between sexist media content and its impact on women victims of gender-based violence.
- Explore the perceptions of women victims of gender-based violence regarding sexist media content and its impact on their lives, particularly in discouraging the reporting of violence and leaving abusive situations.

- Through in-depth interviews, collect additional qualitative data and further explore the perspectives and experiences of women victims of violence.
- Analyze the collected data and produce a report that will serve as a basis for the development of expert recommendations and advocacy for changes in media reporting.
- Strengthen the arguments in our long-term advocacy for combating sexism in the media.
- Contribute to reducing the production of everyday sexism and the justification of gender-based violence that contributes to women remaining in the cycle of violence.

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## Research objective

The main objective of the research was to examine the reactions of women who have experienced gender-based violence to sexist media content and media reporting on gender-based violence.

### Problem 1

To examine the relationship between exposure to media content and the perception of bias in media reporting on women in general, as well as the way gender-based violence is reported, with experienced violence and previous willingness to report violence.

- i. To examine experienced violence and previous willingness to report violence.
- ii. To examine the use of different media platforms.
- iii. To examine the perception of bias in media reporting on women in general and in the reporting on gender-based violence.
- iv. To examine the relationship between the use of different media platforms and the perception of bias in media reporting on women in general and in the reporting on gender-based violence.
- v. To examine the relationship between experienced violence and willingness to report violence with the perception of bias in media reporting on women in general and in the reporting on gender-based violence.

### Problem 2

To examine participants' reactions to examples of sexist media reporting and reporting on gender-based violence.

- i. To examine the perception of the appropriateness of media portrayals of women and the need for change.
- ii. To examine emotional reactions.
- iii. To examine expected changes in attitudes and behavior as a reaction to the examples.
- iv. To examine expected changes in the perception of personal safety after exposure to the examples.
- v. To examine expected changes in the decision to report and seek help in cases of violence after exposure to the examples.

### Problem 3

To examine the relationship between reactions to examples of sexist media reporting and reporting on gender-based violence in relation to the use of different media platforms, the perception of bias in media reporting on women in general, the way gender-based violence is reported, experienced violence, and previous willingness to report violence.

### Problem 4

To examine participants' opinions on the necessary changes in the way women are reported on in general, as well as in reporting on gender-based violence in the media.

## Method

### Procedure

In order to achieve the set objectives, the research was conducted in two phases. In the first part, a quantitative study was carried out through an online survey, while in the second part a qualitative study was conducted using individual interviews.

### Quantitative research

The survey questions included already existing measures, along with questions constructed for the purposes of this research. The clarity of the questions and the duration of completing the survey were tested on a smaller number of participants prior to the implementation of the study. Data collection was conducted online via the Google Forms platform. The invitation to participate in the research was first published on the pages of the Centre for Civic Initiatives Poreč, and was then further shared using a snowball sampling technique on other relevant platforms assumed to be visited by the target population of participants. This sampling strategy cannot ensure a probabilistic sample, but it is appropriate for research on specific populations (Milas, 2009), such as women who have experienced gender-based violence.

At the very beginning of the survey, participants were presented with a text explaining the objectives of the research and stating the estimated time required to complete the survey. Participants were informed that the research was anonymous and voluntary, that all collected data would be confidential, and that the results would be presented in aggregate form upon publication. A contact was also provided through which participants could reach out if they needed additional information about the research. Consent to participate in the research was a condition for continuing and answering the survey questions.

At the beginning of the survey, participants were informed that part of the questions referred to experiences of violence they had experienced, and a contact of the Network of Support and Cooperation for Victims and Witnesses of Criminal Offences was provided, where they could seek information about appropriate support available in their environment.

In the first part of the survey, participants reported on their sociodemographic data, media consumption habits, perceptions of the portrayal of women and gender-based violence in the media, as well as personal experiences of gender-based violence and reporting of experienced violence. In the second part of the survey, participants were asked to report on their reactions after being exposed to specific examples of headlines and excerpts from media articles about women in general, as well as those related to reporting on gender-based violence, including femicide. The presented examples were taken from daily newspapers and online portals. Before completing this part of the survey, participants were informed about the content they would see and were given the option to discontinue participation in the research without answering this block of questions.

Data collection took place from March 20, 2024 to April 9, 2024.

## Qualitative research

The invitation to participate in individual interviews was included on the last page of the survey. Participants could express their interest in this part of the research and leave their contact (email address). A total of 46 participants expressed interest in continuing the research and left their contact information. Based on data on sociodemographic characteristics, participants were selected in order to achieve heterogeneity of the sample with regard to age, county of residence, partnership status, and having children. A total of 19 participants were contacted to take part in this phase of the research. Of these, 12 responded and interviews were conducted with them.

Before the start of the interview and after reading the informed consent form, participants gave their consent to participate in the research. The informed consent included information about the aim and procedure of the research, explained the need for audio recording of the conversation, and guaranteed the confidentiality of the collected data. Participants were informed that participation in the research was voluntary, that they could withdraw at any time, and that they did not have to answer all questions if they did not wish to. Furthermore, the informed consent form described the expected benefits of participation in the research, as well as the possible risks, stress, and discomfort that participation might cause. As in the quantitative part of the research, a contact was provided through which participants could reach out if they needed additional information about the research. The interviewer was the author of the research, a psychologist with experience in qualitative research as well as in counseling and psychotherapeutic work. Audio recordings of the interviews were destroyed after transcription, and transcripts were coded in order to preserve participants' anonymity. Participants agreed that their statements could be used in the form of quotations in this report. Interviews lasted on average about half an hour ( $M = 31.42$ ; range from 21 minutes to a maximum of 42 minutes) and were conducted in the period from April 19, 2024 to May 21, 2024 via various online platforms (Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, etc.).

## Materials

### Quantitative research

**Demographic questionnaire.** Data were collected on age, sex, gender, employment status, place of residence (size of settlement, county, city), standard of living, marital/partnership status, parental status and number of children, and sexual orientation.

**Media use.** Participants, taking into account their usual habits, were asked to estimate how much time they spend on average per day watching television, reading newspapers or magazines, browsing online portals and social media, and listening to the radio. The offered responses ranged from non-use of media platforms ("I do not watch TV" / "I do not read newspapers or magazines" / "I do not visit online portals" / "I do not use social media" / "I do not listen to the radio") to graded consumption of media content in terms of number of hours ("Less than one hour", "Between 1 and 2 hours", "Between 2 and 3 hours", "More than 3 hours"). Given the unclear factor structure and low reliability of the total score, analyses were conducted separately for each medium.

**Questionnaire on the perception of biased portrayal of women in the media (Bubalo and Jelić, 2015).** The questionnaire contains 16 items describing different forms of biased portrayal of women in the media. Participants indicated their level of agreement with the statements on a scale from 1 ("Completely incorrect") to 5 ("Completely correct").

Factor analysis showed grouping into two factors: Stereotypical portrayal of women in the media (12 items;  $\lambda = 6.61$ ; 41% of explained variance; Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.92$ ; example item: “In the media, great emphasis is placed on the importance of a youthful appearance of women.”) and Equal portrayal and representation of women in the media (4 items;  $\lambda = 1.98$ ; 12% of explained variance; Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.65$ ; example item: “Women are portrayed equally in the media compared to men.”). The total score was formed as the average score of responses to the corresponding items. A higher score on the first factor indicates a perception of a more stereotypical portrayal of women, i.e., noticing a focus on women’s physical appearance as well as stereotypical roles and traits in media reports, while a higher score on the second factor indicates a perception of greater equality in the portrayal of women in the media.

**Questionnaire on the perception of the portrayal of gender-based violence in the media.** The questionnaire was constructed for the purposes of this research based on the Guidelines for gender-sensitive media reporting on violence against women, domestic violence, and femicide (Sudar, 2019). It contains a total of 16 items for which participants indicated their level of agreement on a scale from 1 (“Completely incorrect”) to 5 (“Completely correct”). Factor analysis showed grouping into two factors: Sensationalist portrayal (7 items;  $\lambda = 4.68$ ; 27% of explained variance; Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.85$ ; example item: “In media reporting on violence against women, terms are used that distort the meaning of violence (e.g., instead of violence, it is referred to as marital disputes, romantic conflicts, excessive jealousy, a party that went too far, etc.)”) and Appropriate portrayal (9 items;  $\lambda = 2.62$ ; 12% of explained variance; Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.75$ ; example item: “In media reporting on violence against women, the dignity of the victim is respected and intimate details from her past are not disclosed”). The total score was formed as the average score of responses to the corresponding items. A higher score on the first factor indicates a perception of sensationalist portrayal, while a higher score on the second factor indicates a perception of a more appropriate portrayal of gender-based violence in the media.

**Experienced violence.** Experienced violence was assessed using an existing questionnaire, the WHO assessment of experienced violence (WHO, 2005, according to Djikanović et al., 2009), which was translated into Croatian by Lujanović (2022) for the purposes of her graduate thesis. Based on the operationalization of violence by the World Health Organization, this questionnaire contains 13 examples of different forms of violence for which participants indicated on a scale from 1 (“Never”) to 5 (“Many times”) how often they had experienced such violent behaviors from their partner. Examples of different forms of violence were grouped into three categories: Physical violence (6 items; example item: “Has your current or any other partner ever pushed you or roughly shoved you?”), Sexual violence (3 items; example item: “Has your current or any other partner ever physically forced you into sexual intercourse when you did not want to?”), and Emotional violence (4 items; example item: “Has your current or any other partner ever insulted you or made you feel bad about yourself?”). In addition to this questionnaire, for the purposes of this research, items measuring Controlling behaviors were added (6 items; example item: “Has your current or any other partner ever insisted on having access to your phone in order to read your messages, photos, etc.?”). The reliability of the existing subscales of different forms of violence was high and consistent with previous research (Physical violence: Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.89$ ; Sexual violence: Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.84$ ; Emotional violence: Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.86$ ). The additional scale constructed for this research also showed high reliability (Controlling behaviors: Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.90$ ). Factor analysis showed that all items together function well as a single measure (19 items;  $\lambda = 9.60$ ; 50% of explained variance; Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.94$ ), therefore, in addition to individual total scores by subscales, an overall score across all items was calculated as a composite measure of experienced violence. Total scores were formed as the average scores of responses to the corresponding items, where a higher score indicated more experienced violence.

**Willingness to report violence.** The questionnaire was constructed for the purposes of this research. It contains a total of 7 items for which participants indicated on a scale from 1 (“Never”) to 5 (“Many times”) how often they had reported experienced violence or sought support. The first item, “I did nothing,” was analyzed separately, while the remaining items were divided based on the results of factor analysis. The first factor indicated Reporting violence (4 items;  $\lambda = 3.06$ ; 51% of explained variance; Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.84$ ), while the second indicated Confiding in close persons (2 items;  $\lambda = 1.24$ ; 21% of explained variance;  $r = 0.52$ ). Total scores were calculated as the average scores of responses to the corresponding items, with a higher total score on the first factor indicating more reporting of violence to official persons and institutions, while a higher total score on the second factor indicated more confiding in close persons.

**Reactions to examples of sexist media reporting and reporting on gender-based violence.** For the purposes of this part of the research, in cooperation with the team of the Centre for Civic Initiatives Poreč, blocks of examples of headlines and excerpts from media articles were constructed, representing sexist ways of reporting on women and those representing inappropriate and sensationalist reporting on gender-based violence, including femicide. The examples were taken from daily newspapers and online portals.

After exposure to the examples, participants provided their responses to the same set of questions for examples of sexism in the media and examples of sensationalist and inappropriate reporting on gender-based violence.

(1) Accuracy of portrayal and need for change. Participants indicated on a scale from 1 (“I do not agree at all”) to 10 (“I completely agree”) the extent to which they considered women/victims to be accurately portrayed in the given examples and the extent to which they believed it was necessary to change the way women were portrayed in the given examples.

(2) Emotional reactions. As a measure of emotional response to the given examples, the PANAS questionnaire of positive and negative affect (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule; Watson et al., 1988) was used. The scale consists of a total of 20 items, of which 10 measure positive affect and 10 measure negative affect. Participants indicated on a scale from 1 (“Very slightly or not at all”) to 5 (“Extremely”) how they felt while reading the examples. The psychometric characteristics of the subscales are presented in Table 1. Total scores were calculated for the two subscales as the average scores of responses to the corresponding items, where a higher total score indicated a more pronounced positive, i.e., negative affect.

(3) Perceived changes. Participants reported on perceived changes in the domains of attitudes and behavior, perception of personal safety, and decision to report violence and seek help as reactions to the read examples of media reporting, on a scale from 1 (change in a negative direction) to 5 (change in a positive direction). Additionally, participants were given the opportunity to describe perceived changes in an open-ended question.

Table 1. Psychometric characteristics of PANAS subscales

	$\lambda$	Percentage of variance explained	Cronbach's $\alpha$
<i>After exposure to sexist reporting on women</i>			
Positive affect	4.75	47%	0.87
Negative affect	4.81	48%	0.86
<i>After exposure to inappropriate and sensationalist reporting on gender-based violence</i>			
Positive affect	4.87	49%	0.87
Negative affect	5.85	58%	0.92

### Qualitative research

The interview guide, developed in collaboration with the team of the Centre for Civic Initiatives Poreč, was constructed with the aim of gaining a broader insight into the impact of media portrayals of women and media content related to gender-based violence on women who have experienced this form of violence.

In addition to the introductory address to participants, whose purpose was to familiarize them with the aim and procedure of the research, the guide contained the following sections:

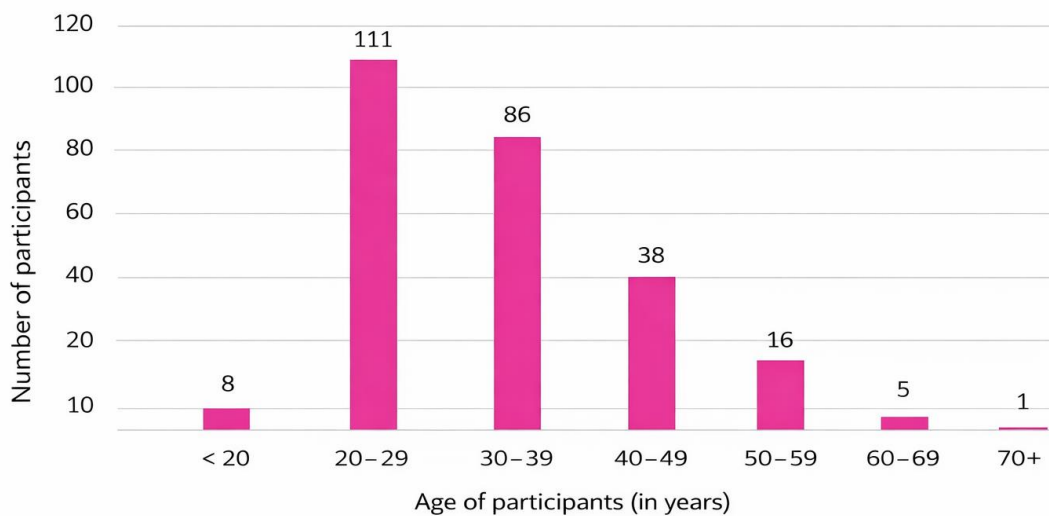
1. Exposure to media content
2. Perception of media reporting on gender-based violence
  - 2.1. General impression of the portrayal of women in the media and of media portrayals of gender-based violence
  - 2.2. Perception of the portrayal of victims in media reports
3. Personal experience and reactions
  - 3.1. Examples of positive/negative portrayals of gender-based violence in the media
  - 3.2. Emotional reactions to media content
  - 3.3. Identification with the presented situations
  - 3.4. Impact on the decision to report violence
  - 3.5. Impact on other women victims of violence

4. Perception of public attitudes towards women victims of violence
5. Desired changes in media reporting on women in general, as well as on gender-based violence

# Participants

## Quantitative research

A total of 307 participants accessed the online study. Since the target group consisted of adult women who have experienced gender-based violence, based on responses to the screening questions at the beginning of the survey regarding age, sex, gender, and experience of gender-based violence, 42 participants did not proceed to the main part of the survey. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 265 participants, who were on average 32 years and 11 months old ( $M = 32.94$ ;  $SD = 10.13$ ). The age distribution of participants is presented in Graph 1.



Graph 1. Distribution of participants by age ( $N=265$ )

At the time of the research, 45% (118) of participants were employed on a permanent basis, while 23% (61) were students. A total of 19% (34) were either occasionally employed or employed on a fixed-term basis. In addition, 8% (21) of participants were self-employed, and 8% (22) were unemployed. The sample also included 2% (6) pupils and 1% (3) retirees.

Participants most often assessed their standard of living as average. The majority of participants lived in a large city (more than 500,000 inhabitants), most notably in the City of Zagreb (94; 35%). Among other cities, the most represented were Rijeka (16; 6%), Split (14; 5%), and Osijek (12; 5%). Other data on standard of living and place of residence are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of participants by living standard and place of residence ( $N = 265$ )

	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Living standard</i>		
Average	109	41.1
Slightly above average	84	31.7
Slightly below average	41	15.5
Significantly below average	20	7.5
Significantly above average	11	4.2
<i>Size of place of residence</i>		
Large city (over 500,000 inhabitants)	108	40.8
Medium city (up to 100,000 inhabitants)	61	23.0
City (up to 50,000 inhabitants)	49	18.5
Small town (up to 10,000 inhabitants)	25	9.4
Village (up to 5,000 inhabitants)	22	8.3
<i>County</i>		
City of Zagreb	101	38.1
Outside Croatia	25	9.4
Primorje-Gorski Kotar County	22	8.3
Split-Dalmatia County	21	7.9
Zagreb County	17	6.4
Istria County	15	5.7
Osijek-Baranja County	15	5.7
Varaždin County	8	3.0
Zadar County	7	2.6
Bjelovar-Bilogora County	5	1.9
Lika-Senj County	5	1.9
Šibenik-Knin County	5	1.9
Brod-Posavina County	3	1.1
Karlovac County	3	1.1
Koprivnica-Križevci County	3	1.1
Vukovar-Srijem County	3	1.1
Dubrovnik-Neretva County	2	0.8
Požega-Slavonia County	2	0.8
Krapina-Zagorje County	1	0.4
Sisak-Moslavina County	1	0.4
Virovitica-Podravina County	1	0.4

At the time of the research, almost half of the participants were in a relationship, while one fifth were married or in a life partnership. One third of the participants had children, most often one child. Around two thirds of the participants identified their sexual orientation as heterosexual, and slightly less than one fifth as bisexual. Other data on marital/partnership status, parenthood, and sexual orientation are presented in Table 3.

*Table 3.* Distribution of participants by partnership status, parenthood, and sexual orientation (*N* = 265)

	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Partnership status</i>		
In a cohabiting/non-marital partnership / in a relationship	121	45.7
In a marital union / civil partnership	54	20.4
Single	50	18.9
Separated, divorced, in the process of divorce	36	13.6
Widowed	2	0.8
Other	2	0.8
<i>Parenthood</i>		
No children	180	67.9
One child	40	15.1
Two children	32	12.1
Three children	12	4.5
Four children	1	0.4
<i>Sexual orientation</i>		
Heterosexual	178	67.2
Bisexual	47	17.7

I do not identify	18	6.8
Homosexual	12	4.5
Asexual	8	3.0
Other (pansexual, queer)	2	0.8

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### Qualitative research

A total of 12 participants were interviewed. On average, they were 37 years and 4 months old ( $M = 37.33$ ;  $SD = 6.66$ ), with an age range from 27 to 49 years. At the time of the research, nine participants were employed on a permanent basis, while three were occasionally employed, employed on a fixed-term basis, or students. Four participants lived in the City of Zagreb, two in Split-Dalmatia County, and one each in Brod-Posavina, Istria, Osijek-Baranja, Primorje-Gorski Kotar, Vukovar-Srijem, and Zadar County. Three participants assessed their standard of living as below average, four as average, and five as above average. Regarding partnership status, five participants were separated or divorced, and seven were in a relationship (cohabiting/non-marital union/in a relationship). Of the interviewed participants, eight had children (two participants had one child, five participants had two children, and one participant had three children).

