



Intercom: Revista Brasileira de Ciências da Comunicação

ISSN: 1809-5844

ISSN: 1980-3508

Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Interdisciplinares da Comunicação (INTERCOM)

dos Santos, Camila Florêncio

As fontes em notícias de violência contra a mulher: um estudo de caso do portal G1

Intercom: Revista Brasileira de Ciências da Comunicação, vol. 46, e2023122, 2023

Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Interdisciplinares da Comunicação (INTERCOM)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-58442023122pt>

Available in: <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=69876423022>

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Articles

The sources in news of violence against women: a case study of G1 portal

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-58442023122en>

Camila Florêncio dos Santosⁱ

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4352-2867>

ⁱ (Universidade do Minho, Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade. Porto, Portugal).

Abstract

Gender-based violence in Brazil is increasingly affecting more and more women. They see their lives destroyed, physically and psychologically as a result of aggression, which often caused by their own family members and partners. And as in all other areas of society, the press also plays a fundamental role in raising awareness about reporting and warning about the seriousness of this scenario. What we often see, however, are factual stories, without the necessary depth and produced by journalists unprepared to talk about this issue. In order to understand how daily journalism on the internet deals with violence against women, this investigation analyzed articles on this topic in five sections of the Brazilian portal G1 in 2017. The editorials related to Brazilian states were chosen because Roraima, Goiás, Mato Grosso, Rondônia and Espírito Santo are the most violent states for women to live in, according to research by Ipea (Institute for Applied Economic Research). We analyzed their sources and whether the content is produced with a humane approach.

Keywords: Journalistic sources. Femicide. Daily journalism. Violence against women. Analysis of sources.

Introduction

Between 2008 and 2018, a total of 628,595 people were murdered in Brazil, according to a survey by the Atlas of Violence 2020¹, developed jointly by the Institute for Applied

¹ Atlas of Violence 2020. Available at: <https://forumseguranca.org.br/atlas-da-violencia>. Access on: January 10, 2021.

Economic Research (Ipea) and the Brazilian Public Security Forum (FBSP). Of this total, 91.8% of the victims were men and 8% women. This statistic, however, hides a different reality for female victims.

Unlike what happens with men, crimes in which the victims are women often have known suspects. This may be associated with the high rates of domestic violence and with Brazil ranking as the fifth country with the highest rate of femicide in the world, according to the research “National Guidelines for Investigating, Prosecuting and Judging Violent Deaths of Women with a Gender Perspective – Femicides²”, carried out by the Brazilian government and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UN Women. In addition, according to the Atlas of Violence, the volume of crimes reported in the family environment, i.e. in the victim’s home, increased by 8.3% between 2013 and 2018. From this data, it is possible to understand that gender-based violence is an issue that needs to be discussed urgently in Brazil.

Feminicide, the murder of women in the context of domestic and family violence as a result of disregard for or discrimination against the status of women, is a type of crime that has been considered in Brazil since 2015, by Law No. 13.104. The term, however, was used for the first time in 1976, in Brussels, by feminist activist Diana Russell, at an International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women. At the time, the intention was to characterize crimes committed against women, “defining it as a form of sexual terrorism or genocide of women” (MENEGUEL; PORTELLA, 2017, p. 3079³).

Even with such alarming numbers, however, many cases of rape, psychological and domestic violence against women are not officially recorded by the victims. This may indicate that the volume of cases is much higher, even though these are crimes that have legislation to defend and protect these victims.

Law No. 11.340, popularly known as Maria da Penha, was introduced in the country in 2006 with the aim of increasing rigor and punishment in cases of domestic violence against women. The name is a tribute to pharmacist Maria da Penha Maia Fernandes, who was a victim of domestic violence for 32 years. Her husband, the one responsible for the crimes, tried to kill her twice until the last attempt, in 1983, left her paraplegic. After numerous complaints, Maria da Penha denounced the Brazilian Party to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights of the Organization of American States. The commission considered the Brazilian justice system to be negligent in the case, which led to the creation of the law.

