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A Study on Women's Voice as News Source in the Mainstream Newspaper of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Women are being treated more equally and have more opportunities to explore themselves than ever before in the 21st century. Nevertheless, the scenario is still asymmetric for women in comparison to men, as women are still lagged behind in several aspects. Working on women's empowerment can be considered one of the major responsibilities of mass media. However, the male voice seems to be still in a dominating position when it comes to the discussion of the usage of news sources. This research aims to find out the ratio of men's and women's voices as news sources in Bangladesh's mainstream newspapers. This paper is prepared on the observation of the content of 'The Daily Prothom Alo', 'The Daily Star' and 'The Dailly Samakal'- three of the mainstream newspaper of Bangladesh in five specific areas as follows: Politics, Business, Sports, Health and Fashion. This study was conducted in Content Analysis and In-Depth Interview Methods. Researchers analyzed half-yearly content from January 2021- June 2021. The paper concludes that all the five beats are heavily male-dominated since females are mostly unavailable in the 'Sports' beat and given exposure in the 'Fashion' beat.

Keywords: Mass media, Mainstream newspaper, News source, Women empowerment, and Women's voice.

INTRODUCTION:

Media plays a significant role in constructing and fortifying balances in gendered issues and perspectives of a society. In particular, news has a significant and out-right impact on creating the notions of power relations in diverse societal phenomena. As the fourth pillar of democracy, it is expected that newspapers will be fair and balanced on gender representation. Global Gender Gap Report, 2021 shows that Bangladesh places in the 65th position among 156 countries in terms of ensuring gender equality (Global Gap Report, 2021). It's a light of hope that women are being treated more equally and have opportunities to explore themselves than ever

before in the 21st century. However, the scenario is still asymmetric for women if compared to men, there is a persistent pattern of underrepresentation of women in relation to men in the world's news media (Jia, 2016). Women are mostly observed to be the news element as the victim, beauty experts, professionals, gynae issues, etc. Male voice seems to be still in a dominant position when it comes to the discussion of the news source. In 1995, the Global Media Monitoring Project conducted a study simultaneously in 71 countries, demonstrating that women account for no more than 21 percent of all news sources in television news broadcasts (Swert & Hooghe, 2010).

“The Missing Perspectives of Women in News, November 2020” report shows that women’s voices were seven times less likely to be heard than men’s voices regarding expert sources cited in politics coverage (Kassova, 2020).”

The Global Media Monitoring Report (2005) pointed out the downgrading of women in the media. The report says that women are more likely to be found in ‘soft stories,’ dealing with topics such as celebrity and the arts, and they are least likely to be found in ‘hard stories’ about politics, government, and the economy. Global Media Monitoring Report, (2005) Sjøvaag & Pedersen, (2019) stated, the reason for gender imbalances in the news partly lies with journalism itself. ‘Journalism is primarily drawn to power’ (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). ‘The fact that the people in power are predominantly male impacts the balance of gender representations in the news’ (Ross, 2007).

The Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh ensures that Women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and public life. These researchers found in the primary observation that ensuring gender equality in all aspects is still far away to reach. Amongst varied issues, representation of women in media reflects notable discrimination. Especially, as news sources or expert sources for news women are much more ignored than men. Gender equality, this multifaceted notion can be discussed from a varied perspective.

The Global Gender Gap Index (2021) considers the following four aspects to measure the ratio of gender balances: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. Keeping in line with these categories this research aims to find out the representation of men and women as news sources in five beats from three national daily newspapers in Bangladesh: The research is expected to contribute in threefold ways: (1). Cross-sectional data of this research includes five notable areas to discuss gender equality in the newspaper; (2). This research anticipates a new horizon to attain women’s progression at the policy-making level to ensure pluralism in mass media; and (3). This study will add a new academic arena to gender and media studies.