# Results

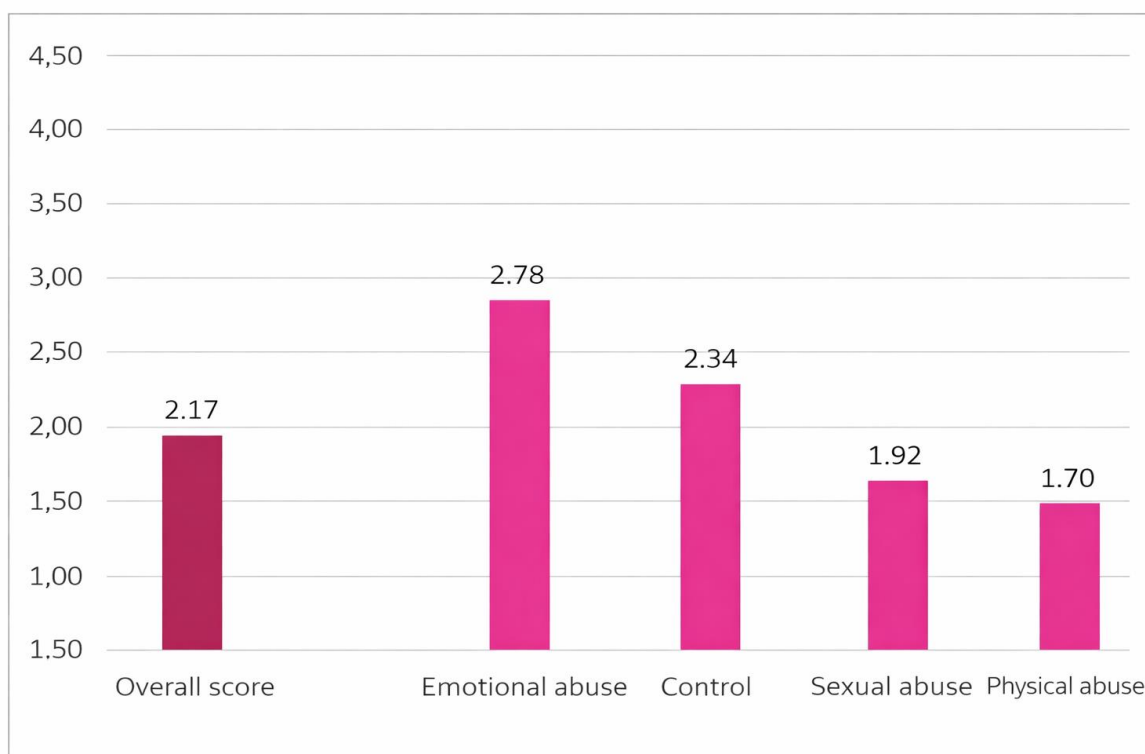
In this chapter, the data collected in the quantitative (online survey) and qualitative (interviews) parts of the research will be presented, organized according to the defined research problems.

## Experienced violence and previous willingness to report violence

### Experienced

### violence

Participants in the online study most frequently experienced emotional violence (insulting, belittling, and intimidation), followed by controlling behaviors of partners (jealousy, regulating behavior, and access to mobile phones), sexual violence (agreeing to sex out of fear), and least frequently physical violence (pushing and shoving). Graph 2 presents the average scores, while Table 4 provides more detailed results on the frequency of experiencing different violent behaviors.



*Graph 2.* Frequency of experienced violence (N = 265)

*Note:* Possible total scores range from 1 (never) to 5 (many times).

Table 4. Frequency of experiencing different forms of partner’s violent behavior (N = 265)

Has your current or any previous partner ever...	Never (f)	Never (%)	Once or twice (f)	Once or twice (%)	Several or many times (f)	Several or many times (%)
<i>Physical violence</i>						
<b>... pushed or shoved you roughly?</b>	125	47.2	53	20.0	<b>87</b>	<b>32.8</b>
... slapped you or threw something at you that could hurt you?	172	64.9	47	17.7	46	17.4
... hit you with a fist?	198	74.7	29	10.9	38	14.3
... hit you with a leg or another object?	201	75.8	30	11.3	34	12.8
... threatened to use or actually used a gun, knife or other weapon against you?	211	79.6	32	12.1	22	8.3
... deliberately strangled or burned you?	220	83.0	35	13.2	10	3.8
<i>Sexual violence</i>						
<b>... had sexual intercourse with you when you did not want to, because you were afraid of what your partner might do?</b>	154	58.1	45	17.0	<b>66</b>	<b>24.9</b>
... forced you into sexual acts you found degrading or humiliating?	166	62.6	46	17.4	53	20.0
... physically forced you into sexual intercourse when you did not want to?	171	64.5	58	21.9	36	13.6
<i>Emotional violence</i>						
<b>... insulted you or made you feel bad about yourself?</b>	58	21.9	49	18.5	<b>158</b>	<b>59.6</b>
<b>... belittled or humiliated you in front of others?</b>	85	32.1	52	19.6	<b>128</b>	<b>48.3</b>
<b>... intentionally intimidated or scared you (e.g., with looks, yelling, breaking objects)?</b>	94	35.5	45	17.0	<b>126</b>	<b>47.5</b>
... deliberately prevented you from seeing someone you care about?	200	75.5	21	7.9	44	16.6

Note: For easier interpretation of the results, the number of response categories was reduced – the response “never” is presented in its original form, while the responses “once” and “twice” are combined, as well as the responses “several times” and “many times.” The most common forms of violent behavior are highlighted in color and bold text/numbers.

Table 4. Frequency of experiencing different forms of partner's violent behavior (N = 265) – continuation

<i>Has your current or any previous partner ever...</i>	<i>Never (f)</i>	<i>Never (%)</i>	<i>Once or twice (f)</i>	<i>Once or twice (%)</i>	<i>Several or many times (f)</i>	<i>Several or many times (%)</i>
<i>Controlling behaviors</i>						
<b>... unjustifiably accused you of cheating or flirting with others?</b>	102	38.5	32	12.1	131	<b>49.4</b>
... told you how to behave?	122	46.0	44	16.6	99	37.4
... became angry if you did not respond to calls or messages immediately?	134	50.6	34	12.8	97	36.6
... insisted on having access to your phone so he could read your messages, photos, etc.?	143	54.0	43	16.2	79	29.8
... monitored who you were with?	184	69.4	30	11.3	51	19.2
... forced you to change clothes when he did not like how you were dressed?	184	69.4	28	10.6	53	20.0

### Reporting violence

Participants in the study most often confided in friends, while reporting to official persons and institutions was very rare (Table 5).

Table 5. Frequency of different ways of reporting partner's violent behavior (N = 265)

	<i>Never (f)</i>	<i>Never (%)</i>	<i>Once or twice (f)</i>	<i>Once or twice (%)</i>	<i>Several or many times (f)</i>	<i>Several or many times (%)</i>
<b>I did nothing.</b>	106	40.0	33	12.5	126	<b>47.5</b>
I confided in my friends.	67	25.3	57	21.5	141	<b>53.2</b>
I confided in family members.	134	50.6	61	23.0	70	26.4
<b>I sought advice and protection from a family doctor.</b>	242	<b>91.3</b>	10	3.8	13	4.9
<b>I sought legal protection when reporting to the police.</b>	237	<b>89.4</b>	20	7.5	8	3.0
<b>I sought advice and protection from NGOs dealing with protection of women victims of violence.</b>	219	<b>82.6</b>	27	10.2	19	7.2
<b>I reported the violence to the police.</b>	214	<b>80.8</b>	36	13.6	15	5.7

Note: For easier interpretation of the results, the number of response categories was reduced – the response “never” is presented in its original form, while the responses “once” and “twice” are combined, as well as the responses “several times” and “many times.” The most common forms of violent behaviors are highlighted in color and bold text/numbers.

In order to examine the relationship between the frequency of experiencing violence and reporting violence, as well as confiding about experienced violence, a correlation analysis was conducted (Pearson’s coefficient of linear correlation).

The frequency of experiencing violence was, as expected, associated with reporting—participants who experienced more violence also reported it more (Table 6). However, it is important to note that this relationship differs when it comes to sexual violence. According to the obtained data, the frequency of experiencing this type of violence is very weakly or not at all related to reporting and confiding about violence. Previous research shows that sexual violence in intimate relationships has a different pattern of impact on victims and creates specific barriers to seeking help compared to other forms of violence in intimate relationships (e.g., Wright et al., 2022). Therefore, the frequency of experiencing this type of violence itself is not a significant factor in seeking help; rather, other characteristics of the victim and her environment are decisive.

Table 6. Association between the frequency of experiencing different forms of violence and the frequency of reporting and disclosing violence (N = 265)

<i>Gender-based violence</i>	<i>Reporting violence</i>	<i>Disclosing violence</i>
Total score	0.43*	0.29*
Physical violence	0.45*	0.18*
Sexual violence	0.17*	0.10
Emotional violence	0.33*	0.31*
Controlling behaviors	0.42*	0.33*

Note: \* statistically significant correlation

### Differences in experienced violence and reporting of violence with regard to sociodemographic characteristics

In order to test differences in experienced violence and reporting of violence with regard to sociodemographic characteristics, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted separately for each sociodemographic characteristic, with different forms of violence/reporting of violence as dependent variables and sociodemographic characteristics as independent variables. Statistical indicators of the test of differences are presented in Table 7 and Table 8. Differences in experienced violence and reporting of violence are then presented in graphs for those sociodemographic characteristics where statistically significant differences were found (Graphs 3 to 7).

The results of the test of differences in experienced violence and reporting of violence with regard to sociodemographic characteristics showed the following:

→ Older participants experienced statistically significantly more of all forms of violence except sexual violence, for which no statistically significant differences were found with regard to age.

→ Participants with a lower standard of living experienced statistically significantly more of all forms of violence.

→ There is no difference in experiencing violence between participants living in Zagreb (n = 101) and those living outside Zagreb (n = 139).

→ Participants who are not of heterosexual orientation experienced statistically significantly more sexual violence compared to participants of heterosexual orientation. For other forms of violence, no statistically significant differences were found with regard to sexual orientation.

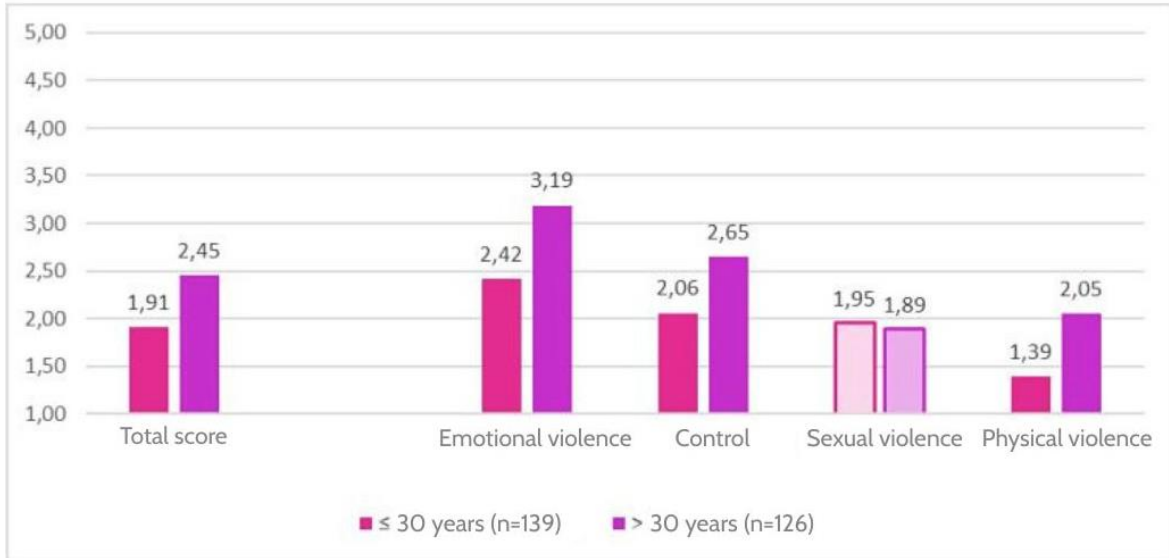
→ No statistically significant differences were found in confiding about experienced violence with regard to sociodemographic characteristics.

→ Regarding reporting of violence, it was found that older participants compared to younger ones, and those with lower and higher standards of living compared to those with an average standard, report violence statistically significantly more often.

*Table 7.* Overview of statistical test indicators for differences in various forms of violence with regard to sociodemographic characteristics

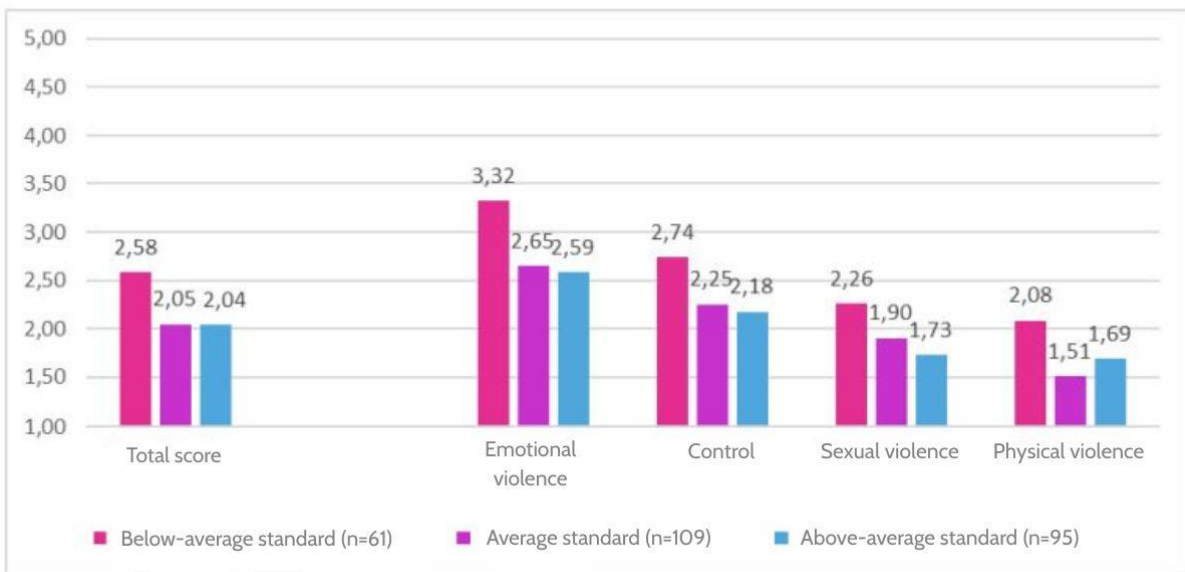
		<i>Df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>partial η<sup>2</sup></i>
<i>Age</i>					
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.81^*$	Total score	1	20.54	0.000*	0.072
F (4, 260) = 15.10	Physical violence	1	35.49	0.000*	0.119
p < 0.001	Sexual violence	1	0.21	0.649	0.001
	Emotional violence	1	24.21	0.000*	0.084
	Controlling behaviors	1	14.16	0.000*	0.051
	Error	263			
<i>Standard of living</i>					
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.91^*$	Total score	2	6.87	0.001*	0.050
F (8, 518) = 3.02	Physical violence	2	7.38	0.001*	0.053
p = 0.002	Sexual violence	2	3.92	0.021*	0.029
	Emotional violence	2	6.95	0.001*	0.050
	Controlling behaviors	2	3.99	0.020*	0.030
	Error	262			
<i>Place of residence</i>					
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.99$	Total score	1	0.58	0.447	0.002
F (4, 235) = 0.32	Physical violence	1	0.15	0.694	0.001
p = 0.865	Sexual violence	1	1.11	0.292	0.005
	Emotional violence	1	0.28	0.600	0.001
	Controlling behaviors	1	0.58	0.445	0.002
	Error	238			
<i>Sexual orientation</i>					
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.96^*$	Total score	1	3.41	0.066	0.013
F (4, 260) = 3.08	Physical violence	1	0.51	0.476	0.002
p = 0.017	Sexual violence	1	9.78	0.002*	0.036
	Emotional violence	1	1.10	0.295	0.004
	Controlling behaviors	1	3.746	0.054	0.014
	Error	263			

*Note:* \* statistically significant differences

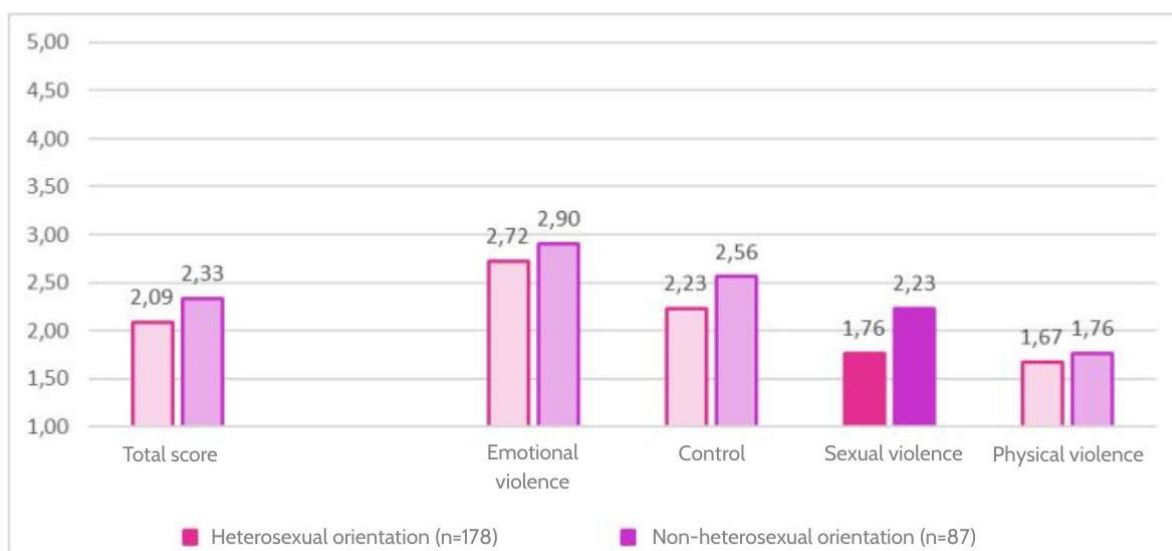


Graph 3. Differences in experienced violence by participants' age (N = 265)

Note: Differences that are not statistically significant are indicated with lighter shades.