This supposed under-reporting of cases of violence against women may be related to the sexist, misogynistic and backward thinking present in the Brazilian society. Another survey

2 UN Women Brazil. Available at: <http://www.onumulheres.org.br/noticias/nacoes-unidas-e-governo-brasileiro-recomendam-diretrizes-nacionais-para-procedimentos-de-investigacao-processo-e-julgamento-de-crimes-femicidas>. Access on: January 24, 2021.

3 All the references originally written in Portuguese have been freely translated.

carried out by Ipea⁴, which interviewed 3,180 Brazilians about social tolerance of violence against women, indicated that 58% of those interviewed agreed that ‘if women knew how to behave, there would be fewer rapes’. In other words, there is a social tendency to blame the victim in many of these cases, a characteristic of the so-called rape culture (KELLER et al., 2018).

Given the above, it is possible to see how gender-based violence is an urgent issue in Brazil. From this, and understanding the importance of the press in building a society’s culture, some questions arise: how does the press behave in the face of this scenario? Do newspapers take on the social responsibility of reducing the impact of this structural sexism in cases of violence against women? Is the news treated in a humane way? Being the main research question “What are the sources used in the Brazilian press to report on violence against women?”, this research analyzes the sources used in news reports on cases of violence against women on G1, Brazil’s largest news portal.

The aim is to understand, based on a case study, how Brazilian journalism approaches violence against women through the sources used in news reports on cases with this theme. In addition, it seeks to understand the weight of the female voice as a source in news about violence against women and whether the victims are heard. Finally, we hope to understand whether there is a pattern in the sources used and whether they contribute to a humane approach to the cases.

To do this, the news sources related to violence against women (rape, domestic violence, abuse, aggression, femicide) published on the G1 portal in December 2017 were analyzed – a year that includes the observed period of increased gender violence in the country according to the Atlas of Violence. The editorials corresponding to the states of Roraima, Goiás, Mato Grosso, Rondônia and Espírito Santo were studied, since Ipea data indicates that these were the most violent Brazilian regions for women that year.

Besides their genre, the sources were analyzed and classified by credit, category and group, as defined by Schmitz (2011). A discourse analysis was also carried out based on the Humanized Journalism Manual - Violence against women⁵, developed by Think Olga, a Brazilian feminist NGO.

Types of sources in daily journalism

The quality of journalistic content, especially the daily kind, is often related to the sources heard for a story, with the news actually being what was said by its sources, not an expression of the journalist’s opinion (SIGAL, 1986). In addition, the ability to go after good sources is what shows whether a journalist is competent in their profession or not (SOUSA, 2005), since it is necessary to have a mature relationship with these sources and know how to get the best out of this relationship for the quality of the news. According to Pinto (2000,

4 SIPS - Social Perception Indicators System. Available at: http://ipea.gov.br/portal/images/stories/PDFs/SIPS/140327_sips_violencia_mulheres.pdf. Access on: January 24, 2021.

5 Available at: https://issuu.com/thinkolga/docs/minimanual_1_ef8621a394e2c. Access on: October 30, 2023.

p. 278), “sources are people, groups, social institutions or traces – speeches, documents, data – prepared, constructed, left behind”, and the relationship between source and journalist is based on mutual interest. The advantages of a story becoming public or not are also part of the contours of this relationship (GOMIS, 1991).

Sources, despite having caused controversy at historical moments in journalism, are still rarely studied today – even though, according to Gans (2004), for a journalist, everyone is potentially a source. Classic authors created names that are still used in newsrooms around the world. Some of these classifications were used in this study.

Schmitz (2011) is a researcher who recently returned his studies on the taxonomy of sources. In his research, he organized sources into five types: Category, Group, Action, Credit and Qualification, as shown in the table below.

Figure 1 – News source classification matrix.

Category	Group	Action	Credit	Qualification
Primary Secondary	Official Corporative Institutional Popular Notable Testimonial Specialized Referential	Proactive Active Passive Reactive	Identified Anonymous	Trustworthy Reliable Doubtful

Source: SCHMITZ, 2011, p. 23.

For this investigation, the interest lies in the definitions of Category, Group and Credit, points that were analyzed in the selected news items and will be briefly explored below.