Literature Review

The scarcity of women’s voices in media articles is not an infrequent phenomenon. Gender experts have raised their voices many times on this issue. Research conducted by the Center for the Study of Media, Communication, and Power (2018) on behalf of the Global Institute for Women’s Leadership at Kings College, London showed that four out of every five expert comments in online news articles of mainstream UK news outlets have come from male experts, 7% of people quoted as experts in online news articles by the main UK news outlets are men (News center, 2018). Analyzing 1,112 articles, the same report also produced the statistics that men supply almost nine out of ten expert comments in the news for certain fields like foreign politics and business and finance (Journalism.co.uk, 2018). Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), the world’s longest-running advocacy and research project on gender in the news media have been working relentlessly since 1995 to ensure gender parity in media. GMMP report gets published once every five years, which demonstrates the overall scenario of gender balance in world media. Their latest couples of reports presents quite miserable data and make it clear that there has been a modest improvement when it comes to the point of gender balance in traditional media. GMMP (2010) shows only 24% of the people who heard or read about traditional media news are female, whereas 76%, more than three out of four, are men. Though 52% of women are quoted in the news, the ratio falls drastically when it comes to providing expert comments. Only 20% of the experts have turned out to be women, whereas men stand for the rest of the 80%. The scenario remained almost unchanged after five years, as data from GMMP (2015) suggests that there has been no improvement in the field of presenting women as experts. Let alone improvement, the scenario even got worse. Although the ratio increased in almost every other sector, like women being presented as spokesperson or eyewitnesses; the ratio of women being presented as an expert came down to 19% in comparison to the report published five years ago. Compared to other regions of the world, Asian women are less likely to emerge as subject experts in traditional media news. Asia has the lowest ratio of only 10% female experts portrayed in news among eight regions, including Africa, the

Caribbean, Latin America, Europe, the Middle East, North America, and the Pacific (GMMP, 2015).

Armstrong, (2004) argued that the gender of the reporter might have a role in selecting sources for news. He presumed female reporters are more likely to be assigned to soft news, whereas male reporters are more likely to be assigned to hard beats. He came up with evidence that though female reporters are covering hard beats like business and politics, most of them are still assigned to soft beats like features, arts, and entertainment. Women are not holding powerful and executive positions are another impediment to finding women experts. A study depicts that, women held only 4.9% of the top positions of organizations across 13 countries in the US, UK, and Europe (Financial Times, 2018). As women are not in a compatible position to provide expert comments, often reporters are left with no option except reaching male experts.

Knut De Swert and Marc Hooghe, (2010) researched Belgian media to investigate the issues which promote women's voice entitled "When do women get a voice? Explaining the presence of female news sources in Belgian news broadcasts (2003-5)". This research investigates 25,896 items and 1600 hours of television news datasets from public broadcasting and commercial television in Belgium from the years 2003 to 2005 showing that beyond the quantitative presence of women's voices it is also a matter of rethinking that women's voices are heard in a stereotyped manner. "Speaking in a purely quantitative way, the presence of female news sources would increase but this would not change anything about the problem of stereotyping" (Swert & Hooghe, 2010). Usually, the context of traditionally female topics determines the women's presence as news sources. Jia *et al.* (2016) conducted a study entitled- "Women are seen more than heard in online newspapers" which examined 2,353,652 articles over six months from more than 950 news outlets finds the proportion of females was consistently higher in images than in text, women are more likely to be represented visually as "eye candy" than they were mentioned as a news actor or source (Jia *et al.*, 2016). Thus, women are being reinforced as sources of visual pleasure rather than represented in the text. But it's a matter of concern that, "the news media are still very much male-dominated, with an overall probability of

77.0% than an entity mentioned in the text is male, or 69.6% that a face image is male" (Jia *et al.*, 2016). Amongst twelve categories with an additional category named "others" of the investigation except for fashion, male mentions in written texts were dominating also in the images incorporated with the news. Fashion is the only category that mentions females more in text and image with a probability of an entity being male at 45.9% in text and of a face image is 36.1%. Gender balances are the least common in sports news and the closest parity in fashion news.

A study conducted in Norway had related results. Sjøvaag and Pedersen, (2019) in their study 'Female Voices in the News: Structural Conditions of Gender Representations in Norwegian Newspapers' pointed out that women are more likely to be used as victims (44.6%), spokespersons (41.1%), unsung heroes (48.4%), & family members (51.8%) in Norwegian newspapers. 'On the contrary, when it's the turn to use women as experts, the ratio collapses to 32.9%, far less than other categories' (Sjøvaag and Pedersen, 2019).