Graph 4. Differences in experienced violence by participants' standard of living (N = 265)



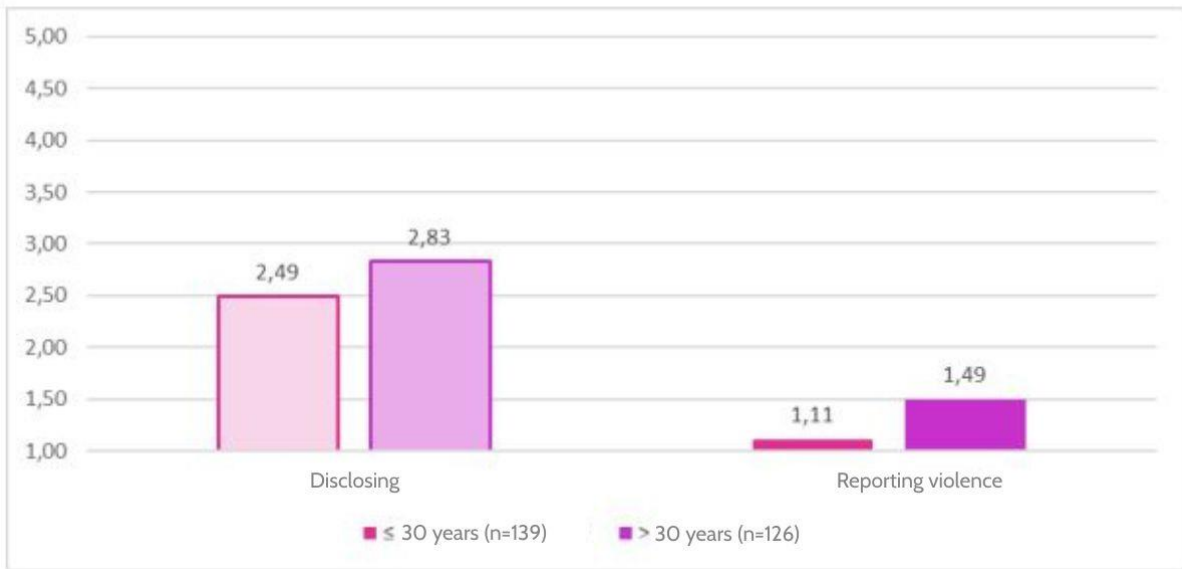
Graph 5. Differences in experienced violence by participants' sexual orientation (N = 265)

Note: Differences that are not statistically significant are indicated with lighter shades.

Table 8. Overview of statistical test indicators for differences in disclosing and reporting violence with regard to sociodemographic characteristics

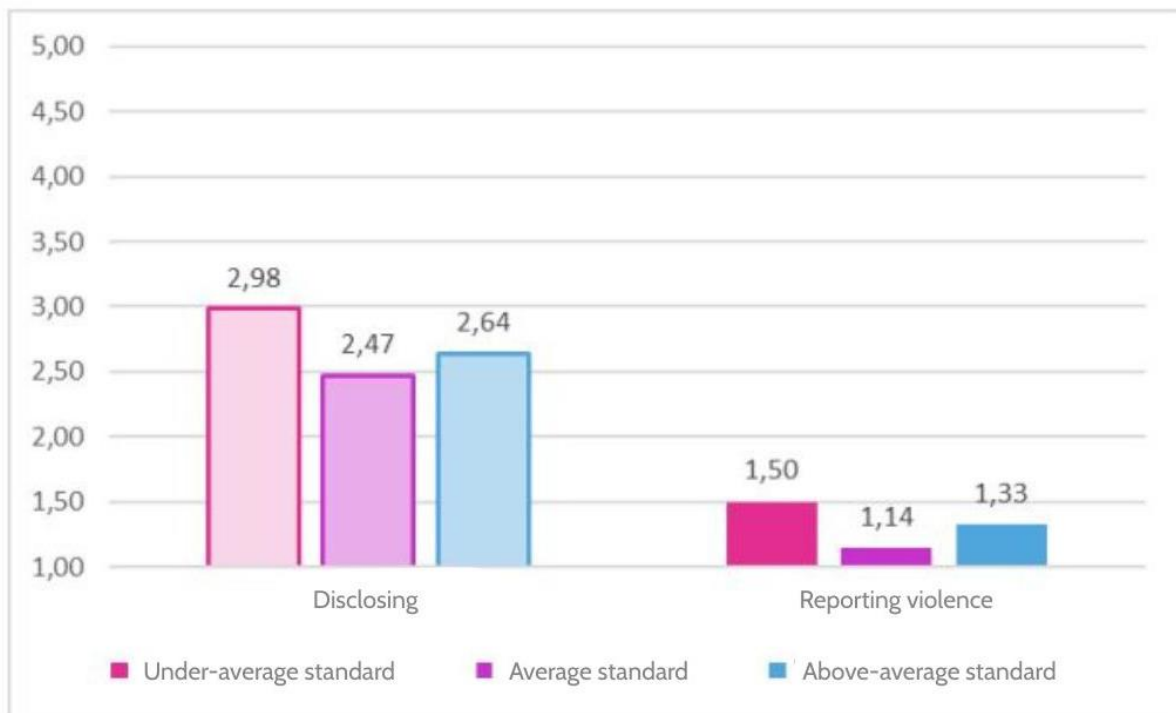
		<i>Df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>partial η<sup>2</sup></i>
<i>Age</i>					
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.93^*$	Disclosing	1	1.18	0.279	0.005
$F(2, 215) = 8.34$	Reporting violence	1	16.74	< 0.001*	0.072
$p < 0.001$	Error	216			
<i>Standard of living</i>					
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.95^*$	Disclosing	2	2.52	0.083	0.023
$F(4, 430) = 3.02$	Reporting violence	2	4.91	0.008*	0.043
$p = 0.018$	Error	216			
<i>Place of residence</i>					
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.99$	Disclosing	1	0.11	0.735	0.001
$F(2, 215) = 0.09$	Reporting violence	1	0.02	0.877	0.000
$p = 0.917$	Error	216			
<i>Sexual orientation</i>					
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.99$	Disclosing	1	0.635	0.426	0.003
$F(2, 215) = 0.33$	Reporting violence	1	0.135	0.714	0.001
$p = 0.718$	Error	216			

Note: \* statistically significant differences



Graph 6. Differences in disclosing violence and reporting violence by participants' age (N = 265)

Note: Differences that are not statistically significant are indicated with lighter shades.



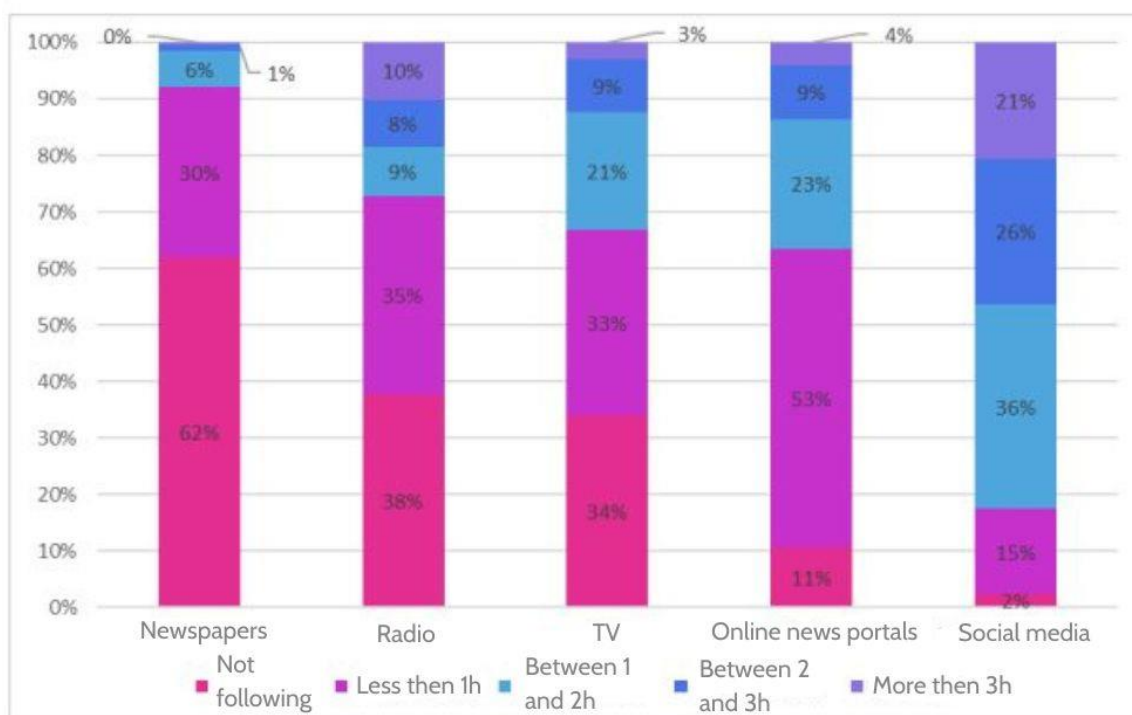
Graph 7. Differences in disclosing violence and reporting violence by participants' standard of living (N = 265)

Note: Differences that are not statistically significant are indicated with lighter shades.

## Media and perception of bias in media reporting

### Media platform use

Graph 8 presents the frequency of use of different media platforms for the sample of participants who took part in the quantitative part of the research (online survey). In line with the relatively young sample of participants, the most frequent was the use of social media and online portals, while the use of traditional media such as television, newspapers/magazines, and radio was significantly less frequent.



Graph 8. Frequency of following different media platforms expressed in percentages (N = 265)

Participants who took part in the qualitative part of the research (interviews) showed a similar pattern of use of different media platforms. They most frequently used social media and, indirectly through them, online portals, while they rarely followed traditional media such as television and newspapers/magazines, and listened to the radio mainly while driving.

“I mostly don’t go directly to the internet and open portals individually, but what appears to me in my feed on social media is usually the content I actually consume.”

“I read portals, but not by going directly to them—rather, I see what appears on social media. I use social media and that’s basically where I’m exposed to information.”

“In recent years, I basically don’t follow television at all, like news or daily broadcasts and things like that, because it frustrates me more than it informs me.”

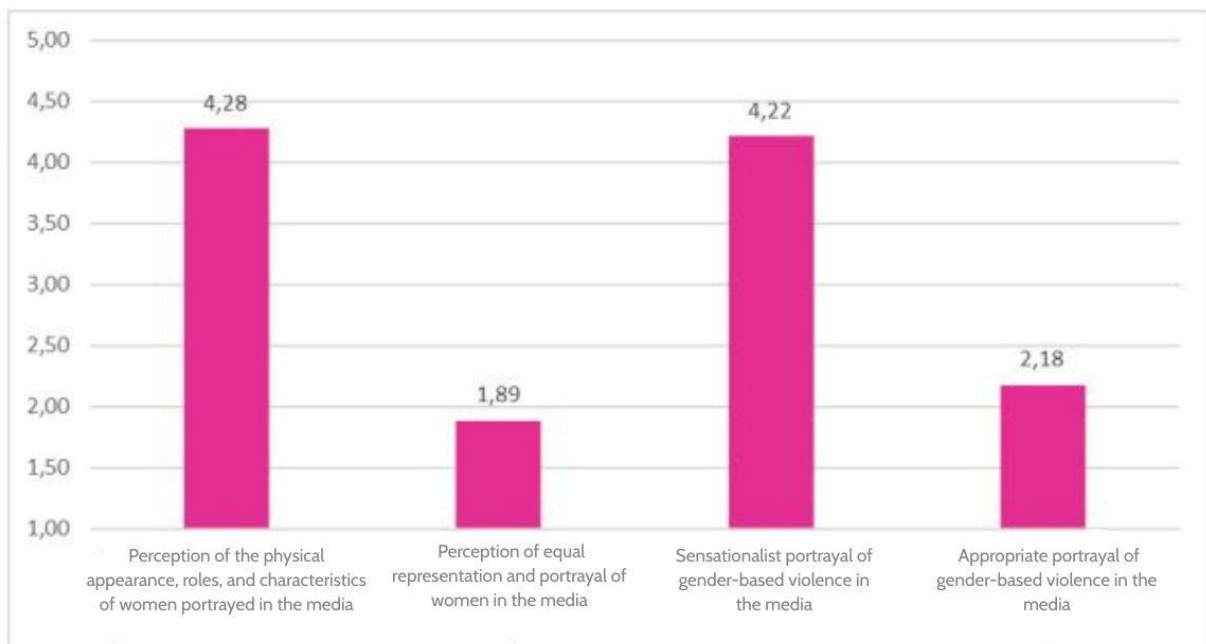
“So, I don’t have a TV at home, I don’t use the radio at the office either, maybe a bit while driving sometimes, I wouldn’t say often.”

### Perception of bias in media reporting on women and gender-based violence

Based on the data collected through the online survey, Graph 9 presents the average scores on the measures of perception of biased portrayal of women and portrayal of gender-based violence in the media, while Tables 9 and 10 present more detailed results for each individual item in these measures.

Participants showed a very consistent agreement that women are portrayed in the media in a stereotypical way, through an emphasis on women’s beauty and youthful appearance, successful balancing of appearance, professional achievements, and domestic roles as homemakers and wives, as well as through the emphasis on fashion, beauty, and health as the main interests of women. In addition, the results clearly show that, in the opinion of the participants in this research, media reporting lacks equality in the portrayal and representation of women compared to men.

When it comes to reporting on gender-based violence, participants generally perceived it as sensationalist and very rarely appropriate. The results presented in Table 10 show that, according to the participants in this research, the Guidelines for gender-sensitive media reporting on violence against women, domestic violence, and femicide are very often not respected in media reporting.



*Graph 9.* Mean scores on measures of the perception of biased portrayals of women and the portrayal of gender-based violence in the media (N = 265)

*Note:* Possible total scores range from 1 (completely inaccurate) to 5 (completely accurate).

Table 9. Perception of biased portrayals of women in the media (N = 265)

	Completely / mostly inaccurate f	%	Neither accurate nor inaccurate f	%	Mostly / completely accurate f	%
<i>Perception of physical appearance, roles and characteristics of women (stereotypical portrayal of women)</i>						
<b>The media sends the message that a woman's physical appearance is very important.</b>	8	3.0	5	1.9	252	<b>95.1</b>
<b>The media place strong emphasis on the importance of women's youthful appearance.</b>	7	2.6	7	2.6	251	<b>94.7</b>
<b>The media send the message that a woman should simultaneously be attractive, successful in her career, and a good housewife and partner.</b>	9	3.4	11	4.2	245	<b>92.5</b>
<b>Women in the media are portrayed as if their main interests are fashion, beauty and health.</b>	10	3.8	12	4.5	243	<b>91.7</b>
<b>The media mainly emphasize the importance of a slender and well-proportioned female body.</b>	12	4.5	13	4.9	240	<b>90.6</b>
In the media, superficial female roles are often presented.	12	4.5	19	7.2	234	88.3
Women in the media are often portrayed as beauty icons from the entertainment industry.	8	3.0	27	10.2	230	86.8
Women in the media are mostly portrayed as young, attractive and appealing.	12	4.5	27	10.2	226	85.3
The media portray women as more emotional and more sensitive than they are in real life.	10	3.8	36	13.6	219	82.6
Women in the media are often portrayed as gentle and fragile.	18	6.8	47	17.7	200	75.5
The media often portray women as dependent and subordinate to others.	22	8.3	66	24.9	177	66.8
Women in the media are most often passive and do not speak much.	32	12.1	71	26.8	162	61.1

*Perception of equal portrayal and representation of women (equal portrayal of women)*

<b>Women of all ages, from the youngest to the oldest, are equally represented in the media.</b>	226	<b>85.3</b>	26	9.8	13	4.9
<b>Women in the media are portrayed equally in relation to men.</b>	216	<b>81.5</b>	35	13.2	14	5.3
The media send the message that men and women should equally participate in childcare and household responsibilities.	212	80.0	37	14.0	16	6.0
In the media, women and men are equally represented in text, image, voice and speech.	179	67.5	63	23.8	23	8.7

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*Note:* For easier interpretation of results, the number of response categories was reduced – responses indicating disagreement (“completely inaccurate” and “mostly inaccurate”) are combined, as well as responses indicating agreement (“mostly accurate” and “completely accurate”). The most frequent responses are highlighted in color and bold text/numbers.

Table 10. Perception of the portrayal of gender-based violence in the media (N = 265)

*Sensationalist portrayal of gender-based violence in the media (sensationalist portrayal of GBV)*

	Completely / mostly inaccurate f	%	Neither accurate nor inaccurate f	%	Mostly / completely accurate f	%
<b>Media reporting on violence against women often uses terms that obscure the meaning of violence (e.g., referring to domestic violence as marital disputes, love conflicts, excessive jealousy, or “a celebration that went too far”).</b>	14	5.3	19	7.2	<b>232</b>	<b>87.5</b>
<b>Media reporting on violence against women includes speculation about neighbors, acquaintances, or family members that does not contribute to clarifying the case.</b>	11	4.2	25	9.4	<b>229</b>	<b>86.4</b>
<b>Media reporting on violence against women includes details from the perpetrator’s past and testimonies that are not relevant to the committed violence (e.g., opinions about the perpetrator from a primary school teacher or sports coach).</b>	19	7.2	20	7.5	<b>226</b>	<b>85.3</b>
Media reporting on violence against women includes unverified assumptions and speculation about motives during the investigation (e.g., he was extremely jealous, she cheated on him, he was drunk, etc.).	14	5.3	29	10.9	222	83.8
Media reporting on violence against women uses sensationalist expressions for perpetrators and violence (e.g., monster, killer, monster from hell, beast, house of horror).	26	9.8	27	10.2	212	80.0
In media reporting on violence against women, the focus is placed on the victim’s appearance and behavior (e.g., clothing, late-night outings).	19	7.2	42	15.8	204	77.0
Media reporting on violence against women describes explicit details of femicide.	32	12.1	63	23.8	170	64.2

Note: For easier interpretation of the results, the number of response categories was reduced – responses indicating disagreement (“completely inaccurate” and “mostly inaccurate”) are combined, as well as responses indicating agreement (“mostly accurate” and “completely accurate”). The most frequent responses are highlighted in color and bold text/numbers.

In the qualitative part of the research, participants described their impressions of the general portrayal of women in the media and what they think about the way gender-based violence is reported. Some

participants highlighted that they had noticed a decline in the quality of reporting and a general shift towards sensationalism in the media, regardless of the topic being reported on.

“Regardless of the topic, I think that reporting in general—I’m not talking only about women now—but with the emergence of portals, the disappearance of newspapers, and the overall decline of the journalism profession, it has actually become terrible.”

“I am strongly against revealing details in newspapers, however I see that there are no penalties in our media; it simply doesn’t happen. The Croatian Journalists’ Association can issue warnings, portals can be fined and so on, but I still see that reporting always focuses on those scandalous clickbait moments that are actually not important for the content of the text and do not protect anyone’s dignity.”

“It’s as if everything has somehow been reduced to the subjective perception of the journalist. I really feel that.”

“A combination of political content and scandalous content is almost 100%.”

“When I was growing up, topics of violence were covered in the crime section; they were not on the front page of newspapers.”

When it comes to the portrayal of women and gender-based violence, their responses are consistent with the quantitative data and indicate that women are mostly portrayed stereotypically, while gender-based violence is presented in a sensationalist manner, with an emphasis on victim-blaming and justification of perpetrators. More detailed results are presented below and supported by participants’ quotes.

### **Portrayal of women in the media**

Regarding the portrayal of women in the media, participants pointed out that women are mostly described through stereotypical interests such as appearance and care for the family, while they much less frequently experienced women being portrayed through stories about their professional or educational achievements. In this part, participants particularly emphasized the topic of balancing private and professional life, which is always associated with women and never mentioned when talking about men.

“No importance is given to their qualities, profession, or education; something private or personal always has to be included. I don’t think they are portrayed equally to men.”