Categories

Categories are defined as Primary and Secondary sources (SCHMITZ, 2011). Primary sources “directly provide the essence of a story, such as facts, versions and figures, because they are close to or at the source of the information. It usually reveals data ‘firsthand’” (SCHMITZ, 2011, p. 24). Testimonies from primary sources can be used to compare those from secondary sources.

Secondary sources are not often seen in daily journalism. According to Schmitz (2011), they play a role in contextualizing the story, helping to interpret a story or even complement the information presented by a primary source: “they are the people with whom the reporter discusses the unfolding of a news story (suite)” (SCHMITZ, 2011, p. 24).

Group

The Group tab contains official and unofficial sources (SCHMITZ, 2011). Official sources are those related to public bodies such as the police, government, powers, and the state. These are the sources preferred by reporters because they do not initially have secondary or hidden intentions beyond their interest in informing the population (SCHMITZ, 2011).

However, even though they are the most sought after by journalists, official sources may have an interest in concealing information in order to maintain the integrity of the institutions and are therefore possibly more tendentious (ROSSI, 2013). Also, according to Rossi's analysis (2013), official sources are often the only ones consulted in the construction of a news story because of the deadline. In online and daily journalism, the object of study in this investigation, this applies even more regularly. Unofficial sources are institutional, corporate, individual, witnesses, reference documents and specialists (SCHMITZ, 2011).

Credit

The crediting of sources determines when they are identified or anonymous, with confidentiality being negotiated between the journalist and the source (SCHMITZ, 2011). In this case, the source can reveal their identity when sharing the information, a practice known in journalism as *on the record*. On the other hand, anonymity, or *off the record*, occurs when the source intends to share the information but, for some revealed (or undisclosed) reason, prefers not to state their identity in the news, or even to reveal something off the record “with the clear intention of not disclosing or, if they do, without indicating who made the statement (on background) or the position they hold (on deep background)” (SCHMITZ, 2011, p. 29).

Gender issues in journalism

Gender awareness emerged in the European feminist movement in the 1700s, especially in France and England (BINGEMER, 1994). The motto of the French Revolution ‘*Liberté, égalité, fraternité*’ (liberty, equality and fraternity) began to be questioned, after all, it was a limited concept of liberty, as it did not consider women's rights. Over the years, the feminist movement grew stronger as a result of this questioning and also as a form of support for class struggle movements, such as the movement to abolish slavery.

Simone de Beauvoir, a French philosopher and one of the great references of the feminist movement, points out that even in vocabulary, women appear as negative and men as neutral. After all, we use “men” to refer to human beings. Thus, women are perceived in society as “the other”, giving a negative and limiting perception, without any kind of reciprocity (BEAUVOIR, 1980). It was in 1949 that the philosopher launched her book ‘*The Second Sex*’ and brought gender issues into the political debate. The famous phrase “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (BEAUVOIR, 1980. p. 9), is considered the beginning of feminist reflection from a perspective disassociated from biological sex. It was from then on that the distinction between

sex, from a biological/natural perspective, and gender, as a socio-cultural construction, began to be discussed (BUTLER, 2003). Thus, gender came to be seen from “a critical perspective on the production of knowledge in various disciplines of the social sciences” (AMÂNCIO, 2003, p. 687).

Although the feminist movement has been fighting for so long, women today continue to suffer from impositions of power and a world that is increasingly dominated by patriarchal sexism, based on psychological and social supremacy that aims to dominate women’s bodies and ideas. The end of sexism and misogyny has not been won, even with so many years of struggle. So much so that, on a daily basis, it leaves its mark, whether through wage disparity in the job market, the minimization of women’s voices in positions of power, abusive love relationships, domestic violence, sexual violation and even crimes that result in the death of women. In the media, we see this reality portrayed on a daily basis.

In Brazil, the first records of the gender struggle date back to the 1800s, with the publication of three works by the author Nísia Floresta Brasileira Augusta: *Conselhos à Minha Filha*, in 1842; *Opúsculo Humanitário*, in 1853, and *A Mulher*, in 1856. In addition, Nísia translated another feminist classic into Portuguese, *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, by Mary Wollstonecraft, written in 1792 (COSTA & SARDENBERG, 1994). The press also played a central role in the development of the feminist movement in Brazil. In 1822, the newspaper *Sentinela da Liberdade*, published in the capital of Pernambuco, Recife, published a manifesto signed by around 120 women demanding the right to be part of “Brazil’s share of glory” (TELLES, 2004).