Research Relevance

The overall scenario of quoted news sources delimitates that, women are less found as news sources or subjects of news in comparison to men. In terms of special issues or issues regarding expertise, the ratio shows a great fall. So, newspapers as a mass used media observed to bias the gender relations. Thus, women are getting a marginalized group. This research will create an impression to balance the gender presentation and empower men and women simultaneously. It is expected this research will influence the news industry and concerning academia to rethink the gender balances in consideration of the news source and other factors regarding journalism.

Research Questions

This research aims to look into the gender aspects of the news sources depicted in the mainstream newspaper of Bangladesh. The primary question of this research-

- 1) Are reporters leaning exceedingly towards men for collecting information/data to write the report?

Researchers will go with the secondary questions mentioned below to reach the goal of the study and to

ease the attainment of the answer of the primary question. These questions also help to analyze the coverage of women's voices.

- 2) What is the overall scenario of selecting women as a news source in the mainstream newspaper?
- 3) Is there any stereotyped manner of portraying male and female voices as a news source?

Theoretical Framework

This research work relates to a couple of theories. One is 'Muted Group Theory,' and 'Feminist Standpoint Theory' is the other one. 'Muted Group Theory' leads to the idea that voices of people attached to subordinate groups, based on gender, race, class, sexuality, caste, ethnicity, or religion, are often not considered as significant to the members of dominant groups, and as a result, get seldom considered for decision or policy-making. Littlejohn and Foss, (2009) stated that women are considered subordinate in most cultures compared to men. For this reason, they cannot share their opinion as freely as their male counterparts. As a result of perceiving women's opinions as less important, their comments receive less coverage and get muted gradually. Edwin Ardener & Shirley Ardener primarily developed 'Muted Group Theory' which was further developed by Cheris Kramerae, a U.S. scholar on women's studies and communication. Her work elicits that women's opinions are not welcomed in a patriarchal society Griffin, (2006) stated that according to Kramerae language is bound to men, as it is generated and controlled by men. That is why women can never express their thoughts and opinions in their language. Whenever women express their views on any issues, men-controlled society overrides them. That turns women into a silent group, and women's voice tends to disappear. Feminist theorists argue that "women's words are discounted in our society; women's thoughts are devalued. When women try to overcome this inequity the masculine control of communication places them at a tremendous disadvantage... women are thus a muted group" (Sayed *et al.*, 2019). Another theory that is used in this research, 'Feminist Standpoint Theory', relates power relation to the subordination of particular groups. Standpoint theorist's observe notable differences between men and women. As Griffin (2006) stated, Julia T. Wood attributes gen-

der differences "to the extent that women are distinct from men, she sees the difference largely as a result of cultural expectations and the treatment that each group receives from the other." This theory rejects the idea that knowledge is a straightforward outcome of essential characteristics of group members & rather emphasizes social ideologies that explain why women are assigned to certain activities and why those activities are less valued than activities assigned to men (Littlejohn and Foss, 2009). This practice tends to form a hierarchy in the society so that different groups hold different positions and offer a dissimilar power relation. Thus, men get advantaged and women are under advantaged. This theory backs the concept of the structure of the formed by power relations that create unequal social locations; one is occupied by dominant groups, while the other is occupied by subordinate groups, and "...masters are backed by the established structure of their society, it is they who have the power to make their view of the world stick. They are the ones who write the history books" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). According to this theory, society forces men and women to perform different social duties, and offer different rights and opportunities, only because of dissimulation in sex. Supporters of this theory also propagate the concept that different social locations where men and women occupy farms have different sorts of knowledge among them Feminist standpoint theory has contributed to feminist theory and has developed more useful ways of thinking about the production and consumption of knowledge in local and global political economies. As this research intends to dig out the reasons women are marginalized as a news source or quoted less in the daily news, the researchers felt these theories may provide an academic framework to reach any conclusion on this issue.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

Quantitative and qualitative both manners are applied to conduct the present study. The quantitative figures were investigated through the content analysis method and the qualitative data was analyzed by observing the texts, images, and discourses. Another research method in-depth analysis also has been applied to have the comprehensive opinions and thoughts of both the academician and industry expert in the media arena. In this regard, researchers interviewed two academicians,

practitioners and experts in gender issues Professor Dr. Gitiara Nasrin and Professor Dr. Sheikh Mohammad Shafiul Islam.

