The Portrayal of Women in Contemporary Sinhala Newspaper Reporting

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The portrayal of women in media has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, with significant attention given to television, film, and advertising. This study on "The Portrayal of Women in Contemporary Sinhala Newspaper Reporting" examines how women are depicted in Sinhala newspaper reporting, focusing on prominent Sinhala publications such as Lankadeepa, Divaina, Silumina, and Mawbima. The study looked at how women are portrayed in terms of their social roles, traits, and ideals of femininity in the setting of Sinhala newspapers by using a qualitative methodology. The study's findings illustrated that women are depicted through language in three ways: the use of derogatory terms, such as 'dooshanaya', 'kelesima', and 'ganika', when reporting incidents involving women; a negative emphasis on women's presence in news reporting, resulting in gender bias; and an exaggeration of women's physical appearance in news reporting, leading to the objectification of women and a reduction of their value to superficial characteristics, disregarding their expertise, skills, and contributions. Suggestions for enhancing the portrayal of women in Sinhala newspaper reporting include advocating for the adoption of gender-sensitive guidelines and language and fostering diverse gender perspectives within newsrooms to foster inclusivity and equity in news dissemination.

KEYWORDS: Gender, Media, Sinhala Newspapers, Stereotypes, Media Ethics, Gender Bias

INTRODUCTION

Press media refers to the news industry within the mass media that disseminates news to the general public through various channels such as print media (newspapers), broadcast news (television and radio), and other available forms of media. In Sri Lanka, there are media operators, both state-owned and privately-owned, that offer different types of television, radio, and newspaper services in Sinhala, Tamil, and English. The media plays a significant role in society by reporting on current events and situations, raising awareness among citizens about various issues, reflecting and perpetuating the prevailing culture and societal norms, and serving as a key communicator with the public. Hence, the media can significantly influence the promotion of gender equality, encompassing both the workplace environment and the representation of men and women. This involves ensuring gender portrayal, utilizing neutral and non-gender specific information, and actively contributing to a more equitable society (Kangas, et al., 2015).However, the representation of women in media raises significant concerns and issues that require identification and addressing. Within the media landscape,

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the number of gender imbalances and gaps that exist needs to be acknowledged and remedied.

Exploring the representation of women in Sinhala newspapers is a pertinent and significant area of research. This is because the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes regarding gender roles and relationships (Abeywardana, 2017). According to (Abeywardana, 2017) the way women are depicted in the Sinhala media carries substantial influence on their societal standing and can impact the opportunities and roles available to them. Moreover, the portrayal of women in Sinhala newspapers holds ethical implications and is the media's responsibility to report on issues in a fair and accurate manner, while avoiding the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and reinforcing unequal power dynamics.

Through a thematic analysis of women's portrayal in Sinhala newspapers, this study aimed to uncover the patterns and implications of media representation. By examining the relationship between media representation and broader concerns of gender equality and media ethics, valuable insights can be gained. The research findings contributed to the ongoing efforts to foster responsible and equitable media reporting practices.

The portrayal of women in the media can have ethical implications (Abeywardana, 2017) . Media representations that reinforce gender stereotypes, objectify women, or diminish their worth can perpetuate inequality and contribute to the marginalization of women. Ethical concerns arise when media content reinforces harmful narratives that undermine women's agency, perpetuate gender biases, or contribute to the overall discrimination and oppression of women (Abeywardana, 2017). Media professionals have an ethical responsibility to challenge and question such portrayals and strive for more equitable and inclusive representations. Media ethics and the portrayal of women are closely linked, as ethical considerations guide how women are represented in media, and the portrayal of women in media can have ethical implications in terms of fairness, accuracy, and promoting gender equality and social justice.

The significance of this study lies in its ability to shed light on the portrayal of women in contemporary Sinhala newspaper reporting. By identifying and analyzing specific patterns in language use, such as the employment of derogatory terms, negative emphasis on women's presence, and exaggeration of physical appearance, the study provides valuable insights into the potential biases and objectification prevalent in media representations of women.