In 1975, another major milestone in the Brazilian feminist movement took place through the press. The newspaper *Brasil Mulher* had its first edition published on October 9th of that year, presenting an overview of the First World Conference on Women, an event promoted by the United Nations (UN) in Mexico City. At the time, the event declared 1975 as the International Year of Women and 1976 to 1985 as the decade of women.

In Brazil today, according to Professor Inmaculata Díaz Narbona (2017), in an interview with Feldeman (2017), the presence of women in the press is often associated with violence, with women being the victims of crime in most cases. Or when they are associated with controversial issues that are often strongly questioned by conservative society.

Blood and the control of women’s bodies are always in the news and, unfortunately, they are the most widely covered subjects in the mainstream press. When there is a debate about abortion, we also find more about women in the media. Prostitution is also a topic that attracts media attention (NARBONA, 2017, *apud* FELDEMAN, 2017, p. 11).

Another point is the fact that the texts that address these issues are simple and contain only descriptive content about the facts (NARBONA, 2017), that is, they don’t go into depth. In addition, as sources, women have little space in specialized subjects such as politics and

leadership positions, not least because of their low representation in these roles – only 34% of senior leadership positions⁶ and 15% of political⁷ decision-making spaces are held by women in Brazil. The electorate, however, is made up of 52.5% women. On topics that are considered feminized, women are more present, such as when addressing topics related to emotional and family issues, fashion, and beauty (NARBONA, 2017).

Language in the mainstream media is not usually inclusive (NARBONA, 2017). In this way, journalism naturalizes certain statements, such as the choice to say “forced sex instead of rape, crime of passion instead of femicide, catcalling and not harassment” (LARA et al. 2016. p. 197). This narrative, which naturalizes crimes against women, is a reflection of a cultural value rooted in society that naturalizes these abuses which, “when transmitted by the media and repeated constantly, ends up becoming even stranger in our lives – and producing very real effects” (LARA et al. 2016. p. 197).

Violence against women portrayed in journalism

From the above, it is possible to see that journalism may have inadequate practices for dealing with violence against women, suggesting that the media reflects society’s behavior. In addition, the daily journalism that portrays violence in Brazil is dependent on official sources – in this case, in most situations, the military and civil police or even the municipal guard. And this “addiction” results in journalism that is completely uncritical of public safety (RAMOS & PAIVA, 2007).

Because of this, the journalist is also dependent on the agenda of these police authorities, who end up not prioritizing topics and cases that may not be considered important. In this way, journalism’s chances of producing reports that question cases of violence against women and show a broader picture, both stories and characters, and of the situation in Brazil in general, are also diminished. The media could “contribute to changing old socio-cultural conceptions, but they can also encourage the naturalization of a patriarchal culture, in which men have the right to subjugate their partners” (SOUZA; OLIVEIRA, 2015, p. 1), making it an essential space for bringing about the change that the feminist movement is fighting for.

The press is also responsible for setting the agenda for political and social debates, monitoring public policies, and also influencing society’s opinion. For this reason, the feminist movement strongly advocates that this agenda be in vogue. According to the Violence against Women Dossier⁸, the press should address gender-based violence by showing its real proportion

6 Source: Participation of women in management positions in Brazil increases. Available at: <https://diariodocomercio.com.br/dia-internacional-da-mulher/participacao-de-mulheres-em-cargos-de-diretoria-no-brasil-aumenta/>. Access on: January 24, 2021.

7 Source: Special women in politics. Available at: <https://www.brasildefatores.com.br/2020/07/30/especial-mulheres-na-politica>. Access on: January 24, 2021.

8 Source: Dossier on violence against women. Available at: <http://www.agenciapatriciagalvao.org.br/dossie/o-papel-da-imprensa/>. Access on: December 20, 2020.

regionally and throughout the country, publicize and monitor public support services and do more research into causes and possible solutions.