Data Collection

Three national dailies of Bangladesh are selected in this research as the source of data collection following the purposive sampling method; The Daily Prothom Alo, The Daily Star, and The Daily Samakal for content analysis. These three newspapers are taken considering the highest circulation in Bangladesh. Researchers collected data in five varied categories to reach the goal of the study to measure the gender ratio in terms of sources quoted in news. The categories of investigation of current study are as follows: Politics,

Education, Health, Sports, and Fashion. Data collection ranges from January 2021-June 2021 taking the timeliness into account.

Data Analysis

Researchers analyzed 4811 sample news from five varied beats of sample newspapers. In this segment numerical findings are presented in five charts. Findings from the Politics, Health, and Education beat are presented in a single chart for each newspaper. Results from sports and fashion news are presented in a different chart as these beats are diverse. Results showed that the most heavily male-centered beat is the sports beat, on the contrary, males are less found and females are quoted the most in the fashion beat.

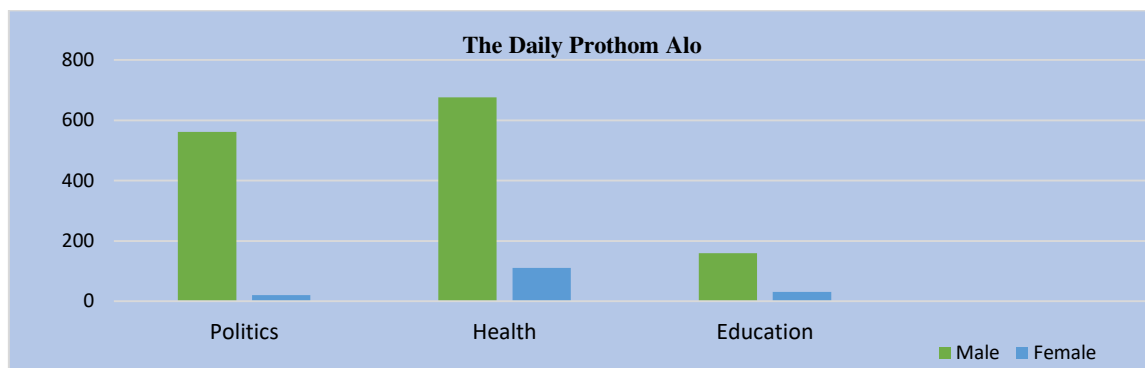


Fig. 1: The Daily Prothom Alo (Beat-wise News Source).

Fig. 1 demonstrates the scenario of choosing male or female news sources in three different beats in the Daily Prothom Alo. As the chart shows, all the beats are heavily male-dominated. In Politics beat, out of 582 news sources, 562 are from male news sources and

only 20 are from females. In the health beat, out of 787 news sources, 676 are male and 111 are female. In Education beat, out of 190 comments, 159 quoted male sources and 31 female sources were quoted.

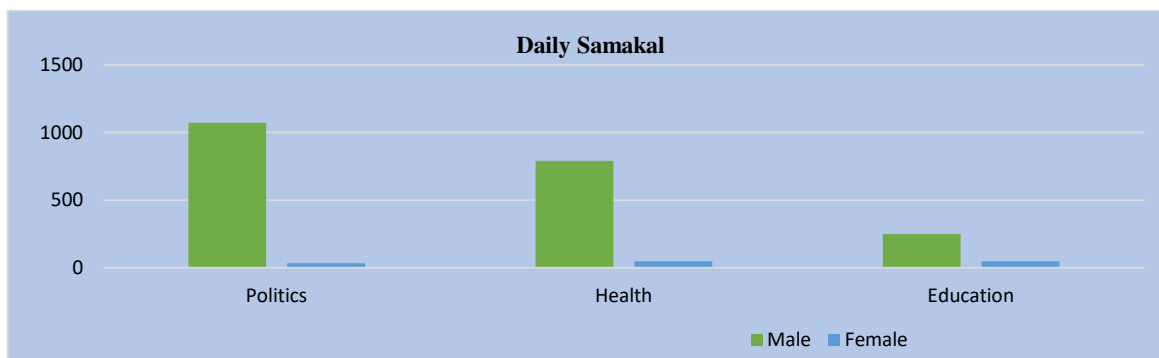


Fig. 2: Samakal (Beat-wise News Source).