The problem statement revolved around how women are portrayed in current Sinhala newspaper reporting. The main question to be addressed was "How are women portrayed in contemporary Sinhala newspaper reporting?".

The research objectives of the study were as follows:
- To examine how women are represented in Sinhala newspapers.
- To explore the relationship between media ethics and portrayal of women in Sinhala newspaper reporting.
- To suggest recommendations for improving the portrayal of women in Sinhala newspaper reporting.

The research questions of the study were as follows:

- How are women represented in Sinhala newspapers?
- What are the dominant themes and messages about women that emerge from Sinhala newspaper reporting?
- To what extent do Sinhala newspapers adhere to media ethical guidelines and norms when reporting about.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theories used in the study are social responsibility theory, feminist theory, agenda setting theory, social cognitive theory, cultivation theory, and critical race theory.

Social responsibility theory

Social responsibility theory is defined as an ethical theory in which individuals are accountable for fulfilling their civic duty and the actions taken by an individual should benefit the entire society (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). This theory is built on a system of ethics where actions and decisions must be ethically validated before proceeding or starting anything. If the actions and decisions harm society, then that is considered socially irresponsible (Pachamama Alliance, 2022). Therefore, media professionals should act in a manner that benefits society, not just the individual or the media organization he or she is representing.

Feminist theory

Feminist theory examines the ways in which gender inequalities are perpetuated through social, cultural, and economic structures. Feminist theory recognizes that gender is a socially constructed category that intersects with other forms of identity, such as race, class, sexuality, and ability. Feminist theory has evolved over time, with different waves of feminism emphasizing different aspects of gender-based inequality. First-wave feminism, which emerged in the 19th and early 20th centuries, focused on securing women's legal rights, such as the right to vote. Second-wave feminism, which emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, focused on issues such as reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, and the portrayal of women in media and popular culture. Third-wave feminism, which emerged in the 1990s, expanded the movement's focus to include issues such as intersectionality, globalization, and the diversity of women's experiences (Crossman, 2020).

Agenda setting theory

Agenda setting theory suggests that media outlets have the power to shape public opinion by selecting which issues to cover and how to cover them. "Accessibility" is the cognitive process in which agenda setting occurs. Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, two college professors who conducted a study of North Carolina voters during the 1968 U.S. presidential election and published their findings in 1972, discovered that what individuals perceived to be the most crucial concerns were also those that received the most negative media coverage. Public agenda setting, media agenda setting, and policy agenda setting are the three types of agenda setting theories (McCombs, 2015).

Social cognitive theory

Social cognitive theory developed by Albert Bandura in 1986 emphasizes the role of social learning in shaping attitudes and behavior. People are seen as active agents who are both influenced and are influenced by their environment. The act of learning desirable and

undesirable behaviors through observing others and then replicating those behaviors in order to maximize rewards is known as observational learning and is a key element of the theory (Vinney, 2019).

Cultivation theory

Cultivation theory suggests that long-term exposure to media messages can shape individuals' perceptions of reality. George Gerbner introduced this theory in the 1960s. This theory was mainly associated with television, but later it was applied to other media as well (Vinney, 2019).

Critical race theory

Critical race theory examines the ways in which race intersects with other forms of oppression, including gender. According to the scholar, this is a theoretical framework and academic discipline emerged in the United States in the 1970s aimed to examine how race and racism intersect with other forms of social oppression and privilege, such as gender, class, and sexuality (Bodenheimer, 2021).

There are several key concepts related to the portrayal of women in media, such as 'Representation', 'Stereotyping', 'Objectification' and 'Intersectionality'.

Representation

According to Stuart Hall, the process by which members of a culture use language to produce meaning is what is meant by representation. Conceptual maps and language are the two systems of representation identified by Hall (Stilesguilsborough, 2021).