“Well, in any case not in a positive or good way, not as it should be, that is, in a way they would never write about men, for sure. Sensationalism always prevails over any kind of responsible and objective reporting; it is always more important how someone looks or what they were wearing than any of their actions, achievements, or anything else. [...] And when successful women are talked about, even if it’s not in an openly negative sense, it always has to be intertwined with how she handles everything, both family and this and that. [...] For men, no one ever asks how they manage their private life and balance family and work, because they are primarily devoted to work and that’s it; at home they don’t have to do anything, while we have to do both.”

“Women are mostly presented as some kind of object that is talked about in terms of what a politician was wearing. It doesn’t matter what she said, but how she looked at that moment and I don’t know... the objectification of women is really strongly present in the media.”

“Shopaholics, and women are reduced to fashion and beauty, how to stop aging, and that kind of superficiality.”

“But generally about women, I mean, I don’t want to read during elections what a female politician was wearing and things like that. That is belittling that woman, regardless of whether I agree with her or not.”

“When they talk about women, the focus is on their appearance. It doesn’t matter what they have achieved; what matters is how they look, the shape of their body, shocking images, videos—and they use women’s bodies for clickbait to drive more traffic to articles.”

### Portrayal of gender-based violence in the media

Participants mostly stated that they closely follow media reporting on gender-based violence and that they devote a significant part of their media consumption to these topics, even though they find them distressing. When it comes to the type of media platform, they particularly highlighted comments on social media. As most of them followed news and current events via social media, alongside the news itself they were usually exposed to readers’ comments, and found it very difficult to limit the time they spent reading the various opinions expressed in those comments.

“I’m actually very interested in it and I really follow it. If there’s an opportunity, I will follow the story all the way to the end.”

“I would say, unfortunately or fortunately, it has somehow become an obsession for me; I get angry and always look for these topics, especially lately—there’s more and more of it, on a daily basis I think you can find such a story.”

“For quite a long time, because the topic interests me personally, so I study and follow what’s happening in society more because of that.”

“That interests me the most because I’ve been through it myself, so I probably follow that the most, and the way it is reported—and then when I read the comments... it just frustrates me, so sometimes I distance myself from it and don’t want to follow it, I don’t want to read it.”

“I have this need to read all the comments from all the idiots under those posts. And you just can’t believe it. And when you read all the comments, then it’s clear to you why the environment is like that.”

“For quite a long time, because first I read the news, then I definitely come back to see updates—new developments about that news. If it’s on social media, then I look at the comments. That’s where I sink. Maybe it would be better not to read that. But yes, I definitely stay there. While reading comments, I scroll for 15–20 minutes.”

“Putting aside comments that write all sorts of things, but that in one serious article, on a serious portal, written by a serious professional journalist, there can be statements defending the perpetrator and blaming the victim—that is absolutely unbelievable to me.”

“The fact that they will include some disgusting details just so they, as journalists, get more clicks. It seems to me that with that kind of provocative narrative, their goal is obviously to get more clicks, but then below... I don’t know, if I look at the comments it’s even worse. It’s better not to open that

part, but when you see 299 comments and then illiterate people arguing and saying horrible things,  
it makes me want to move away.”

The overall impression of participants regarding reporting on gender-based violence was primarily negative, highlighting a superficial, sensationalist approach aimed at profit, i.e., increasing viewership through the exploitation of others’ suffering. Participants emphasized the frequent simplification of this topic in the media, and even the romanticization of violence, as well as missed opportunities to provide meaningful coverage of the issue that would include the use of appropriate terms and concepts (gender-based violence, femicide, rape, etc.). They also pointed out the lack of framing this issue as a broader social problem and the failure to take into account the complexity of the dynamics of violence, help-seeking, and reporting. The only positive examples mentioned by participants included certain television programs where experts were invited, as well as segments related to important dates where appropriate participants were included and the topic was presented correctly. However, participants emphasized that such examples are extremely rare.

“Journalistic reporting is non-objective and very much focused on sensationalism, on finding something juicy in the story.”

“I mean, I understand why they do it, those sensationalist headlines, clickbait headlines—I understand why they do it, it’s to increase reach, to get more people, more clicks, to earn more money from ads—but that human dignity means so little to them, I don’t know, that’s actually fascinating to me, and of course sad.”

“Commenting on the verdict, like it’s romantic—he loved her so much that he couldn’t bear that she wanted to leave him. And the verdict itself was presented so romantically, as if killing her was some romantic act, and then the whole media reporting about it was like that, something very romantic. They were just short of drawing hearts around it. Like, he loved her so much that he had to kill her because she no longer loved him. Terrible.”

“I think the way it is reported is not okay, that it pollutes the media space and unfortunately, instead of informing people about it as a social problem—because it is a broad social problem—it stays at the level of tabloid-style reporting, alongside someone’s breasts.”

“Somehow everyone thinks that it suddenly happened, but it didn’t happen suddenly. It’s something you keep within your four walls, and then when it comes out, when you leave it, then that person’s behavior becomes visible. But it’s something you kept hidden, and then everyone thinks—he suddenly snapped, why did he snap now... but nothing happened suddenly, he has always been like that, it’s just that it’s always kept within those four walls.”

“I think people really don’t understand, and especially when we have such media headlines and such statements in the media and news, how will people even understand what violence is? They cannot recognize it in their own environment, maybe they are experiencing it themselves and don’t know how to recognize it because it is all considered normal here.”

“I think there is a difference—you can really feel it—when someone takes their job seriously and reports on the situation, and when someone is simply looking for a way to justify, in this case, the actions of a man and the actions of a perpetrator.”

“First of all, in the media they don’t talk about gender-based violence at all. They say, I don’t know, he killed a woman, a mother, and so on, but it is not placed in the real context. So, the word femicide is not mentioned, gender-based is not mentioned, what that means is not explained, there

is no broader context given—it is just plain reporting like ‘he drank a beer with neighbors’ and no one expected him to do that. It’s somehow petty, sensational, like something for people to read on Facebook, so that comments from all extremes gather below, but without any sensitivity.”

“I remember one headline—it was about rape, but it was borderline, I think it wasn’t framed as pedophilia, it was someone a bit older than her. I remember it said: ‘Had sex with a minor.’ They label these criminal acts not by their actual name, but as something else—that is not it.”

“For example, what’s missing for me is the background, talking about why women do not leave abusive situations. There are surely ten reasons why it is difficult for a woman to leave, and that should be emphasized. But in reporting, it somehow stays at who he is in society, what her life is like, and how their everyday life looked in the eyes of others.”

“I think we rarely come across any positive example. Positive examples happen on occasions like the Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women or the European Day for Victims of Crime, then there is some talk about statistics, statements are taken from organizations, and that’s mostly it. And then when something happens again... it’s wrong again.”

In addition to this general impression, participants highlighted several aspects of reporting on gender-based violence that are in direct contradiction with guidelines on how such reporting should be conducted.

→ Protection of privacy: Participants believe that the privacy of the victim and others involved is only superficially protected, for example by using initials, while at the same time a number of identifying details about the context are provided, which seriously compromises or completely violates that privacy. For most participants, protecting privacy is important; however, one participant emphasized that, for her, the opposite is important—going public under one’s full name, which she sees as confronting the shame many victims of violence feel.

“There is no privacy at all. Maybe the child is protected, but not the victim.”

“It is literally clickbait, whether it’s newspapers or portals—you learn about the victim and the situation as if you were their immediate family. I think that is completely excessive. Especially when there are difficult social situations involved, situations that include children... they might as well write which kindergarten the children attend! They dig up interpersonal and family relationships as if the tragedy itself is not enough.”

“There are often discussions about the character of both the perpetrator and the victim, but unlike others, it doesn’t bother me when names and surnames of the victim and the child are mentioned. Because I believe the victim has nothing to be ashamed of.”

→ Victim-blaming: All participants emphasized the very frequent minimization of the seriousness of violence and detailed examination of the victim’s life in order to find details that could justify the occurrence of violence. In other words, media reporting is often focused on finding the cause of violence in the victim herself, rather than in the perpetrator.

“Fatal, attractive, and so on.”

“Honestly, it’s terrible to me because, again, the woman is not protected at all. And the woman is always to blame. The woman is always to blame, whether she is at fault or not.”

“Women are portrayed either as if nothing serious happened—the act itself is trivialized—or there is an attempt to somehow blame the woman. Something like that is always present.”

“They are not portrayed as victims, but rather there is a search for context, an attempt to find why it happened, what triggered the violence. The focus is not on the act of violence, but on how she contributed to it happening.”

“There is always an attempt to find a way to insert in the same sentence what she did—she did this to him, so then he did that to her.”

“It is simply not accepted that this is violence and that there is no justification for it, but justification for violence is constantly being sought, and a reason is constantly being looked for as to why someone did it. And usually, the victim is to blame because she provoked him or something like that.”

“They are mostly presented as if they committed some wrongdoing and therefore deserved to be killed. There is no softer way to say it—it is simply that brutal. The victim’s behavior is always questioned, and the perpetrator’s behavior is not.”

“Most women do not have evidence of emotional abuse. They don’t. And for most physical abuse either. So he has to beat you severely, leave you bruised and disfigured, and someone has to see it or you have to record it. So women have started recording. Even when they present the recording, then it is said that she did it intentionally. Why did she record it? She provoked the situation. So it is never good. It’s not good if you have evidence, it’s not good if you don’t have evidence.”

→ Stereotypical portrayal of the victim: Participants highlighted the presence of a stereotypical portrayal of the victim as someone who mainly experiences physical violence with visible consequences, who is financially dependent on the perpetrator and has children. Such portrayal simplifies the complexity of violence, which occurs in various forms beyond physical injuries and is present across all social groups.

“That is something I would like to break—the stigma that violence is not reserved for someone or against someone. It exists in all parts of society.”

“Violence can happen to anyone, anywhere, to all women regardless of class, educational status, or anything else.”

“The victim cannot be an attractive, successful woman who has her own job, who is independent... that cannot happen to her. I think that’s why women are also afraid to report it, because they are not ‘good enough’ victims.”

“Victims are those who walk around with bruises. The perpetrator is some kind of complete madman, some brute. But it doesn’t have to be like that at all. Violence is many things. What started with me did not look like violence, nor did I think it could be that.”

→ Justification of the perpetrator: In media reporting, the portrayal of the perpetrator is completely different from that of the victim—while details from the victim’s past are sought to explain the occurrence of violence, in the case of the perpetrator, details are usually sought that present him as a respectable member of the community and someone for whom it is hard to believe that he could have committed violent acts.

“When I remember those newspaper articles like: ‘She was killed by a gun.’ Well, the gun did not kill her. I mean, now I’m talking about how men are portrayed, how they are protected, but I want to say that men are protected from everything, and women—they are blamed for being where they are.”

“The perpetrator is always someone whose background is explored to show he was a calm man, a family man. Neighbors are asked for comments. Nothing indicated that he was like that. Everything goes in the direction of defending the perpetrator and demonizing the victim. Searching for reasons—he must have had a reason, something must have happened, maybe it was alcohol. Looking for external causes. He is a successful entrepreneur, a family man, respected in society, has status... It is presented as unbelievable that he could be a perpetrator at all. Maybe it was an isolated incident, maybe he lost control... The narrative goes in the direction of finding justification for violence and for the perpetrator. He is never portrayed as a perpetrator or a murderer, but always as a man with a name and surname, with status, with a job—and what was done is never named, like murder; things are never called by their real name in newspapers.”

“Why is he called a respectable entrepreneur? Why is that important for the story? Is it really important, when violence happens, that someone is an entrepreneur, a minister, a devout believer, a father of two? That is not relevant for violence! It’s not important to me, but those are the details that shape people’s opinions, and I think opinions are very often formed that way in a way that should not be.”

“There is always something—‘but he was jealous’... there is always something. But actually, most often that is not the case. There is nothing... I think violence most often comes from something within them. In my own case, I did nothing to provoke the violence. It came from him, from within him. And that is something that is not emphasized enough.”

“The most common comment I noticed under such news is that women are usually to blame because they chose the perpetrator. Or the system is to blame, or the woman who chose him, or the police who did not react, or social services. Everyone is to blame except the person who committed the act.”

→ Statements of neighbors: Finally, all participants highlighted the use of statements from people who are not relevant for commenting on such events (most often neighbors) as a particularly disturbing part of media reports and as something that further contributes to the justification of the perpetrator and trivialization of gender-based violence.

“They focus on completely irrelevant things: the neighbors said they were a wonderful family.”

“Statements are taken from irrelevant people. I also think my neighbors are the best people in the world, but am I inside their home, do I really know what happens behind closed doors? No. My grandmother always had that attitude—he is a great man because he greeted me nicely. That is not true.”

“It all stays at that subjective level, subjective impressions. People who are asked about the event are presented as sources in articles.”

“Completely wrong—for example, statements are taken from neighbors: they were a peaceful family, there were no problems, he wouldn’t have done that. There is no real substance... it all ends up as if we are five-year-old children who do not understand what is happening, so we ask a passerby what happened and that’s it.”

“Not all people are completely bad, not all are completely good. We cannot see everything in black and white, everything is a grey zone. Just because he greeted you on the street as a neighbor does not mean he wasn’t abusing his wife every day. So I think such comments from shocked neighbors are absolutely unnecessary.”

According to the participants, this kind of portrayal of victims and perpetrators, and of gender-based violence in general, contributes to a distorted public image of these issues. Participants believe that empathy towards victims and understanding of the dynamics of violence are extremely rare, and that public attitudes far more often involve misunderstanding of victims and of the difficulties surrounding the reporting of violence, victim-blaming, and simplification of violence to the point of accepting different forms of violence due to frequent exposure to sensationalist portrayals of violence in the media.

“I think there is, how should I put it, I think it is bipolar. On the one hand, it awakens a protective element in people towards their own, their family, their wife; someone’s eyes will be opened, so they will ask, they will try to do something. And on the other hand, that attitude is also very judgmental.”

“I think that theory about exposure and the media portrayal of violence is completely accurate—namely, the more we are exposed to violence presented in that way, the more normal it becomes to us. I think it becomes normal to us, we no longer notice any anomaly in it. We are shocked for one day, and the next day it is already—let’s move on.”

“I think that everything we read in the media contributes to that distorted view of the role of the victim and the role of the perpetrator.”

“Well, certainly a great deal, because too many details are presented about the victim’s life and about how long they were married, how many children, and so on, and then people have a wrong perception of what it means to live in violence. The comments will mostly be—Why did she put up with it for so long if she wasn’t well?”

“In general, women are always to blame, and if it is not known why she is to blame, then it is because she hid it, but the woman is definitely to blame. So, either she is to blame for not leaving immediately and for staying, or she is to blame because she must have somehow caused it.”

“That they are not victims at all, that they brought it on themselves. Well, I think that is what the general public thinks about women, unfortunately. Sometimes when I am in my own circle, my people, my friends, my family, or the circle of people who think like me, then I think, okay, everyone is aware that this is not right. And then I see an article, and even read the comments, and then I realize that not everyone thinks that way.”

## Relationship between media platform use and the perception of bias in media reporting

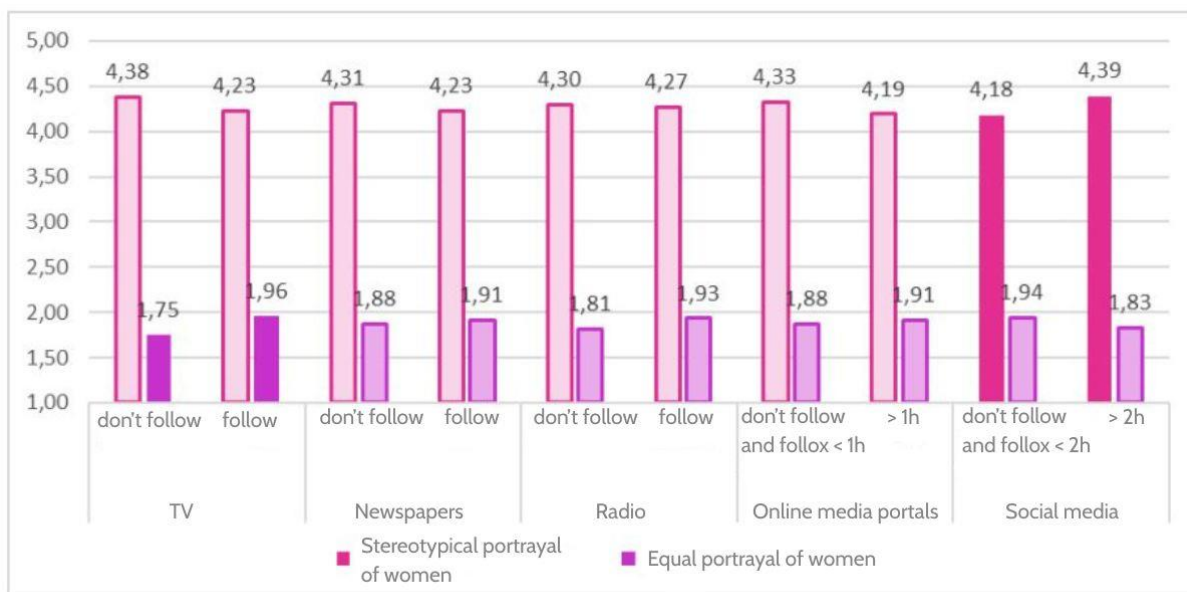
In order to examine the relationship between media use and the perception of bias in media reporting, participants in the quantitative part of the research were divided into subgroups according to the frequency of using different media. Since participants were very unevenly represented across the original categories of frequency of media use from the survey (Graph 8), for the purposes of this analysis the categories were regrouped in different ways. For television, newspapers/magazines, and radio, participants were divided into those who use that medium (ntv = 175; nnp = 101; nr = 165) and those who do not (ntv = 90; nnp = 164; nr = 100). Then, for online portals, they were divided into two groups—those who do not use portals and those who use them for up to one hour (n = 168) versus those who spend more than one hour on portals (n = 97). Finally, for social media they were also divided into two groups—those who do not use social media and those who use it for up to two hours (n = 142) versus those who spend more than two hours on social media (n = 123). After that, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted separately for each medium, with four measures of media bias as dependent variables and media use as the independent variable. Statistical indicators of the test of differences are presented in Table 11, and then the differences in the perception of bias in media reporting are shown in graphs for those media where statistically significant differences were found (Graphs 10 and 11). The analyses showed the following:

- Television: Participants who watch television have the impression that women are represented and portrayed somewhat more equally, and that gender-based violence is portrayed in a less sensationalist and more appropriate way compared to those who do not watch television.
- Newspapers/magazines: Participants who read newspapers/magazines have the impression that gender-based violence is portrayed in a less sensationalist and more appropriate way compared to those who do not read newspapers/magazines.
- Radio: No statistically significant differences.
- Online portals: No statistically significant differences.
- Social media: Participants who use social media for more than an average of two hours a day have the impression that women are portrayed more stereotypically and that gender-based violence is portrayed in a more sensationalist and less appropriate way compared to those who spend less than three hours on social media. This result may be explained by the comments present on social media. Namely, in the interviews, participants described how reading comments takes up a significant part of the time they spend on social media, and how those comments strongly reflect simplified understandings of gender-based violence and victim-blaming.