Fig. 2 demonstrates the scenario of choosing male or female as the sources of news in three different beats of the Daily Samakal. In Politics beat, out of a total of 1104 quoted sources, 1071 news sources are from male and 33 of those are from females. In Health beat, out

of 836 news sources, 789 are male and 47 are female. In Education beat, out of 297 comments, 249 males are quoted while 48 sources of news are found from female counterparts.

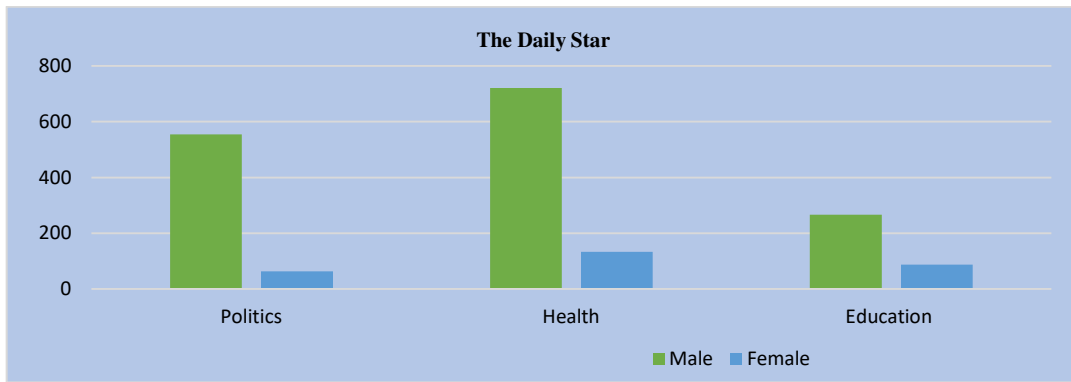


Fig. 3: The Daily Star (Beat-wise News Source).

Fig. 3 shows the ratio of male and female news sources quoted in the Daily Star. Women are less quoted in the politics beat as the result depicts only 64 women are found as news sources while a total of 618 sources were found there. In the health beat amongst 855

quoted voices, the male-female news sources' ratio stands for 721:134. In the Education beat, out of 355 news sources 267 are from male and 88 are from female.

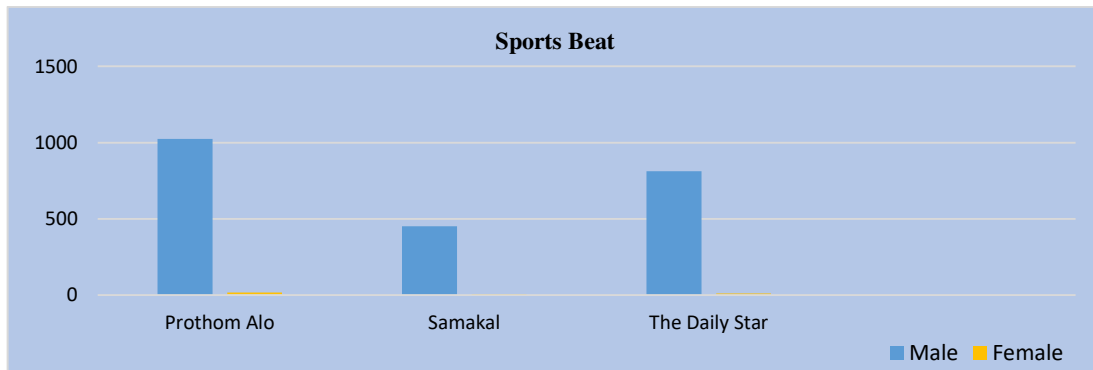


Fig. 4: Ratio of Male-Female Source quoted in sports news (Newspaper-wise).