Blay (2003), in a study on the media's approach to cases of gender violence, found that in the 1980s there was a strong tendency to blame the victim. In these contexts, crimes were justified as frustrated attempts to break up relationships. This scenario changed somewhat in the 2000s when, according to the researcher, "the news became more investigative, relatively neutral and with a certain tendency to question judgments that made it easier for defendants to escape" (BLAY, 2003, p. 93).

In the reporting of these cases, language is another factor that has a major influence. Because of this, the Brazilian NGO Think Olga has developed a humanized journalism manual with tips for 'journalists and media outlets that want to cleanse their communication of prejudices'. Among the topics covered, one of the chapters deals with violence against women. The manual presents humanized ways of approaching cases of rape, domestic violence and femicide. Good practices include not romanticizing the acts of violence or the aggressors, not being afraid to use the word 'rape' and not judging the victims for their behaviour.

Figure 2 – Example of romanticizing a crime

C. also said that she must request the girl's transfer to another school tomorrow. According to her, her daughter is embarrassed and cannot leave the house. "She's stuck at home, but I have to get out. I hear things on the street, and I have to defend my daughter. I reported it because I thought it was the best thing, that I was protecting my girl. I didn't hurt anyone's daughter, but I'm being treated as if I had committed a crime", said C. Upon discovering the romantic encounters four months ago, she reported the case to the school principal.

Source 1: Minimanual of Humanized Journalism Part I: Violence against women.

Figure 3 – Example of romanticizing a crime 2

Stepfather arrested in Serra accused of forcing stepdaughter to have sex

The sexual violence allegedly occurred on the night of December 29th and was proven through medical examinations. Suspect was arrested this Tuesday.

Source: Minimanual of Humanized Journalism Part I: Violence against women.

Figure 4 – Exemple of recommended approach

According to the State Public Prosecutor's Office, the accused committed the crime of rape of a vulnerable person against his daughter, currently 11 years old, between 2010 and 2015, and against his stepdaughter, aged 9 years old, between 2013 and 2015. According to the complaint, the accused "he had carnal unions and performed other libidinous acts", "on numerous occasions", at "imprecise times", inside his residence.

Source: Minimanual of Humanized Journalism Part I: Violence against women.

Figure 5 – Example of recommended approach 2

Man is arrested for rape and attempted femicide in MS.

The victim would be the author's ex-partner.

Source: Minimanual of Humanized Journalism Part I: Violence against women.

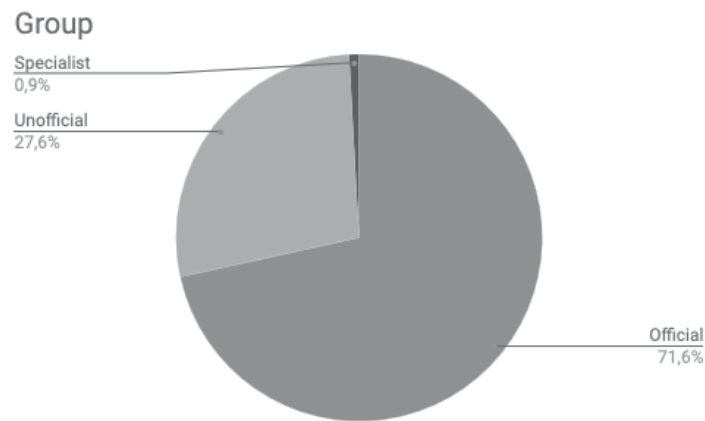
Data analysis

For this research, the news related to violence against women in the month of December 2017 in five sections of the G1 portal was analyzed. A total of 73 stories were documented, an average of 14 per section, a total of 2.3 stories per day. Of these, only 41 had the journalist's name revealed, 19 women and 22 men. In all these sections, 118 sources were accounted for, an average of 1.6 per publication.

It is important to note that of the five sections, only the Rondônia section had only one source. All of them were official (Military Police and press office), primary and unidentified. In only two of them was no source identified. In six of them, the victim was heard.