*Table 11.* Overview of statistical test indicators for differences in perceptions of biased media reporting on women and gender-based violence with regard to following different media platforms (N = 265)

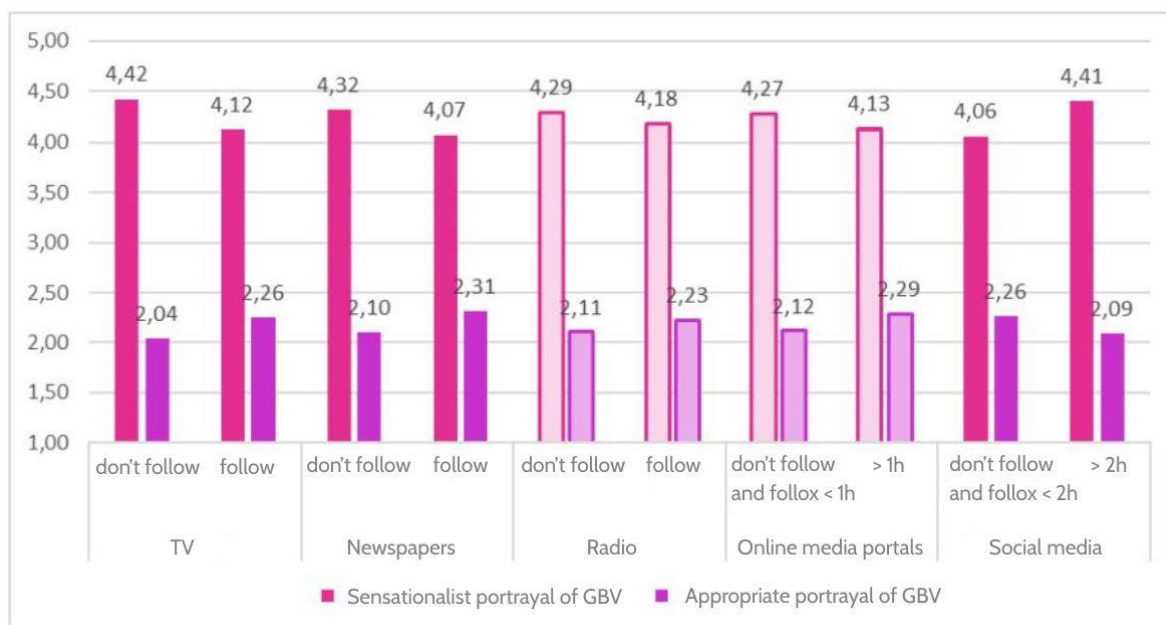
	<i>Df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>partial η<sup>2</sup></i>
<i>Television</i>				
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.94^*$				
F (4, 260) = 4.15				
p = 0.003				
Stereotypical portrayal of women	1	3.48	0.063	0.013
Equal portrayal of women	1	6.06	0.015*	0.023
Sensationalist portrayal of GBV	1	11.55	0.001*	0.042
Appropriate portrayal of GBV	1	6.56	0.011*	0.024
Error	263			
<i>Newspapers/magazines</i>				
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.95^*$				
F (4, 260) = 3.35				
p = 0.011				
Stereotypical portrayal of women	1	1.08	0.299	0.004
Equal portrayal of women	1	0.19	0.664	0.001
Sensationalist portrayal of GBV	1	7.95	0.005*	0.029
Appropriate portrayal of GBV	1	6.36	0.012*	0.024
Error	263			
<i>Radio</i>				
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.99$				
F (4, 260) = 1.02				
p = 0.397				
Stereotypical portrayal of women	1	0.17	0.683	0.001
Equal portrayal of women	1	2.21	0.138	0.008
Sensationalist portrayal of GBV	1	1.69	0.195	0.006
Appropriate portrayal of GBV	1	2.09	0.150	0.008
Error	263			
<i>Online news portals</i>				
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.98$				
F (4, 260) = 1.64				
p = 0.164				
Stereotypical portrayal of women	1	3.12	0.078	0.012
Equal portrayal of women	1	0.20	0.653	0.001
Sensationalist portrayal of GBV	1	2.55	0.112	0.010
Appropriate portrayal of GBV	1	4.02	0.046*	0.015
Error	263			
<i>Social media</i>				
Wilks' $\lambda = 0.93^*$				
F (4, 260) = 4.62				
p = 0.001				
Stereotypical portrayal of women	1	7.95	0.005*	0.029
Equal portrayal of women	1	1.79	0.182	0.008
Sensationalist portrayal of GBV	1	16.63	0.000*	0.059
Appropriate portrayal of GBV	1	4.83	0.029*	0.018
Error	263			

Note: \* statistically significant differences



Graph 10. Differences in biased media reporting on women by following different media platforms (N = 265)

Note: Differences that are not statistically significant are indicated with lighter shades.



Graph 11. Differences in biased media reporting on gender-based violence by following different media platforms (N = 265)

Note: Differences that are not statistically significant are indicated with lighter shades.

## Relationship between experienced violence, disclosure of violence, and reporting of violence with the perception of bias in media reporting

To examine the relationship between experienced violence, disclosure of violence, and reporting of violence with the perception of bias in media reporting, correlation analyses were conducted between these variables. The results presented in Table 12 show that, overall, there are no strong associations. Participants who experienced higher levels of physical violence tend to perceive slightly less unequal representation of women and less inappropriate portrayal of gender-based violence in the media, while participants who experienced higher levels of sexual violence are more sensitive to the portrayal of gender-based violence and perceive it as less appropriately represented in the media. Regarding disclosure and reporting of violence, a significant finding is that participants who reported violence more frequently tend to perceive a somewhat more equal representation of women and a more appropriate portrayal of gender-based violence.

Table 12. Association between experienced violence, attitudes about violence, and reporting of violence with perceptions of biased media reporting (N = 265)

	<i>Stereotypical portrayal of women</i>	<i>Equal portrayal of women</i>	<i>Sensationalist portrayal of GBV</i>	<i>Appropriate portrayal of GBV</i>
<i>Experienced violence</i>				
Total violence score	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.04
Physical violence	-0.06	0.12*	-0.11	0.17*
Sexual violence	0.10	-0.06	0.13*	-0.17*
Emotional violence	0.05	-0.02	0.06	0.02
Controlling behaviours	0.01	0.03	0.05	0.03
<i>Reporting violence and attitudes</i>				
Attitudes about violence	-0.08	-0.05	-0.00	0.00
Reporting violence	-0.17*	0.20*	-0.10	0.21*

Note: \* statistically significant correlation

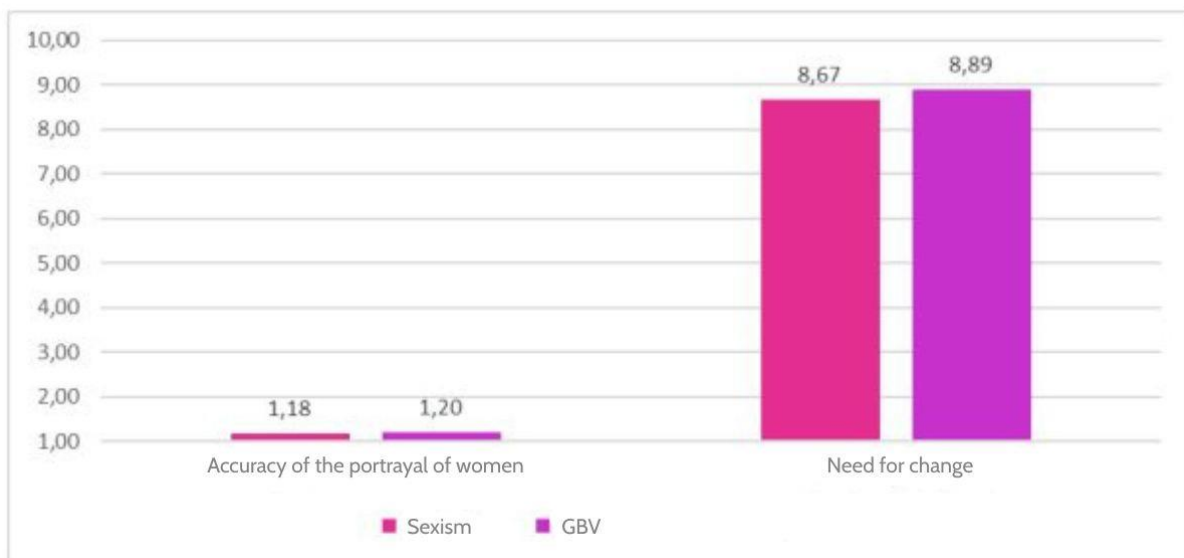
## Reactions to examples of sexism and reporting on gender-based violence

After completing the first part of the online survey, which included questions on sociodemographic characteristics, media consumption habits, perceptions of the portrayal of women and gender-based violence in the media, as well as personal experiences of gender-based violence and reporting of experienced violence, participants were introduced to the second part of the study.

The introduction outlined the content of the second part and gave participants the option to withdraw from the study without answering the set of questions related to reactions after exposure to specific examples of headlines and excerpts from media articles about women in general and those related to reporting on gender-based violence, including femicide. Eight participants chose to withdraw before the second part, so further analyses were conducted on a sample of 257 participants.

### Accuracy of media portrayals of women in the examples and the need for change

The results of the quantitative part of the study showed a very strong disagreement with the accuracy of the portrayal of women and victims of violence in the examples, as well as a clear need for changes in such ways of reporting on women and victims of gender-based violence (Graph 12). The results were also consistent across examples of sexism and examples of gender-based violence.

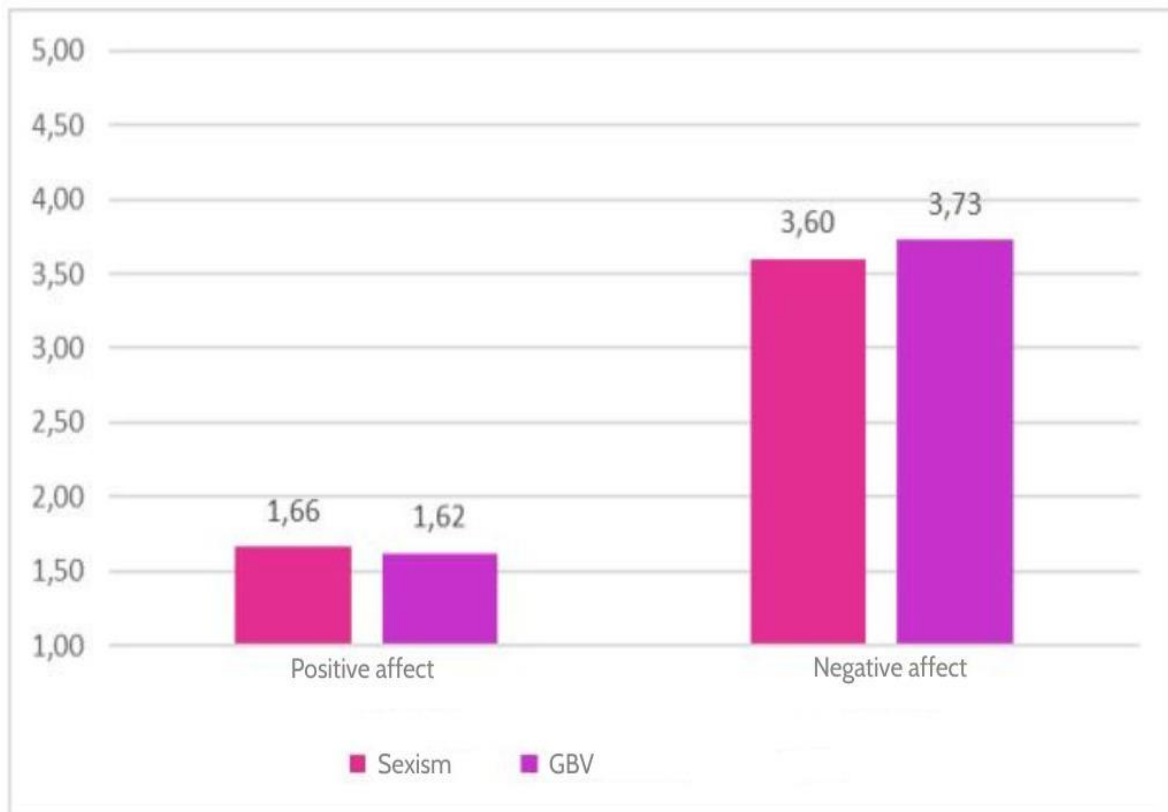


Graph 12. Average agreement scores with the way women/victims are portrayed in the examples and the need for change (N = 257)

Note: Possible total scores range from 1 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree).

## Emotional reactions

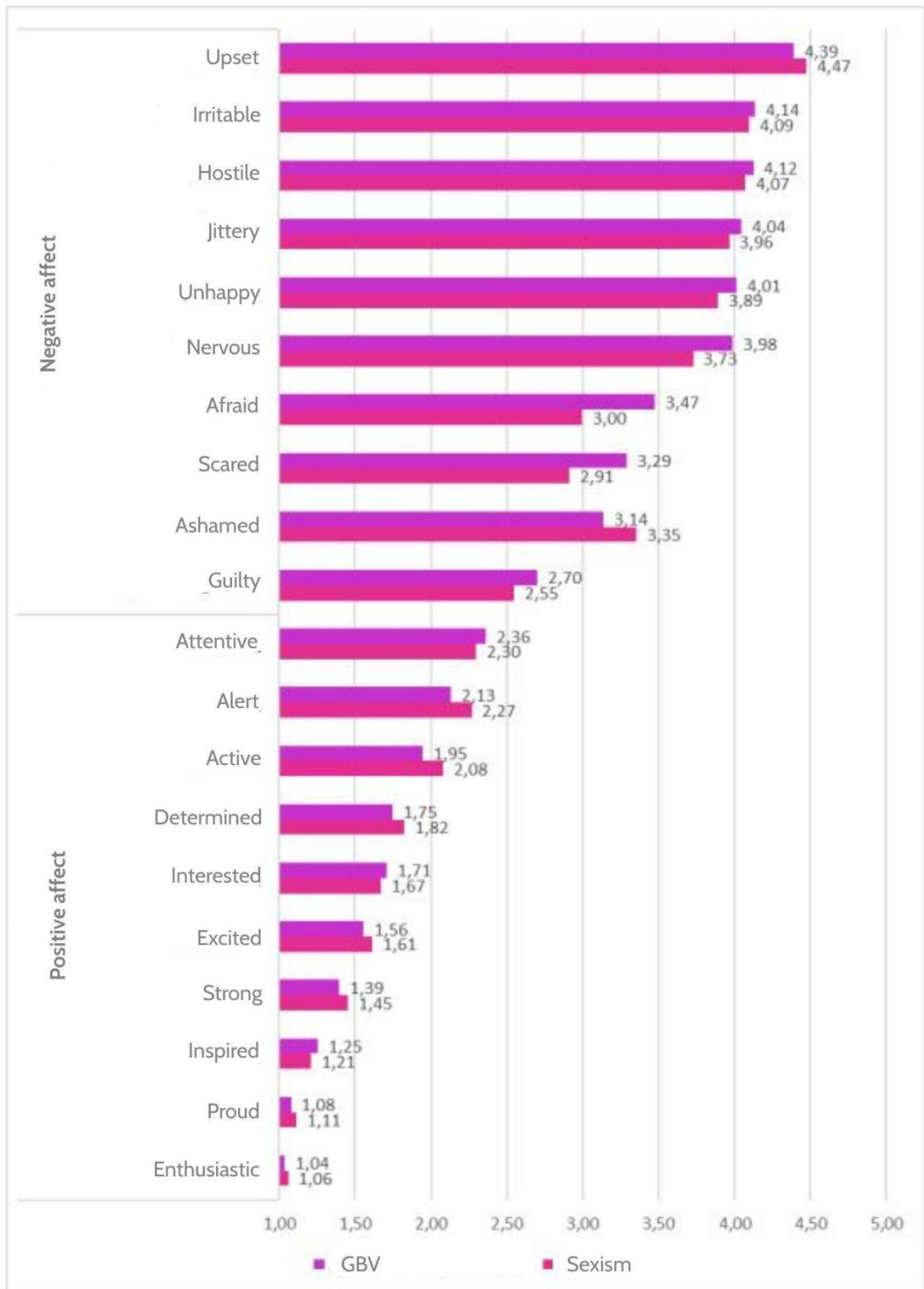
Similarly to perceptions of the accuracy of representation and the need for change, emotional responses in the quantitative part of the study were also highly consistent across examples of sexism and inappropriate portrayals of gender-based violence in the media. At the overall level, the results show that negative emotions were significantly more pronounced than positive ones (Graph 13).



Graph 13. Total scores on the positive and negative affect scales (N = 257)

Note: Possible total scores range from 1 (very little or not at all) to 5 (extremely).

A more detailed overview of the intensity of different emotions shows that almost all negative emotions were strongly expressed, with distress being the most intense (Graph 14). When comparing these emotional reactions following examples of sexism and reports on gender-based violence, some minor differences are visible at a descriptive level. Participants felt somewhat more nervous, anxious, and frightened after reports on gender-based violence, while they felt somewhat more ashamed after examples of sexism. Regarding positive emotions, participants again showed very consistent reactions to both examples of sexism and reports on gender-based violence. Emotions indicating arousal and activation (attentive, alert, active) were somewhat present, while emotions with a positive affective tone were, as expected, rated at very low levels of intensity (Graph 14).



Graph 14. Intensity of emotions on the PANAS subscales of positive and negative affect (N = 257)

Note: Possible scores range from 1 (very little or not at all) to 5 (extremely).

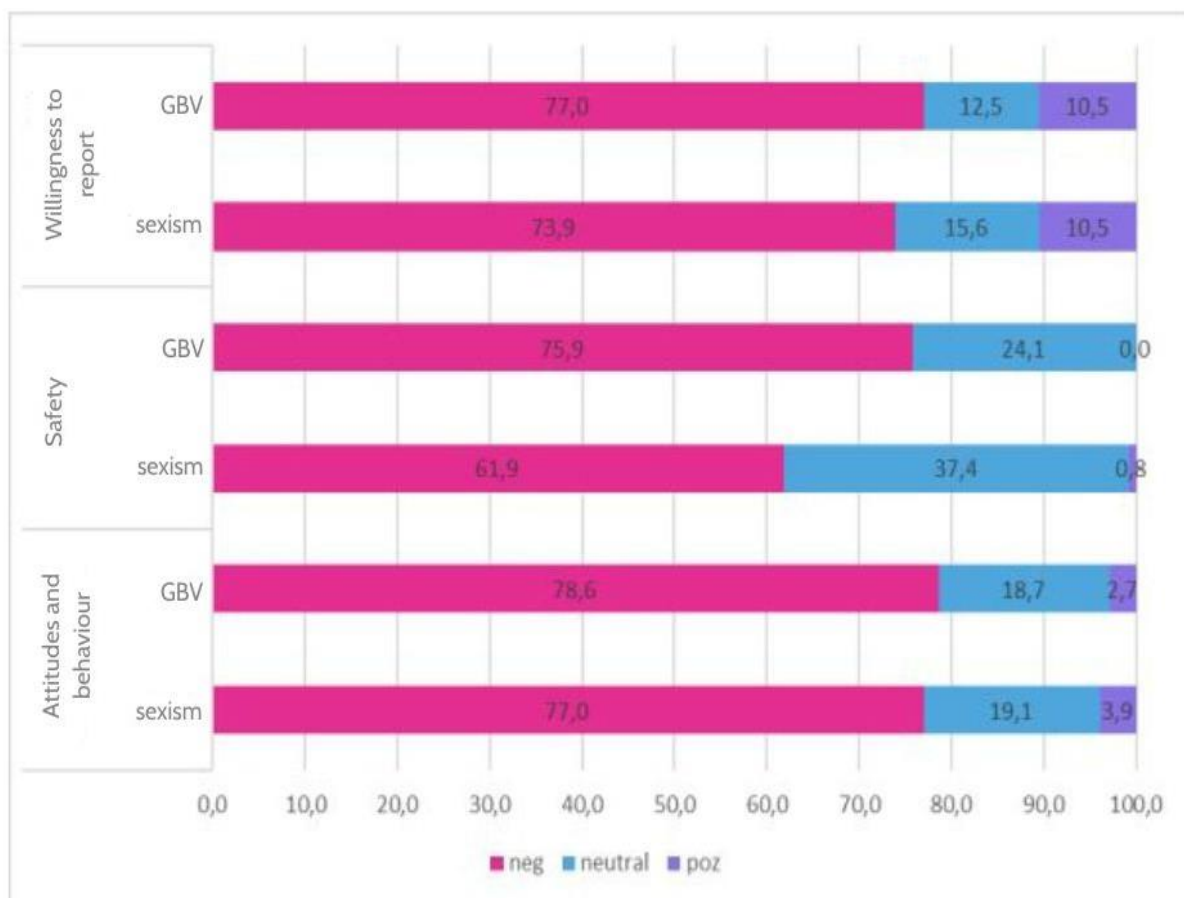
### Expected changes in attitudes and behaviour, perception of personal safety, and decisions to report violence and seek help

After reporting their emotional reactions to examples of sexism and inappropriate media coverage of gender-based violence in the online survey, participants also reported perceived changes in their attitudes and behaviour, their sense of personal safety, and their willingness to report violence and seek help as reactions to these media examples.