Sports beat is the highly male-dominated news beat amongst the five beats. News sources quoted in all the three newspapers of the sports beat are demonstrated in **Fig. 4**. Women are mostly absent in the sports beat as the chart demonstrates. Out of 824 news collected from the Daily Prothom Alo, only 17 news was found

female-based. That is 92% of the total news is male-centered in the sports beat. The scenario is almost the same in the other two newspapers; 93% and 91% of total news were about male sports in the Samakal and the Daily Star consecutively.

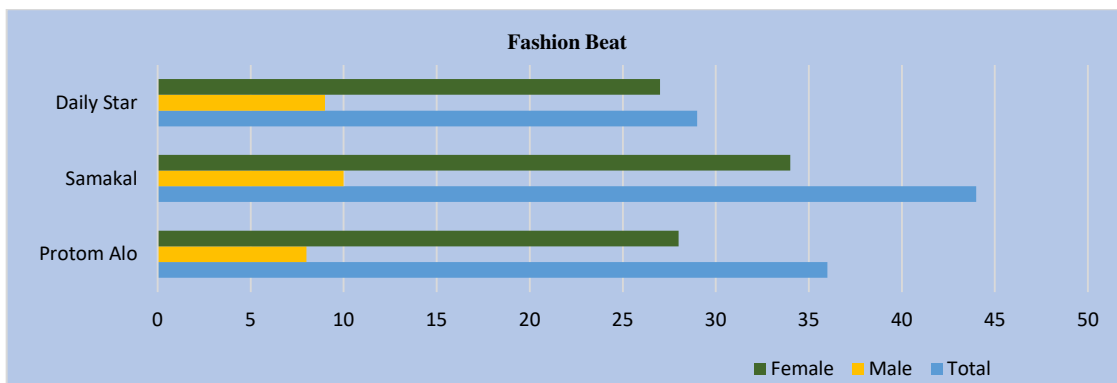


Fig. 5: Findings from fashion news (Newspaper Wise).

Fig. 5 is based on the presence of males and females as the subject of news in the fashion beat. All three newspapers are observed to be heavily female-oriented in the fashion beat. A total number of 109 news were studied from the fashion beat as a part of the study. Out of these, 89 news are based on female fashion and only 20 news are on male fashion. Females are also dominant as news sources or expert sources in this beat.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

This chapter attempted to specify the major findings of this research. All the findings are categorized into two major segments; the first one is the findings from the content analysis and the second one is the finding from the in-depth interviews taken as a part of current research.

Findings from Content Analysis

The findings from the content analysis are discussed below in five points as follows

Though adequate female sources are available reporters tend to quote male sources

This study finds that, in the 21st century women are participating in the professional areas more than ever. It is mentionable, that in the education and health arena women's participation as professionals are almost near to men's. Nevertheless, in the education beat, women are quoted as news sources just for 17% whereas men are found for 83% on an average. In the health beat, the ratio is more disappointing. The ratio of male and female news sources is observed 80:20 percent on average in this beat. According to the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC) website, at present, there are total 1 lakh ninety thousand registered doctors in the medical sector of Bangladesh and in the Dental sector, the total number of registered doctors are 11 thousand three hundred and fifty. While 60% of the total registered doctors are female and 40% of them are male doctors according to the information of the Bangladesh Medical and Dental Council (BMDC). Even so, reporters tend to reach male sources more than women even though women are available and prominent in professional places.

Women are observed to be quoted more as sources on special days

Researchers framed the research in the time range from January to June of 2021. Amongst these six months,

women are more found to be covered in mainstream newspapers in March, especially on the 8th of March, International Women's Day. This intention marginalizes women more always.

Reporters frequently go to the same sources

Findings from the health beat brought forward an issue to discuss. That is, reporters tend to visit the same sources frequently to report in a specific field. Some doctors are observed as a fixed source of reporters in the health beat which challenges ensuring a fair and balanced opportunity for expression of all. It empowers a particular group of people and corners others.