Stereotyping

Research has shown that women are often portrayed in stereotypical ways, such as being overly sexualized, submissive, or objectified. Stereotyping refers to the process of making assumptions or generalizations about a group of people based on their characteristics or traits. In the media, women are often stereotyped based on their gender, leading to limited and narrow depictions that do not accurately reflect the diversity and complexity of women's experiences (GCSE Media Studies Revision - BBC Bitesize, n.d.)

Objectification

Objectification refers to the process of reducing a person to an object or commodity, often for the purpose of sexual gratification. Women in the media are frequently objectified, treated as mere physical objects to be looked at and evaluated based on their appearance (Barber, 2011).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality recognizes that individuals have multiple identities and experiences that interact and intersect with one another, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and socio-economic status. Research on the portrayal of women in media has increasingly recognized the importance of intersectionality, showing that women from marginalized groups may face unique challenges and experiences in media representation (Sampurna, 2022).

Previous research findings

Several past research studies have focused on the representation of women in television advertisements and the film industry in Sri Lanka, and it was identified that there is a lack of local research on this topic.

"A Critical Analysis of Gender Stereotypes; A Case Study with Special Reference to Sri Lankan Sinhala Films in the Year 2015" by Rathnayake (2017) emphasized how gender stereotypes are portrayed in the film and media, which does affect how we view gender roles. The perception of what a man and a woman are and how they need to act toward one another can be strengthened by some gender-specific characteristics. Through male performers and female actresses, films understand the reflection of social connections and gender roles. A study found certain instances of gender prejudice in male and female characters in movies. In all the movies, there was discrimination, particularly verbally and nonverbally. Male characters were highlighted in movies as "independent, non-emotional, aggressive, rough and tough, competitive, experienced, strong and active characters" (Rathnayake, 2017, p. 73). Accordingly, women are frequently represented as "dependent, emotional, humble, shy and sympathetic, irrational, and unconfident characters"(p. 73-74) Through their positions in movies, male and female characters revealed that there was some gender discrimination.

Research on the Sinhala film industry by Dharmawimala (2020) titled "Angel or Monster: Representation of Women in Sri Lankan Period Films, argues that "Sri Lankan period films contain a dichotomous motif of female identity through the construction of related images that may differ from the dominant Eurocentric discourse on the angel/monster concept" (Dharmawimala, 2020, p. 46). Thavishi analyses two Sri Lankan period Films; Vijaya-Kuweni which was released in 2012 and Paththini which was released in 2016. The reconstruction of Kuveni's character aims to highlight her feminine identity as compensation for her original masculine identity. Her appeal and acceptability in the film rely on her feminine attributes, which evoke sympathy for the injustices she faces. This portrayal underscores the need to present female characters as embodying societal ideals of femininity to gain positive recognition. The second is the portrayal of two distinct female characters—Kannagi and Madhavi—as diametrically opposed ones in Paththini (2016). They allow for the representation of both socially acceptable and unacceptable female characteristics.

Berberick (2010) explores how the media's objectification of women continues unabated and impacts society as a whole and argues that the image of an "ideal woman" as presented by media is harmful (Stephanie Nicholl Berberick, 2010).

"Media's Portrayal of Women and its Impact on Body Image and Self-Esteem" by Bareis (2021) shows findings related to the negative impacts of the media's representation of women on their self-esteem and body image. According to (Bareis, 2021) this study examines the development of magazine publishing in the United States over time. The success of Dove's Real Beauty Campaign is then discussed, as well as how they were a crucial forerunner in this trend. According to this study, media will remain integrated into every aspect of consumers' lives. A difference can be observed for the next generation of women if more businesses and brands push to include diversity in their content. The same goes for consumers, who can use resources to have a more positive relationship with the digital world and educate themselves on media literacy.