For the purposes of this analysis, the reported changes were grouped into three categories: negative changes (strong or moderate negative changes / increased sense of insecurity / lower willingness to report and seek help), neutral impact (no effect), and positive changes (strong or moderate positive changes / increased sense of safety / greater willingness to report and seek help). These grouped responses are presented in Graph 15.

The results showed relatively consistent reactions among participants to both examples of sexism and gender-based violence in terms of perceived changes in attitudes and behaviour and willingness to report. In these domains, around three-quarters of participants reported negative changes following exposure to these examples—namely, negative shifts in attitudes and behaviour and reduced willingness to report violence and seek help.

A difference emerged in the perception of safety, where a higher proportion of participants (75.9%) reported an increased sense of insecurity after exposure to examples of reporting on gender-based violence, compared to exposure to examples of sexism (61.9%).



Graph 15. Proportion of participants reporting negative, neutral, and positive changes after viewing examples of sexism and reporting on gender-based violence (N = 257)

In addition to this quantitative assessment, participants in the online survey were given the opportunity to describe the perceived changes in an open-ended question. A total of 159 participants (61.9%) responded after the examples of sexism, while 121 participants (45.7%) responded after the examples of reporting on gender-based violence. The responses were analyzed using content analysis, i.e., by quantifying the occurrence of different words describing emotional states and behavioural tendencies, and are presented in the following graphs (Graphs 16–18). Participants' quotes were grouped by themes and are described below.

→ Reactions referring to the content of the examples (Graph 16): In response to examples of gender-based violence, participants most frequently highlighted the justification of violence and victim-blaming, while in examples of sexism there was more frequent mention of objectification and humiliation through such reporting on women. In both types of examples, there were several comments referring to daughters and girls and concern for their future, and general negative reactions were relatively equally present, with participants stating that they felt bad, uncomfortable, and negative.

“The woman is reduced to the level of an animal who deserved death and beatings because she is surely to blame for everything. Even when she is clearly the victim, she is still blamed, not the ‘poor’ man who was provoked/forced to ‘teach her a lesson.’”

“It triggers fear and anger about a world in which ‘good, loving men’ kill their partners ‘who are to blame themselves.’”

“It turns out that all the killers were wonderful and calm people, not abusers. It’s terrifying how sensationalistically this is discussed, how poorly journalists do their job. Somehow the blame is always placed on the victim. Because she must have provoked him if such a good and calm man did something so terrible. These are all ‘healthy sons of the patriarchy,’ not monsters—just men in a patriarchal society that protects them and does not see women as human beings. Our journalism is truly shameful.”

“I’m frustrated because women are judged for the violence committed against them. I am disgusted by the general attitude ‘he loved her, poor man, and she is to blame for being killed’ and similar narratives. Women’s testimonies are, in most cases, not considered credible; tragedies are mocked, and victims are shamed and stigmatized.”

“I got chills because I live in a country where women are objectified. As if a woman is nothing but a body, a piece of meat, treated as if we are not human.”

“I’m frustrated because whatever a woman does, it is always viewed through her physical appearance, her other skills are diminished, and she is seen as a walking incubator, a housewife, an object.”

“Fear for the future safety of my daughters in a country where we clearly have not moved beyond ‘Lika-style handshakes’ [a euphemism for violence].”

→ Reactions involving negative emotions with high activation (Graph 17): Anger, rage, and frustration were present in responses to both types of examples, though these emotions were mentioned more frequently after examples of sexism. In line with this, words indicating a desire for action were somewhat more frequent after exposure to examples of sexism.

“Every time I encounter such and/or similar headlines, articles, comments on portals—my blood boils. That much.”

“This brings out the worst anger in me toward the system and everything around it, and a need to do something. To put it how I would say it over coffee with a friend—I lose it.”

“I feel ‘triggered,’ I remember situations where I was talked about in a similar way and thought it was normal, and I feel angry and hurt. In the next question I answered that I am more willing to report violence after such headlines—and that is true for me today—but precisely because before it triggered the opposite reaction. Now, when I am more mature/educated, I become angry and motivated for change.”

“Every time I read such a headline, I feel frustration and distrust. I am angry that we are still portrayed through the lens of objectification and usefulness.”

“I feel bad because of these headlines, ashamed as a woman, I am afraid of such content because it harms young girls and boys as well. It creates a distorted image for them. But on the other hand, it motivates me to speak out publicly even more, to fight as a woman for women’s rights every day. It makes me angry, and that is a huge driver for positive change.”

“I am even more determined to be vocal about how rotten our society is and to stand up for myself and all women and girls.”

“These examples outraged me, disappointed me again in the kind of country and society we live in, and encouraged me to fight even more on behalf of all future girls, so they would not have to go through what I went through, just because of an unequal society and imposed roles.”

→ Reactions involving negative emotions with low activation (Graph 18): Sadness and disgust were somewhat more present in reactions to examples of reporting on gender-based violence compared to examples of sexism. The results suggest that reactions to gender-based violence reporting were more oriented toward fear and insecurity, while reactions to sexism were more oriented toward disturbance and agitation. For both types of examples, reactions related to hopelessness and helplessness were present.

“I am sad that other women go through things I have suffered and worse, and that such headlines exist to provoke mockery of victims, especially by men.”

“Lethargic, at the same time sad and worried.”

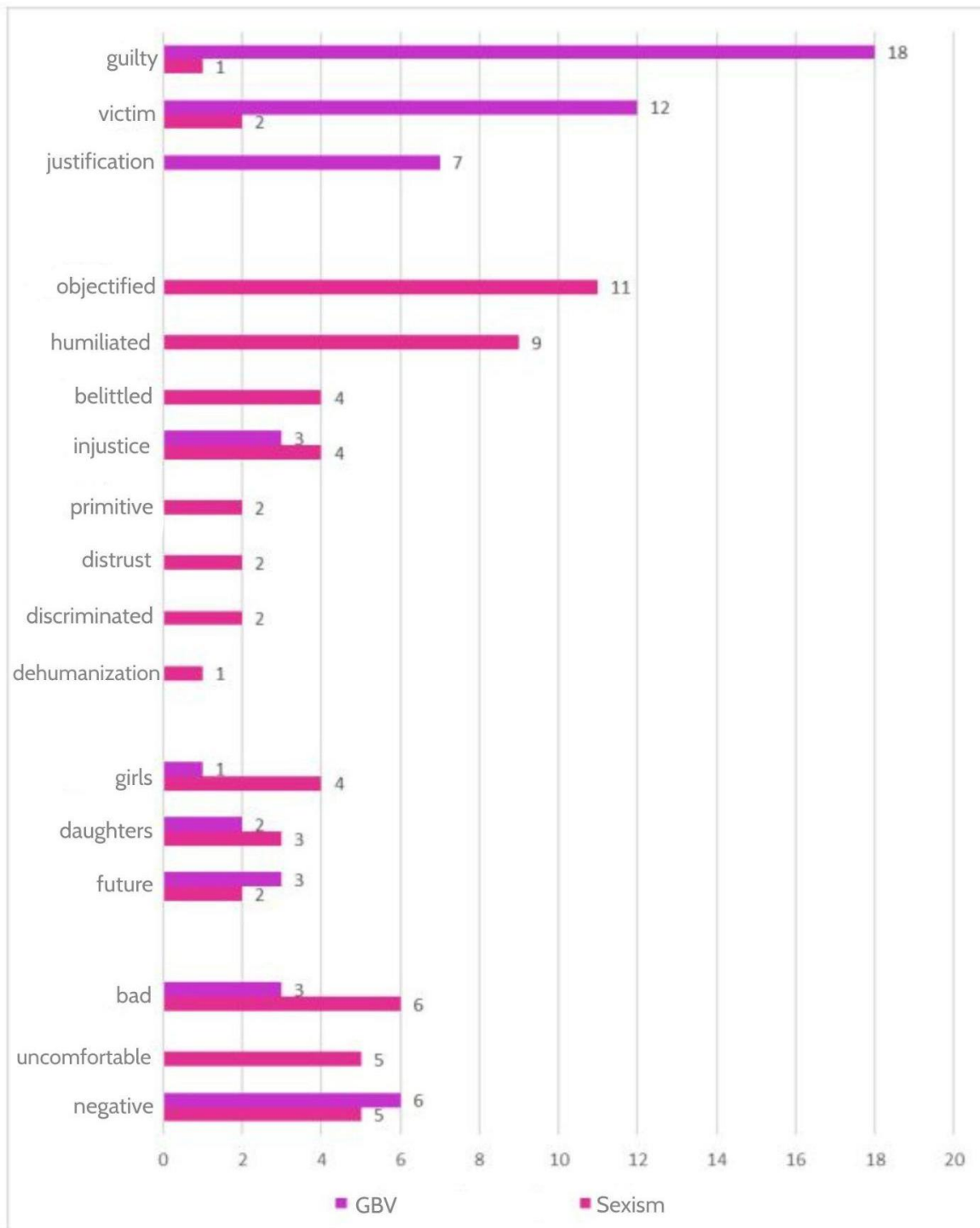
“Helplessness, awareness of people’s detachment, where there is no real recognition or support.”

“I am afraid for myself and all women in the future if nothing changes when I see all these headlines in one place.”

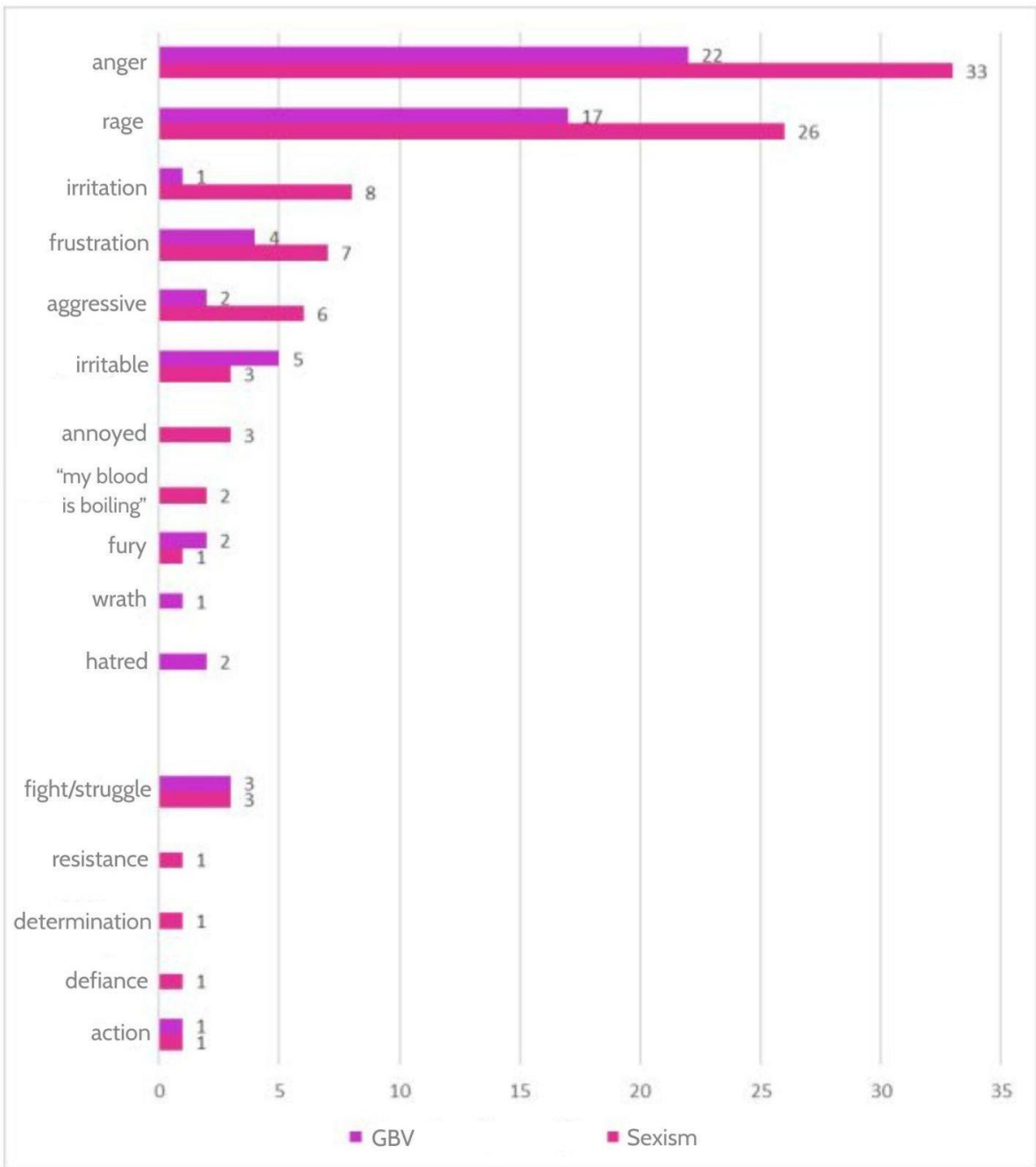
“I am disgusted by the way my gender is described in the media.”

“It is appalling how they describe horrific crimes committed against women and, in some way, blame them for what happened.”

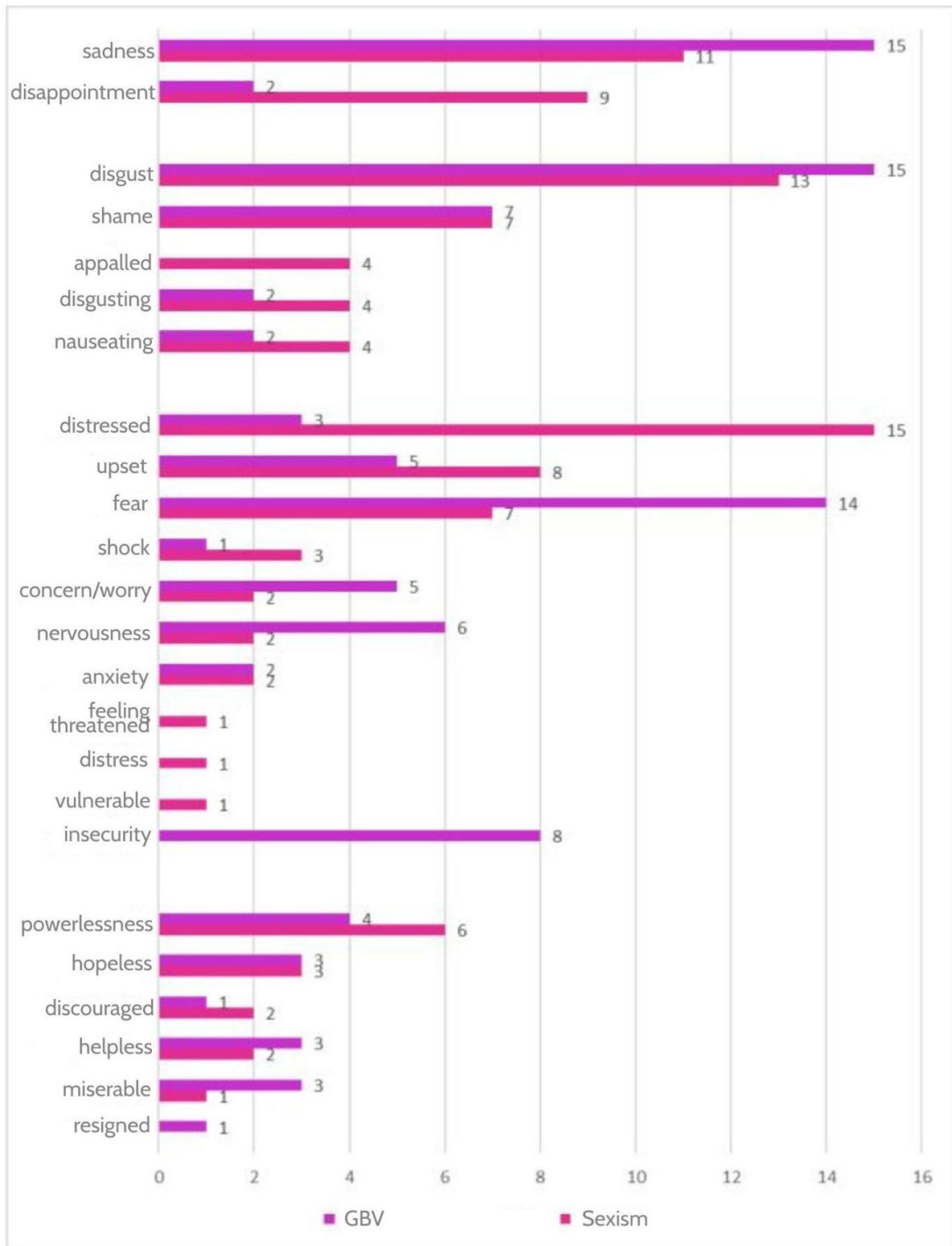
“These examples do not give hope that anything will change for the better.”



Graph 16. Frequency of mentioning words referring to the content of the examples



Graph 17. Frequency of mentioning words related to emotions of unpleasant affective tone and high activation



Graph 18. Frequency of mentioning words related to emotions of unpleasant affective tone and low activation

## Reactions to media reporting on gender-based violence – interview results

### *Emotional reactions*

In the qualitative part of the study, participants described reactions to media reporting on gender-based violence that were similar to those identified in the online survey. The dominant emotions were sadness, disgust, fear, anger, and rage, which for some participants led to feelings of powerlessness and helplessness, while for others they triggered a desire for action, connection with other women, and change.

Some participants found it easier, and others more difficult, to regulate the emotional responses these topics evoked. However, what they all had in common was a strong identification with victims and heightened sensitivity to the way gender-based violence is presented in the media, precisely due to their own lived experiences.

“I would help, I would give anything for it not to be like this, but you are simply powerless. And then all of it just makes you sad—at least for me.”

“In a way, powerless. That sense of powerlessness maybe dominates. I know how long the road is before this stops happening.”

“I think anger and helplessness take over because I know what I’ve been through, and I got out relatively lightly, let’s say. There are many worse cases that never even reach the media. This whole ordeal—I react to it with disgust. I feel anger as a woman, I feel anger as a citizen.”

“Anger, rage, and helplessness. No one can do anything—is it possible that no one can? I can’t do anything. What can I actually do? I’m afraid to report, I didn’t report, even though I knew worse things. I feel angry at myself and at the whole system for being like this.”