In most of the news stories analyzed, the sources were official, primary, and unidentified, from the press office of the local police. In total, 84 sources were official and only 34 unofficial. The unofficial sources included witnesses to the cases, the victims and, in most of the reports analyzed, relatives of the victims.

Graph 1 – Groups of sources analyzed.



Source: the author (2021).

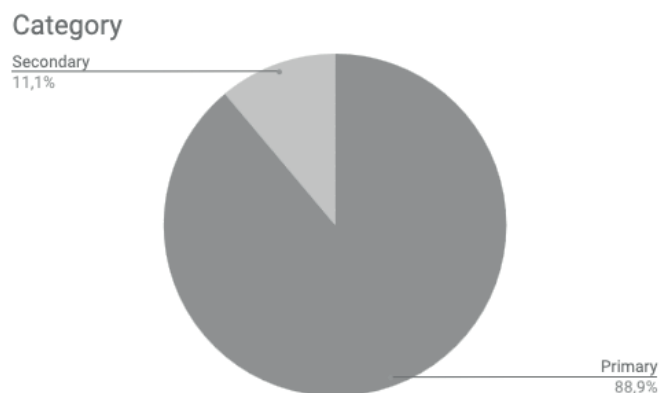
Figure 6 – Official source, primary and identified.

According to the police chief, their relationship has a history of fights that ended up with the police.

"It was a totally troubled relationship and he is a violent individual. Four incidents of threats and bodily harm that they have already had were recorded. According to the suspect, they have only been separated for 10 days, but we have not yet heard her version nor of family members," he said.

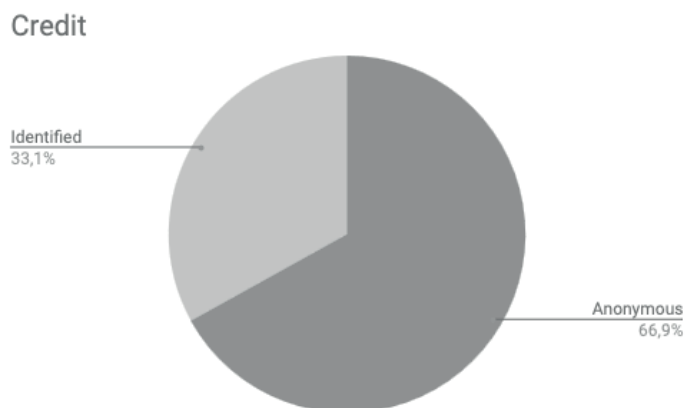
Source: G1.

Primary sources were also in the majority. In total, 104 were classified. Secondary sources, a classification used for victims' relatives not directly involved, "distant" witnesses to the cases and experts, totaled 14.

Graph 2 – Categories of sources analyzed.

Source: the author (2021).

Regarding the credit of the sources, most of them, 78, were classified as anonymous. The other 38 were identified. Of the identified or anonymous sources that suggest gender in some way, 23 are men and 28 are women. It is important to note that of these 28 women, 6 were the victims. In none of the stories analyzed was the suspect heard by the reporter or the outlet. In some cases, the defender or a relative of the accused were the sources.

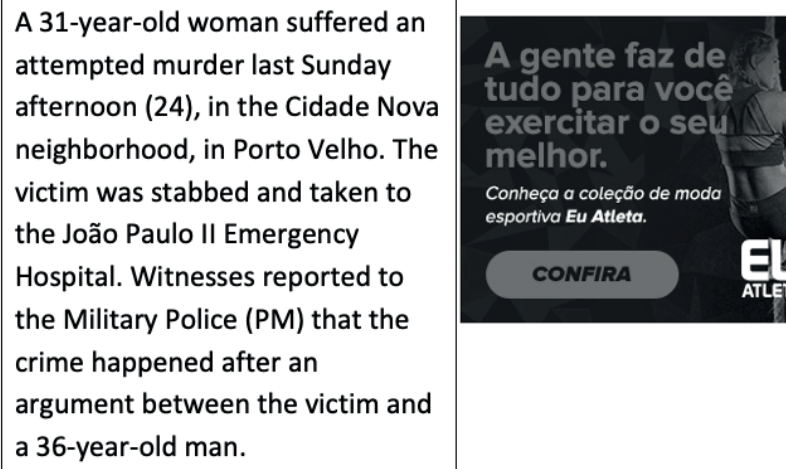
Graph 3 – Credits of the sources analyzed.