Hazir et al., (2016) have researched the representation of men and women in Pakistani media. They have tried to examine gender stereotypes and sexism in Pakistani media and attempted to highlight whether print media reproduces or challenges gender stereotypes and sexism. The findings show that women are primarily portrayed in traditional gender roles in Pakistani

print media. The conventional views of women as being less interested in politics, becoming mothers, and being more preoccupied with physical appearance may cause some women to construct a false sense of self in an effort to conform to male standards of femininity. To maintain male hegemony over both the public and private spheres, patriarchal societal structures use print media as an instrument (Hazir Ullah, 2016).

"Portrayal Of Women in Print Media: A Nepalese Context" by (Gurung, 2016) where a national daily newspaper Kantipur and the Nepali women's magazine Nari were examined to identify women's issues and portrayal of women in print media. Advertising has primarily shown women in a passive role while emphasizing males in more assertive and decisive ones. The aesthetic value of female bodies has been used to judge them. Gender sensitization is essential to changing the process and practices of positive portrayals of women in media through advertising, news, interviews, and articles. Therefore, change is required not only inside media organizations but also among ordinary readers since they may influence how such media function, be exploratory, and present the issues in a more justifiable way to advance gender equality in society.

The study on 'Women Representation in The Media: Gender Bias and Status Implications' by (Nguye, 2020) studied the persistent bias and stereotyping of women in the media, particularly when compared to their male counterparts. The author has used three magazines; Entrepreneur, Fast Company, Inc. to analyze gender stereotypes. The findings show that women's representations are less confident and less future-focused, and specifically that they are given noticeably lower word counts than men. The paper then goes on to analyze the significance of its findings for how women are perceived in society, making some generalizations about how women might combat gender bias that future research can address.

Abeywardena (2017) shares that the media in Sri Lanka keeps diverging from accepted norms of ethical journalism which include offensive imagery, deceptive images, the use of racial slurs against ethnic groups, factual inaccuracies, and the denial of the right of response in media reporting. As a result, the portrayal of women in Sri Lankan media has frequently violated moral standards and contributed to stereotypical beliefs, which have a direct impact on how society views women. There are different ways objectification happens; some newspapers portray women as sex objects where sexist references and pictures are used. These references used by media professionals are irrelevant to the context of the article; Terms such as 'beautiful', 'pretty' etc. are reductionist terms used in the press. In an incident where it shows victims of sexual abuse, reductionist terms are used, and different terms are used that are irrelevant to the context of the article; Sinhala press media sensationalize and romanticize news when reporting on acts of violence against women such as sexual abuse (Abeywardana, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology was used for this study, with a focus on the analysis of newspaper extracts from renowned Sinhala press media publications; Mawbima, Silumina, Lankadeepa, and Divaina. The textual material from these newspapers provided significant evidence for this study of how women are portrayed and the related gender issues. Qualitative data in this study refers to the textual content extracted from these newspapers that provides evidence for examining the portrayal of women and related gender issues. The extracts from these newspapers were chosen from the Ethics Eye Facebook page, an online platform that monitors and flags violations of media ethics in the Sinhala press (Verité Research). By utilizing a qualitative approach, this study aimed to delve deeper into the nuances of media

representation and explore the underlying meanings and themes surrounding the depiction of women in Sinhala newspapers. It uncovered patterns, trends, and potential biases that emerged from the analysis of the selected newspaper extracts.

The data collection process used a random sampling method to ensure a representative sample for the study. The population considered for this research comprised all Sinhala newspapers printed and circulated throughout the country. From this population, a sample of newspaper extracts was selected for analysis, specifically focusing on articles from Lankadeepa, Divaina, Silumina, and Mawbima newspapers. The selection of these four Sinhala newspapers was based on their wide circulation and substantial readership, making them pertinent sources for examining the portrayal of women in the media. This sampling approach enabled the research to capture a diverse range of content and perspectives from the selected newspapers, providing a comprehensive understanding of how women are represented in the Sinhala media. The random sampling method ensured that the articles that were analyzed were representative of the broader population of Sinhala newspaper content, thereby enhancing the validity and generalizability of the findings. By utilizing this random sampling technique, the study aimed to obtain a fair and unbiased representation of the portrayal of women in Sinhala newspapers.