“Very angry, precisely because I went through it and I understand—these women are unprotected, and in the end the woman is blamed for not doing something, while no one goes into the essence of it all—why she didn’t.”

“Angry, activated, motivated to act. Angry, defiant, bold. Those are the feelings I have. [...] A strong desire to connect with other women.”

“And then when I read that he had already been reported multiple times and that all institutions were aware of the case, and in the end he still kills the woman—that disturbs me the most, because I’m afraid the same could happen to me.”

“Every time I get disturbed by any violence reported in the media. I experience it personally, and then all those comments—I can’t not read them—but all of it really disturbs me. [...] I get very upset and for days I stay focused on that topic. I can’t get it out of my head, and every time I relive everything I went through, and every time I ask myself—could it have been me, or will something snap again in my ex-husband and he will come after me? So every time there is that feeling of discomfort and fear.”

“I watch it all together with them because I was part of it, unfortunately. Yes, I think about it a lot, but actually I think about how they feel, what they are going through, why no one can react, why these people cannot be protected—I have a million questions in my head. Yes, a million questions.”

Sometimes I catch myself thinking that maybe I shouldn't think about it so much, but I often find myself thinking about it a lot."

"Maybe because I have that experience, it stays with me longer. I think it's connected. If I didn't have it, maybe I would perceive it differently, but it stays with me every day. Every day—it's almost an obsession, it becomes a dominant topic for me. I think it's connected to the fact that I went through it, so I see it differently. And I understand that people who haven't don't have that perspective."

"How do I feel? I don't know—it makes me very angry. At the same time, it makes me angry and sad. I'm angry because I feel there is a lack of humanity, and I really don't understand that way of thinking. And it also makes me sad. And then I feel a bit foolish. [...] I said I was also a victim of violence, and then I think, when I read in an article that her family warned her about him, well yes—but maybe they should have helped her more. Then I feel a bit stupid—why didn't I react earlier? I feel somewhat called out by that. Sad, angry, and exposed—that's how I feel."

"I learned to set boundaries on how much I can emotionally invest in these things. Of course, it still upsets me deeply, but part of my own healing was exactly that—with time, it becomes easier to talk about it and to be open."

### *Reactions related to trust in institutions, support systems for women victims of violence, and willingness to report violence*

In the interviews, participants described how media reporting on gender-based violence shapes their trust in institutions and support systems, as well as how they believe it may affect other victims of violence.

The interviewed participants mostly reported negative experiences with institutions, resulting in weakened or almost non-existent trust in institutions and the support systems they provide. Among participants, there was a general perception that positive experiences are exceptions, attributed to the efforts of a small number of committed professionals within institutions. Several participants highlighted institutional violence as a topic that is not sufficiently addressed within the broader issue of gender-based violence.

In contrast, participants expressed greater trust in civil society organizations that had provided them with support and important information. Since most participants had personal negative experiences with state institutions when seeking help for gender-based violence, media reporting does not significantly shape their trust in institutions, but rather reinforces already existing negative perceptions.

"I feel like when you go to seek help, someone just slams the door in your face and says there is no place for you here. That's how rejecting it feels."

"I personally don't have good experiences with them, so this just adds fuel to the fire. It literally confirms everything I went through. So I'm not the only one. It's awful."

"I know what the system is like. I think there have been some positive shifts, thanks to the exceptional effort and work of certain individuals, there has been more awareness and some things have entered legislation [...] The question is what happens in smaller communities where the risk of social stigma is higher. [...] Justice is completely blind here, and we treat perpetrators and victims equally, and we portray them equally in the media. That's a huge problem."

“I don’t know how far things would have to go before I would report it. Probably quite far. Precisely because I would think, first of all, that no one would believe me, and secondly, I felt that it wouldn’t remain confidential—that it would leak somehow, if not as gossip then in some worse way. [...] Institutions don’t believe women, women don’t believe institutions. And that’s why they stay silent.”

“Of course it affects things negatively. From my experience, I can honestly say that nothing really works. If there were no organizations that help, that you can turn to, that can guide you—if you had to navigate it alone, I believe you wouldn’t get far. When you approach institutions, first—they don’t give you information, first—they judge you, then question and interrogate you [...] That is an additional victimization. And when you have to go through that, you end up feeling as if you did something wrong, and you have to justify yourself. So there is absolutely no trust in institutions—from personal experience and from the media, it is very clear. [...] This definitely contributed to me delaying reporting; I am sure I would have reported much earlier if I had encountered some positive examples in the media, if I had felt any sense of safety. It takes a lot of courage—and when you don’t have trust, and you read those articles—who would dare?”

Participants believe that inappropriate media reporting on gender-based violence further deepens fear, distrust, and hopelessness among women currently experiencing violence. They emphasize that such reporting creates additional barriers to seeking help and reporting violence. They highlight that media often blame victims and focus on cases where repeated reports of perpetrators failed to protect victims, while failing to provide sufficient information about where and what kind of help is available. Participants believe that this imbalance of information further discourages victims from seeking support.

“I believe that if the entire narrative changed—how the story is shaped—that would mean a lot to women who are currently in such situations. [...] Maybe women would start thinking—okay, I have this option; maybe I should try that. If they saw it often enough, maybe they would decide to take a step.”

“I think it discourages them. Because when something happens, they present examples of what someone did and what kind of sentence they received. And when you see those examples, and knowing our judicial system—how slow it is—you report someone today, and by the time anything happens, that person could repeat the act many times. And if they have connections—and we are a country of connections and nepotism—it discourages people even more. The media present facts shaped by the judicial system.”

“Unfortunately, even if a woman reads that there are shelters or support services, she has probably also read that they are not as safe as they should be.”

“I have never heard in the media that there is a way out. I have never heard that there is housing support for victims of domestic violence. No institution ever informed me about that—I found out through other channels. There is nothing in media reporting that reassures women that it is possible to leave, that it is possible to move on, that there is state support and that someone will guide and help you. It definitely has a strong impact, especially for women in rural areas who may not know who to turn to. Many more women would leave abusive relationships if reporting were different.”

“No one who sees those comments and sees that nothing is being done can feel safe. Not at all. [...] Especially when it is reported that someone was already reported and received a minimal sentence—of course you won’t report it if he will be back on the streets in a year. [...] Maybe if they saw that there is a place, a trusted person they can turn to—then yes.”

“I think it shows them that there is no way out, and that unfortunately no one will help them.”

“It discourages them even more. What you already know on some subconscious level is just confirmed. When you read that someone raped a woman and had already been reported five times—it confirms that reality. You want justice, you want to ensure it doesn’t happen again, but at the same time there is fear—what will happen to you if you report? There is no system that will adequately protect you.”

“I think they simply don’t see a way out, because however you look at it, in the end they will suffer—that’s what the media show.”

### Support and self-support strategies

Interview participants described that their reactions to media reporting on gender-based violence are intense and often occupy their everyday lives. The strategies they identified as helpful include faith, strong support systems within family, friends, and people with similar experiences, professional support, relaxing activities (such as walking, reading, and breathing exercises), limiting exposure to media and content related to gender-based violence, as well as active engagement, advocacy, and organizing events related to these issues.

“I found my path in faith. That’s where I find my peace. And I have a circle of people who are very important to me. I share my story with them.”

“What helps me is being very open, understanding that this period is behind me, and when I have crises, I absolutely seek professional help. The truth is, there is no ‘way out’ of this—it leaves lasting effects. [...] What you can do is learn mechanisms to manage it and talk about it when you feel ready. [...] Time really does help. [...] What helped me the most was having a very strong support network—male friends, female friends, family, and economic independence.”

“I have my channel, my circle of people—sharing helps. Now that I am more ready to talk about it, it has a healing effect. To be heard, to be believed—that alone is enough. Not to be asked why, how, to have it analyzed. I have already punished myself enough by asking myself that every day—why?”

“I like walking, I like reading, I have relaxation techniques, breathing exercises... that calms me when I feel bad about it. Especially when something happens—when I read about a murder or violence—it brings me back into deeper thoughts. But overall, I would say I’m okay.”

“I tried limiting my access to media, and I blocked certain portals that really bother me or selected options so that such content is no longer shown to me. I try to limit my exposure. It doesn’t mean it’s not happening, but I need to protect myself—I don’t have to be exposed to everything bad in the world.”

“It helps me not to read comments and to distance myself from people who write them. It’s absurd to me. I don’t want to engage with such people. I used to try to explain to them, even provide research, but it’s useless—they dismiss everything. So I decided I won’t engage anymore. I just block and move on.”

“Active engagement—writing articles and posts, spreading awareness, organizing actions. Working constructively on solutions, singing, boldness, work—often through art.”

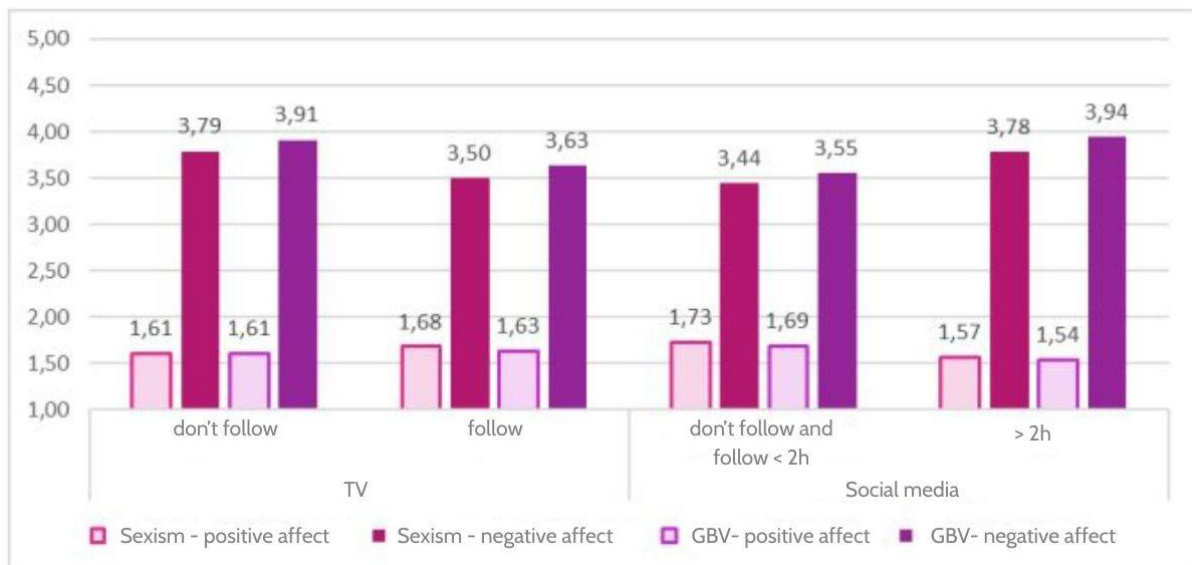
“I used to be more of a passive observer [...] but recently I’ve become more aware or more exposed to such content, so I’ve become more activist-oriented. I haven’t done anything big yet, but things like participating in Pride, sharing stories on Instagram—even if I don’t reach many people—those small steps matter.”

**Relationship between emotional reactions to examples of sexist media reporting and reporting on gender-based violence, and media use, perceived media bias, experienced violence, and prior willingness to report violence**

Based on data collected in the quantitative part of the study, it was possible to statistically test whether media-related habits and attitudes, as well as previous experiences of violence, are associated with emotional reactions to examples of media reporting. Several analyses were conducted for this purpose.

First, for each type of media separately, a multivariate analysis of variance was conducted with four measures of affect (positive and negative emotions for examples of sexism and reporting on gender-based violence) as dependent variables and media use as the independent variable. The categories of media use were defined as described on pages 36 and 37. Statistical indicators of the test of differences are presented in Table 13, and differences in emotional reactions are shown graphically for those media where statistically significant differences were found (Graph 19).

The analyses showed generally consistent reactions to examples of sexism and reporting on gender-based violence, with small but statistically significant differences in relation to watching television and using social media. Participants who watch television experienced slightly less intense negative emotions after exposure to both types of examples compared to those who do not watch television. In contrast, participants who use social media for more than two hours per day experienced somewhat more intense negative emotions after exposure to both types of examples compared to those who do not use social media or use it for up to two hours per day. No statistically significant differences in emotional reactions were found for the use of other media.



Graph 19. Differences in emotional reactions to examples of sexism and reporting on gender-based violence by following television and social media (N = 257)

Note: Differences that are not statistically significant are indicated with lighter shades.

Table 13. Overview of statistical test indicators for differences in emotional reactions with regard to following different media platforms (N = 257)

		<i>Df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>partial η<sup>2</sup></i>
<i>Television</i> Wilks' λ = 0.97* F (4, 252) = 1.68 p = 0.156	Sexism – positive affect	1	0.50	0.478	0.002
	Sexism – negative affect	1	5.89	0.016*	0.023
	GBV – positive affect	1	0.06	0.813	0.000
	GBV – negative affect	1	4.40	0.037*	0.017
	Error	255			
<i>Newspapers/magazines</i> Wilks' λ = 0.99* F (4, 252) = 0.42 p = 0.794	Sexism – positive affect	1	0.47	0.495	0.002
	Sexism – negative affect	1	0.02	0.896	0.000
	GBV – positive affect	1	0.13	0.721	0.001
	GBV – negative affect	1	0.24	0.627	0.001
	Error	255			
<i>Radio</i> Wilks' λ = 0.99 F (4, 252) = 0.87 p = 0.485	Sexism – positive affect	1	0.57	0.450	0.002
	Sexism – negative affect	1	0.86	0.355	0.003
	GBV – positive affect	1	0.43	0.514	0.002
	GBV – negative affect	1	2.72	0.100	0.011
	Error	255			
<i>Online news portals</i> Wilks' λ = 0.99 F (4, 252) = 0.14 p = 0.965	Sexism – positive affect	1	0.10	0.748	0.000
	Sexism – negative affect	1	0.02	0.892	0.000
	GBV – positive affect	1	0.41	0.521	0.002
	GBV – negative affect	1	0.01	0.906	0.000
	Error	255			
<i>Social media</i> Wilks' λ = 0.96* F (4, 252) = 2.92 p = 0.022	Sexism – positive affect	1	2.60	0.108	0.010
	Sexism – negative affect	1	9.42	0.002*	0.036
	GBV – positive affect	1	2.82	0.094	0.011
	GBV – negative affect	1	9.79	0.002*	0.037
	Error	255			

Note: \* statistically significant differences

To examine the relationship between emotional reactions to examples of sexism and reporting on gender-based violence, and perceptions of media bias, experienced violence, prior willingness to

report violence, and disclosure of experienced violence, a correlation analysis was conducted (Pearson's linear correlation coefficient; Table 14).

The results showed the following:

Participants who experienced more negative emotions in response to examples of sexism in the media and reporting on gender-based violence were those who:

- more strongly perceive women as being stereotypically portrayed in the media
- more strongly perceive gender-based violence as being presented in a sensationalist manner
- have experienced higher levels of sexual and emotional violence, as well as controlling behaviours

Participants who experienced fewer negative emotions in response to these examples were those who:

- more strongly perceive women as being equally represented in the media
- more strongly perceive gender-based violence as being appropriately portrayed

Participants who experienced more positive emotions in response to these examples were those who:

- more strongly perceive women as being equally represented in the media
- more strongly perceive gender-based violence as being appropriately portrayed
- have disclosed their experiences of violence more frequently
- have reported violence more frequently

Participants who experienced fewer positive emotions in response to examples of reporting on gender-based violence were those who:

- more strongly perceive gender-based violence as being presented in a sensationalist manner

*Table 14.* Association between emotional reactions to examples of sexism and reporting on gender-based violence with perceptions of biased media reporting, experienced violence, and prior willingness to report and disclose violence (N = 257)

	<i>Sexism Positive affect</i>	<i>Sexism Negative affect</i>	<i>GBV Positive affect</i>	<i>GBV Negative affect</i>
<i>Perception of biased media reporting</i>				
Stereotypical portrayal of women	-0.12	0.28*	-0.16	0.25*
Equal portrayal of women	0.21*	-0.21*	0.24*	-0.21*
Sensationalist portrayal of GBV	-0.07	0.27*	-0.13*	0.28*
Appropriate portrayal of GBV	0.19*	-0.19*	0.17*	-0.23*
<i>Experienced violence</i>				
Physical violence	-0.03	0.09	0.03	0.09
Sexual violence	-0.07	0.18*	-0.05	0.22*
Emotional violence	-0.11	0.17*	-0.07	0.20*
Controlling behaviours	-0.04	0.17*	0.01	0.20*
<i>Reporting and disclosure of violence</i>				
Disclosure of violence	0.16*	-0.02	0.21*	-0.04
Reporting violence	0.18*	-0.05	0.24*	-0.08

Note: \* statistically significant correlation

### Relationship between expected changes in attitudes and behaviour, perception of personal safety, and decisions to report violence and seek help, with media use, perceived media bias, experienced violence, and prior reporting of violence

Based on data collected in the quantitative part of the study, the relationship between media-related habits and attitudes, previous experiences of violence, and expected changes in attitudes and behaviour, perception of personal safety, and decisions to report violence and seek help after exposure to examples was examined. Since expected changes were measured on an ordinal scale, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used. It is important to note that most participants generally reported negative changes after exposure to the examples (negative shifts in attitudes and behaviour, increased insecurity, and reduced willingness to seek help and report violence). Therefore,

when interpreting correlation coefficients, we cannot speak of positive versus negative changes, but only of more or less intense negative changes. The results showed the following:

Changes in attitudes and behaviour:

→ Participants who experienced more intense negative changes in attitudes and behaviour were those who:

- \* use social media more frequently
- \* more strongly perceive women as being stereotypically portrayed in the media
- \* more strongly perceive gender-based violence as being presented in a sensationalist manner
- \* have experienced higher levels of sexual violence

→ Participants who experienced less intense negative changes were those who:

- \* listen to the radio more (only after examples of reporting on gender-based violence)
- \* more strongly perceive gender-based violence as being appropriately portrayed
- \* have reported violence more frequently (only after examples of sexism)

Changes in the sense of safety:

→ Participants who felt more insecure were those who:

- \* use social media more frequently
- \* more strongly perceive women as being stereotypically portrayed in the media
- \* more strongly perceive gender-based violence as being presented in a sensationalist manner
- \* have experienced higher levels of sexual and emotional violence
- \* have experienced higher levels of physical violence and controlling behaviours (only after examples of reporting on gender-based violence)

→ Participants who felt less insecure were those who:

- \* listen to the radio more
- \* watch television more (only after examples of reporting on gender-based violence)
- \* more strongly perceive women as being equally represented in the media
- \* more strongly perceive gender-based violence as being appropriately portrayed

Changes in willingness to seek help and report violence:

→ Participants who felt less willing to seek help and report violence were those who:

- \* use social media more (only after examples of reporting on gender-based violence)
- \* more strongly perceive women as being stereotypically portrayed in the media
- \* more strongly perceive gender-based violence as being presented in a sensationalist manner
- \* have experienced higher levels of sexual and emotional violence
- \* have experienced higher levels of physical violence and controlling behaviours (only after examples of reporting on gender-based violence)

→ Participants who felt less unwilling (i.e., more willing) to seek help and report violence were those who:

- \* watch television more (only after examples of reporting on gender-based violence)
- \* more strongly perceive women as being equally represented in the media
- \* more strongly perceive gender-based violence as being appropriately portrayed

*Table 15.* Association between expected changes in attitudes and behaviour, perceived personal safety, and decisions to report and seek help in cases of violence with media platform use, perceptions of biased media reporting, experienced violence, and prior willingness to report (N = 257)

	<i>Sexism</i>			<i>Gender-based violence</i>		
	<i>Attitudes &amp; behaviour</i>	<i>Sense of safety</i>	<i>Reporting &amp; seeking help</i>	<i>Attitudes &amp; behaviour</i>	<i>Sense of safety</i>	<i>Reporting &amp; seeking help</i>
<i>Media platform use</i>						
Television	-0.04	0.07	0.08	0.01	0.16*	0.16*
Newspapers/magazines	0.04	0.05	-0.03	0.00	0.02	0.01
Online news portals	0.07	0.08	-0.07	0.06	0.01	-0.07
Social media	-0.18*	-0.14*	-0.06	-0.15*	-0.20*	-0.17*
Radio	0.05	0.15*	0.03	0.14*	0.16*	0.11
<i>Perception of biased media reporting</i>						
Stereotypical portrayal of women	-0.23*	-0.27*	-0.20*	-0.20*	-0.23*	-0.17*
Equal portrayal of women	0.08	0.15*	0.24*	0.12	0.17*	0.19*
Sensationalist portrayal of GBV	-0.15*	-0.17*	-0.14*	-0.17*	-0.20*	-0.20*
Appropriate portrayal of GBV	0.15*	0.21*	0.29*	0.18*	0.21*	0.23*
<i>Experienced violence</i>						
Physical violence	0.03	-0.06	-0.08	-0.07	-0.13*	-0.14*
Sexual violence	-0.14*	-0.16*	-0.14*	-0.14*	-0.14*	-0.19*
Emotional violence	-0.02	-0.12*	-0.15*	-0.11	-0.14*	-0.19*
Controlling behaviours	-0.03	-0.09	-0.09	-0.11	-0.15*	-0.15*
<i>Reporting and disclosure of violence</i>						
Disclosure of violence	0.03	-0.01	-0.02	0.00	0.01	-0.03
Reporting violence	0.14*	0.07	0.05	0.06	-0.02	0.02

**Note:** \* statistically significant correlation

## Required changes in media reporting on women and gender-based violence

In this section, instead of presenting a conclusion of the report findings, the necessary changes identified by participants in the qualitative part of the study are summarised. These changes refer to media reporting on women and gender-based violence and are grouped into two categories: general representation of women in the media and reporting on gender-based violence. Each change is accompanied by a quote to better illustrate it.