Source: the author (2021).

The journalist's approach to the subject was also analyzed. In general, factual news stories were short and to the point, which may justify the extensive use of primary and official sources. In the news stories with repercussions, there was more variety of sources, more identified sources, and more in-depth stories.

Only two news stories went into depth about the problem of violence against women in Brazil. As suggested by the Manual for Humanized Journalism, there was no information about support for victims or incentives to report violence – Brazil has a telephone line for reporting domestic violence, the Women’s Call Center: 180. In only one story was this action found. However, it was not in the journalist’s or outlet’s guidelines, but in the source’s words.

Figure 7 – Attempted feminicide not covered by the newspaper in this way.



Source: G1.

There were no terms or language that romanticize the abuse of women or soften the crimes reported – such as ‘forced sex’. However, the term ‘feminicide’ was used in only two stories, even though other news stories suggested that it was a crime.

Final considerations

Physical, sexual, moral, property and psychological violence against women are urgent, topical issues that need to be addressed in different spaces. Statistics show an increasingly worrying scenario not only in Brazil, but in several countries. The aggressor, in the majority of known cases, is in the victim’s home. They use love, passion and care to justify acts that are often said to be impulsive and love driven. Or even passionate. These actions, however, regardless of the justification, can mark the life of a woman, her children, and her family forever. This ‘love’ can kill. And it often does.

Simply punishing aggressors doesn’t seem to help stop this behavior. For many years now, the feminist movement has advocated the importance of talking about this violence and raising awareness so that more women can identify situations of aggression and seek help. The media, as feminists advocate, plays a fundamental role in this process of alerting and changing

society. For this reason, this research analyzed the approach given to cases of violence against women in five sections of Brazil's largest online news portal, G1, through its sources.

After theoretical research and analysis of the empirical object, it was possible to conclude that the cases are treated without distinction or any kind of emphasis on the seriousness of this scenario. There is also no work to raise awareness of the importance of reporting or reducing this type of crime. Most of the news stories are brief and mainly use official sources to report the facts. It is worth noting that the sections analyzed deal with factual topics and reports, without many examples of investigative or in-depth reports.

The word 'feminicide' was used in only two of the news stories analyzed, even though it is a crime under Brazilian law for homicide against women when the motivation is the victim's gender. Despite this, nothing was identified in any of the news stories that suggested blaming the victim for the crime. Nor was there any analysis of behavior that detracted from the woman as a victim. The words "rape", "abuse" and "harassment" were also used, with no attempt to minimize or romanticize such acts.

Given the above, and based on this research, it can be concluded that daily online journalism does not set out to promote structural changes in society. This can be seen in the choice to prioritize the use of official sources, which prevents questions about public safety or actions related to the prevention of these crimes. Breaking the news correctly and quickly seems to be the main choice.

When analyzing from the perspective of humanizing the news, it was possible to identify attitudes considered positive in the stories analyzed. One of them was the use, in most of them, of terms recommended for dealing with gender crimes. Despite this, it is possible to identify a need to work more actively to raise awareness of crimes against women, encouraging reporting and using different sources to analyze the facts being reported.

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About the author

Camila Florêncio dos Santos

PhD candidate in Communication Science at the University of Minho, Portugal. Fellow scholarship holder of the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). She holds a master’s in communication sciences from the University of Porto, Portugal. Specialist in digital communication and bachelor’s degree in Social Communication – Integrated Communication Management, with a major in journalism from PUC Minas. Communications and social media manager. Email address: contato@camilaflorencio.com.br

Data availability

The author confirms that the data supporting the research is available upon request. The supplementary material is available online: Editorials (in Portuguese).

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Editorial data

Received on: 02/22/2021

Accepted on: 10/25//2023

Editor: Maria Ataide Malcher

Editorial assistant: Aluzimara Nogueira Diniz, Julia Quemel Matta, Suelen Miyuki A. Guedes and Weverton Raiol

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