Women are seen more on the Fashion beat

Amongst the five beats investigated in the study, the fashion beat appears as an exception. A significant presence of women is found in this beat. Nevertheless, there are also issues of discussion, since women are more seen and not heard in this beat as well. Maximum news of the fashion beat is covered with female models but a mentionable number of reporters found in the fashion beats while female reporters or voices of female experts regarding beauty care or fashion is still dissymmetric. The summary depicts that, women are still seen more but heard less.

A significant absence of women is found in the sports beat

Researchers found women's absence in the sports beat the most. This beat is extremely male-centered. Women's voices as the sources of news are rare, women are also absent in sports as a whole. Most of the news in the sports beat at the national or local level is on male sports. Total 1957 news were investigated from the aforementioned newspapers under this study. Only 169 sports news was found with female participants. On average, 92% of the total news found in sports beat is male-based. Women are quoted only 5% compared to men in this beat as news sources and mostly it was about an accident during sports or about victory.

Summary findings from the in-depth interviews

Women are mostly absent as news sources

We can see women's presence in the mainstream media is really very rare. Because the media of Bangladesh is mainly elite-oriented and the society is mainly patriarchal. For interviews, media especially select those people who have perceived knowledge or

depth on an event, issue, or affair. And from this viewpoint, it is a stereotypical perception of society that women are lagging behind in terms of knowledge, skills, and understanding of different facts or issues. For the specialized beats like science, technology, economy, politics, and sports women's presence is very rare.

Women are presented in a stereotypical manner

Women are mostly seen as the victim, attacked, or affected. Our society has an imbalanced power structure that promotes men's power and marginalizes women. Though the scenario is getting changed gradually, women now enjoy freedom for education and professional practices and sphere in public more than before. However, the stereotypical perception still exists in society; women are found as news sources in some specific issues which carry the elements of soft news like film, entertainment, or issues with twists. So, it is observed women are mostly preferred as news sources like entertainment, cultural, or sensitized reports. Women or women's names are utilized to add some extra flavor to this specific news.

Male-centered media practices lead to this discrimination

The media of Bangladesh is extremely male-dominated; power and control of the media are monopolized by the male counterparts of the society. That leads the media practitioners to uphold and retain the power practices of men continuing over centuries. Equal participation of women in all the worthy sectors of society is still unreachd. Therefore, men hold the power structure, and women are dominated by men. That also impacts the media representation of women.

Ways out to raise the women's presence as news sources

There are still some ways to minimize this discrimination. Women empowerment is very important. Changes in traditional perceptions, stereotypical behavior, and beliefs can lead to change the situation. Patriarchal attitudes should be changed. Women should have the opportunities to be educated. If women step forward to media ownership, power structure and stereotypical gender perceptions may be changed. If the managerial & ownership pattern of media changes the scenario might be modified.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Women's participation in professional activities is still less in comparison to men. The ratio of male and female members of the 11th Parliament of Bangladesh is 276:74 whereas 50 seats of the National Parliament of Bangladesh are reserved for women. This ratio depicts women are severely lagging in direct political participation. Women continue to be significantly under-represented in the highest political positions. (UN Women: 2020). Besides this, women are also notably lagging in sports. A number of total 1957 news of the sports beat were collected and analyzed. Sports news covering females found only 8% while the percentage is 92% for male. Baitinger, (2015) argued, journalistic professional norms of holding the powerful to account, therefore, influence the presence of women in the news, as less women than men hold high positions of power. Both analyses show that women are less found as news sources in comparison to men; if women are quoted as news sources, then it is in a stereotypical manner exemplary family, fashion, entertainment, as the victim, attacked or affected. For the specialized reports on skills, knowledge, attitude, or depth of understanding women are less presented as news sources. Women are seen as more prominent in the fashion news beat in the whole newspaper. Here we can find the traditional ways of treating women as grounded in soft affairs or the elements of men's visual pleasure. "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact" (Mulvey, 1975).

Overall, a lacking of responsiveness in journalistic practice is observed. A qualitative change is needed to ensure equal and fair gender representation in the media industry. Such research can be conducted focusing on the other genders like lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender. Thus, researchers found further areas to be studied.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:

This is original research and no matter of copyright issue is traced here. Therefore, the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest to publish this paper

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