Two participant statements concisely capture the essence of all required changes:

***“Start seeing women as people, as human beings. That’s the first step.”***  
***“We don’t need scandals, we need news.”***

### Required changes in the representation of women in the media

1. Ending the objectification of women based on their appearance.
2. Ending the sexualisation of women.
3. Reducing the emphasis on portraying women primarily through their family roles.
4. Focusing on women’s achievements and educational success.
5. Ensuring equal representation of men and women.
6. Establishing a system of appropriate consequences for media platforms, media owners, editors, and journalists in cases of sexist reporting and inappropriate coverage of gender-based violence, and ensuring consistent enforcement of these measures.

"Generally speaking, when it comes to women and reporting on any woman, it doesn't matter whether it is about violence or whether it is about a politician, a singer, it doesn't matter... that women stop being objectified and that it doesn't matter how old a woman is, whether she has wrinkles, whether she uses botox, whether she is wearing a low-cut top, whether she is in a mini skirt, whether she is dressed "appropriately". That reporting on women based on their appearance or on how they are dressed simply stops. That it is finally understood that we are all human beings who, I don't know, age, have wrinkles, have body hair and everything that is normal and that we are born with, that we are the way we are. And that the qualities of a woman are highlighted, and if a woman is a successful politician, educated, that what she does is what matters, not what she is wearing."

"I mean, with women in general, whether they are victims of violence or singers or politicians, it will always be about how a woman looks and that is somehow always the most important thing when we talk about women and when women are talked about. [...] What I saw was a picture, I think, of some singer who used to be a bit heavier, an example of her when she was heavier and now when she is thinner. At the top there was a caption in the sense of: let this be your motivation, to see that nothing is impossible. That she achieved everything she could in life and that you can too. The fact that she lost weight is presented as her greatest achievement in life, instead of looking at all the awards she received for her albums. That is the success – to lose weight."

"I would like to see less of who wore what, I mean, okay, but there are specialized platforms for that, there are fashion pages or something like that. Don't stuff that into spaces that are supposed to be for reporting. What I'm trying to say is, let's specialize, because I think a woman is not that, a woman is not a cosmetic procedure. If she wanted to have cosmetic procedures, great, good for her, let's not judge, let's not speculate what she did, where she did it and things like that."

"As for reporting and mentioning women in general, that is something we are always trying to achieve, and that is equality and equal treatment. Absolutely that someone's work is valued in the same way. Just as our work is not valued equally in terms of pay, it is not valued equally in any other sense either. There is always something else when it comes to us [women]. That is terrible, terribly stupid. [...] I want equality there. It absolutely should not matter whether they are commenting on a woman singer or a man singer, if they are going to comment, let them comment in the same way on their work or activity."

### Required changes in reporting on gender-based violence

1. Education of journalists on the topics themselves in order to deepen their understanding of what they are reporting on, as well as education on appropriate ways of reporting on:
  - a. the context and causes of violence
  - b. victims, especially the issue of reasons for staying in abusive relationships
  - c. perpetrators and judicial proceedings
2. Elimination of sensationalist and scandal-driven language and reporting practices.
3. Use of appropriate terminology instead of colloquial expressions and language that diminishes the seriousness of the problem.
4. Reporting factual information and the broader picture of gender-based violence as a social issue, in order to raise public awareness and provide education.
5. Ending the practice of taking and publishing statements from neighbours, acquaintances, friends, and other non-relevant individuals.
6. Including statements from experts and providing detailed information on sources of support at the local and national level.
7. Establishing a system of appropriate consequences for media platforms, media owners, editors, and journalists in cases of sexist reporting on women and inappropriate reporting on gender-based violence, as well as ensuring the consistent enforcement of these consequences.

"I think journalists need continuous education for it to be useful. On how to report on violence in general, and especially on gender-based violence. [...] First, they should be given a broader context of gender-based violence. Not only how to report on it, but also to understand the background of it.

That someone explains to them what gender-based violence is. [...] To place emphasis on why victims do not report. How to protect the identity of the victim and the children involved in that story? How to do that? [...] And how to report on perpetrators of violence? That is maybe even worse to me. That things are called by their real names. That a person who committed [the act], that this person is a murderer. So, a person who killed someone is a murderer. That he is not a respected entrepreneur, that he is not a respected member of society, that he is not a gym owner, that those are his roles, and that the emphasis is placed on what was done. [...] And that there is more discussion about the verdicts that have been delivered in the past and that this is given more attention... that is what I am missing."

"There absolutely needs to be a reduction in the media exposure of these stories in the sense that okay, it is news, but it is not a scandal to be scavenged on for a month. I think it is extremely important to raise awareness among journalists about how and with which methods they can approach sensitive topics so that they have a news story, but that the topic is not disgustingly exploitative. I don't know how else to put it. [...] It would really be good to start including, whether it is about suicide, self-harm, bullying, or gender-based violence, information on who people can turn to and why. Write a list of numbers. It is literally like having a footnote in an article. That is what I truly think would be appropriate."

"And it would be nice if the media wrote about where a woman can turn to, from whom she can actually seek help. Because they can apparently only find that when they come to a social welfare centre. Maybe they find some leaflets or something like that. So maybe they try there, or they hear from a neighbour or a friend or I don't know what. I think the media should write much more about where a woman should go and whom she should contact. For a start. [...] So that a woman does not have to run across half the village like I did, just for someone to show up and help you. Very little is written about that and that person should be protected more."

"Literally just a factual report about something that happened, and then everything is left to the investigation, which should at some point show what and how it happened. We get too involved in value judgments and most often they are ones we do not want and they are wrong. I think it should be exclusively factual, at least in that initial phase. Another thing is, if something is proven, then condemnation should be expressed, a general social condemnation of violence, but that reporting on specific events is free from such impressionistic comments."

"To turn more to organisations that deal with violence, to take their statements as well, to issue an appeal to women who are experiencing violence, where they can report it, whom they can contact. Some basic information that every woman who is in a violent situation, and does not know how to leave, should be given a chance, some information that it is possible. That it is possible and what can be done."

"More caution. Really wait until an investigation is conducted and then publish some information. [...] Avoid those interviews with neighbours. That is so unnecessary to me. What do they know? Maybe they heard some arguments, but they are always asked. And they will always tell you the same thing. They were good neighbours. They did not see any problems. That is how it is. Because outside of four walls, problems are not visible. Maybe more interviews with victims of violence themselves. There are none anywhere. There are neighbours, people who maybe work with victims of violence, but we have very few women or other victims of violence speaking publicly about what they have gone through. How will you sensitise the public unless they truly get to know those people?"

"I think they should definitely start controlling more how the media report. I think there should perhaps be higher penalties. Because obviously whatever is being done is not working. [...] I honestly do not know how in 2024 it is possible to write like that. And that portals can write such nonsense. And that it is even allowed to pass. That text has to go through. It is not just one person who read it, wrote it. It has to go through multiple people who approve something like that."

"The problem is literally at the root of everything. At the root of socialisation. How men are socialised. How women are socialised. That is where the problem lies."

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Participants emphasised that reporting should be factual, responsible, and supportive, rather than sensationalist, harmful, or intrusive, with a stronger focus on education, accountability, and access to help for victims.

## Summary of research findings

The main objective of the study was to examine the reactions of women who have experienced gender-based violence to sexist media content and media reporting on gender-based violence. To achieve this, the research was conducted in two phases – a quantitative study through an online survey and a qualitative study through individual interviews.

### Sample characteristics – Quantitative study (survey)

- The online survey was completed by 265 adult women who have experienced gender-based violence.
- The sample is predominantly composed of younger adult women (75% aged 20–39) with a relatively good standard of living (73% report an average or slightly above-average standard).
- Most participants live in urban areas (82%), with a significant proportion (38%) residing in Zagreb.
- The majority are in some form of partnership (85%), and one third have children (32%).
- Two thirds identify as heterosexual (67%), and slightly less than one fifth as bisexual (18%).

### Sample characteristics – Qualitative study (interviews)

- 12 adult women who have experienced gender-based violence were interviewed, aged 27–49, from different parts of Croatia (City of Zagreb, Split-Dalmatia, Brod-Posavina, Istria, Osijek-Baranja, Primorje-Gorski Kotar, Vukovar-Srijem, and Zadar counties).

### Experienced violence and reporting behaviour – Quantitative study (survey)

- Half of the participants reported frequent experiences of emotional violence (insults, belittling, intimidation) and controlling behaviours by partners (e.g. jealous accusations).
- One third reported frequent experiences of physical violence (pushing, shoving).
- One quarter reported frequent experiences of sexual violence (consenting to sexual intercourse out of fear of a partner).
- Older participants and those with lower living standards experienced higher levels of violence compared to younger participants and those with higher living standards.
- Non-heterosexual participants experienced statistically significantly higher levels of sexual violence compared to heterosexual participants; no significant differences were found for other forms of violence.
- Participants most often confided in friends, while reporting to authorities and institutions was very rare.
- Overall, participants rarely report violence; however, older participants, as well as those with lower and higher (vs. average) living standards, reported violence somewhat more frequently.

## Media use and perceived bias in media reporting

### Quantitative study (survey)

- Participants most frequently follow social media and online portals, while traditional media (television, newspapers/magazines, and radio) are followed significantly less.
- Participants believe that women are portrayed stereotypically in the media, with an emphasis on youthful and attractive appearance, balancing looks, career success and domestic roles, and focusing on fashion, beauty, and health as primary interests. They also perceive women as not being equally represented compared to men.
- Reporting on gender-based violence is perceived as sensationalist and only rarely appropriate. In other words, participants believe that media guidelines for sensitive reporting on violence against women, domestic violence, and femicide are often not respected.
- Perceived media bias is relatively consistent across participants, but results suggest differences between media types: those who follow television and print media perceive slightly less bias, while those who use social media for more than two hours daily perceive higher levels of biased reporting.

### Qualitative study (interviews)

- Participants showed similar media use patterns: they primarily follow social media (including comments), indirectly access online portals through them, rarely follow traditional media, and mainly listen to the radio while driving.
- Participants highlighted a decline in reporting quality and a general shift towards sensationalism across topics.
- Women are perceived as being portrayed stereotypically, primarily through appearance, family roles, and balancing private and professional life, while their professional and educational achievements are less visible.
- Gender-based violence is perceived as being portrayed in a sensationalist and simplified manner, often involving victim-blaming, lack of privacy protection, justification of perpetrators, and reliance on irrelevant sources.
- Such portrayals contribute to a distorted public understanding of gender-based violence.

### Relationship between experienced violence, disclosure, reporting, and perceived media bias – Quantitative study

- Participants who experienced more physical violence tend to perceive slightly less inequality in the representation of women and less inappropriate reporting.
- Participants who experienced more sexual violence are more sensitive to portrayals of gender-based violence and perceive them as less appropriate.
- Participants who reported violence more frequently perceive media portrayals of women as more equal and reporting on gender-based violence as more appropriate.

### Reactions to examples of sexist reporting and reporting on gender-based violence – Quantitative study

- Overall, participants' reactions were negative and highly consistent across both types of examples.
- Participants clearly disagreed with the way women/victims were portrayed and believe such representations should change.
- Emotional reactions were similar across both types of content, with negative emotions significantly more pronounced than positive ones.
- Almost all negative emotions were present, with distress being the most intense.

- Participants felt slightly more nervous, scared, and frightened after exposure to reporting on gender-based violence, and slightly more ashamed after exposure to sexist content.
- Positive emotions were minimal, with only moderate activation-related feelings (alert, attentive, active).
- Around three quarters of participants reported negative changes in attitudes and behaviour and reduced willingness to report violence or seek help after exposure to both types of content.
- A difference emerged in perceived safety: more participants reported increased insecurity after exposure to reporting on gender-based violence (75.9%) than after sexist content (61.9%).
- Reactions to gender-based violence examples often included recognition of victim-blaming and justification of violence, while reactions to sexist content more often highlighted objectification and humiliation.
- Participants also expressed concern for daughters and young girls, as well as general discomfort and negative feelings.
- Anger, frustration, and rage were present in responses to both types of content, more frequently after sexist examples, alongside a stronger desire for action.
- Sadness and disgust were more pronounced in responses to gender-based violence reporting. These reactions were more associated with fear and insecurity, while reactions to sexism were more linked to agitation and distress. Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness were present in both cases.

#### **Reactions to media reporting on gender-based violence – Qualitative study (interviews)**

- Dominant emotions included sadness, disgust, fear, anger, and rage. For some participants, these led to feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, while for others they prompted a desire for action, connection with other women, and social change.
- Participants differed in how easily they regulated these emotional responses, but all shared a strong identification with victims and heightened sensitivity to how gender-based violence is portrayed, due to their own lived experiences.
- Several participants highlighted institutional violence as an under-addressed issue within the broader topic of gender-based violence.
- There is a general perception that positive experiences with institutions are rare and largely depend on the efforts of individual professionals.
- Participants expressed significantly higher trust in civil society organisations, from which they received support and important information.
- Given that most participants had negative personal experiences with state institutions, media reporting does not significantly shape their trust in institutions, but rather reinforces already existing negative perceptions.
- Inappropriate media reporting is perceived as deepening fear, distrust, and hopelessness, and as creating additional barriers for women currently experiencing violence to seek help or report it.
- Coping strategies identified as helpful include faith, strong support systems (family, friends, peers with similar experiences), professional support, relaxing activities (walking, reading, breathing exercises), limiting exposure to media content on violence, and activism and collective action.

#### **Relationship between reactions to examples of sexism and reporting on gender-based violence, and media consumption, perceived bias in media reporting, experienced violence, and prior willingness to report violence**

- The analyses conducted showed small but statistically significant differences/associations. Below are the general patterns indicated by the data, while Table 16 presents more detailed results for different types of reactions separately to examples of sexism and reporting on gender-based violence.

→ Media consumption: Participants who watched more television and listened to the radio experienced somewhat less pronounced negative changes after exposure to the examples compared to those who watched less television and listened to the radio. In contrast, participants who followed social media more experienced somewhat more pronounced negative changes compared to those who followed social media less.

→ Bias in media reporting: Participants who believed that women are portrayed more stereotypically and that gender-based violence is presented more sensationalistically had more pronounced negative reactions to the examples shown. On the other hand, participants who believed that women are portrayed more equally and that gender-based violence is presented more appropriately in the media had less negative reactions.

→ Experienced violence: Participants who had experienced higher levels of sexual and emotional violence, as well as controlling behaviours, had more negative reactions to the examples shown.

→ Reporting violence: Participants who had previously confided more about their experiences of violence and reported it had less pronounced negative reactions.

### Required changes in media representation of women

→ Ending the objectification of women based on appearance

→ Ending the sexualisation of women

→ Reducing emphasis on women's family roles

→ Focusing on achievements and education

→ Ensuring equal representation of women and men

→ Establishing a system of appropriate consequences for media platforms, media owners, editors, and journalists in cases of sexist reporting on women and inappropriate reporting on gender-based violence, as well as ensuring the consistent enforcement of these consequences.

### Required changes in reporting on gender-based violence

→ Education of journalists on gender-based violence with the aim of deepening their understanding and ensuring proper reporting on:

- o the context and causes of violence
- o victims, especially the issue of reasons for staying in abusive relationships
- o perpetrators and judicial proceedings

→ Elimination of sensationalist and scandal-driven language and reporting practices.

→ Use of appropriate terminology instead of colloquial expressions and language that diminishes the seriousness of the problem.

→ Reporting factual information and the broader picture of gender-based violence as a social issue in order to raise public awareness and provide education.

→ Ending the practice of taking and publishing statements from neighbours, acquaintances, friends, and other non-relevant individuals.

→ Including statements from experts and providing detailed information on sources of support at the local and national level.

→ Establishing a system of appropriate consequences for media platforms, media owners, editors, and journalists in cases of sexist reporting on women and inappropriate reporting on gender-based violence, as well as ensuring the consistent enforcement of these consequences.

*Table 16.* Relationship between reactions to examples of sexism and reporting on gender-based violence with media platform use, perceptions of biased media reporting, experienced violence, and

prior willingness to report violence

	Positive affect		Negative affect		Attitude and behaviour		Feeling of safety		Reporting and seeking help	
	S	GBV	S	GBV	S	GBV	S	GBV	S	GBV
TV			↓	↓				↑		↑
Newspapers/magazines										
Internet portals										
Social media			↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓		↓
Radio						↑	↑	↑		
Stereotypical portrayal of woman			↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Equal portrayal of woman	↑	↑	↓	↓			↑	↑	↑	↑
Sensationalist portrayal of GBV		↓	↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Adequate portrayal of GBV	↑	↑	↓	↓	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Physical violence								↓		↓
Sexual violence			↑	↑	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Emotional violence			↑	↑			↓	↓	↓	↓
Controlling behaviours			↑	↑				↓		↓
Disclosure of violence	↑	↑								
Reporting violence	↑	↑			↑					

Note: S = examples of sexism in the media; GBV = examples of reporting on gender-based violence in the media; ↑ = more pleasant emotions, more unpleasant emotions, more positive changes in attitudes and behaviour, greater sense of safety, greater willingness to seek help and report violence. ↓ = fewer pleasant emotions, fewer unpleasant emotions, more negative changes in attitudes and behaviour, greater insecurity, lower willingness to seek help and report violence. Lighter shades – less pronounced negative reactions. Darker shades – more pronounced negative reactions.

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