This research incorporated the collection of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered through the examination of newspapers, which included extracts of Sinhala newspapers published during a three-month period from September 2020 to November 2020. This involved the systematic reading and analysis of selected newspaper articles as the primary source of information. In addition to primary data, secondary data was obtained from various sources such as books, journals, articles, and other relevant publications. These resources provided valuable foundation for understanding existing knowledge and theories related to the research topic.

By combining primary and secondary data sources and applying thematic analysis, this research aimed to provide a comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the representation of women in the Sinhala media. The integration of different data collection methods and thematic analysis techniques enhanced the robustness and validity of the findings, contributing to a deeper understanding of the research topic.

This study was completed by avoiding any unethical practices and protecting the human participants involved in the study. The study focused on minimizing the risk of harm, protecting anonymity and confidentiality, and avoiding deceptive practices. Any personal or identifiable information was handled with the utmost care to protect the privacy rights of individuals.

DATA FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Presentation of data

The research followed the manual coding method by analyzing the data in the newspapers. To analyze the collected data, a thematic analysis method was employed. Initially, the data was read to familiarize the entire dataset by reading it in its entirety without engaging in any coding activities. Subsequently, during the next stage, the data was reread to identify key elements and generate initial codes that capture these elements. These initial codes were reviewed and organized to establish overarching themes that encompassed multiple related codes. To ensure consistency, these themes went through a final review and revision, taking into consideration the codes generated from the data. By following this step-by-step process,

a comprehensive and well-structured thematic analysis was conducted. By employing a thematic analysis approach, the study aimed to uncover underlying meanings, implicit messages, and common trends related to the portrayal of women in Sinhala newspapers.

The analysis of the data resulted in the identification of three themes that depicted how women are portrayed through language:

1. Utilization of derogatory terms in news reporting.

2. Negative emphasis on the presence of women in news reporting.

3. Exaggeration of women's physical appearance in news reporting.

Data findings and analysis

Each theme within the analysis incorporated data, including the corresponding code number/s, conclusions, and evidence derived from the data collection process. Due to limitations on word count, the full articles could not be included within the evidence section; therefore, extracts were chosen from the infographics published on the Ethics Eye Facebook page, which is an online platform, and the article headings will be presented as part of the analysis.

Theme 1: Utilization of derogatory terms in news reporting

Words such as 'dooshanaya' or in English, 'pollution' creates negative feelings about a sexual crime where a woman is involved and indicates something 'impure' has happened and the woman's image is highlighted, which leads to distress and pain in the victim. Perera (2020) highlights the various words that are reported in several languages that are anti-feminist. In his article, he describes how a lecturer from Jaffna University discussed the term 'dooshanaya' in Tamil, saying that it is inappropriate to refer to a sex crime with words like 'katapalittal' ('dooshanaya' in Sinhala) which has a patriarchal connotation and means 'destroying virginity'. The term 'ismathdari' 'issathlutna' used in Pakistan and denotes a loss of respect and dignity. According to Mehwish Hussain of a Pakistani media site, they have stopped using words that imply a woman's 'loss of virginity'and 'polluted'. In Perera (2020)'s article, Author, Upul Shantha Sannasgala, points out that certain words in the Sinhala language contain emotional expressions rather than technical meanings, stating that the word 'dooshanaya' is one such example.

During the analysis process, several references were found pertaining to the theme 'Utilization of derogatory terms in news reporting' (Table 1). A majority of the newspaper articles examined contained terms such as 'dooshanaya' and 'kelesima' in both the headline and the body of the text. The word 'ganika' is used in media reports in Sinhala with negative social and derogatory connotations. . In Sinhala language reporting, it is desirable to use the phrase 'lingika shramika' to promote a more impartial and courteous attitude. Similar news reporting frequently uses the term 'sex worker' rather than 'prostitute' in English-language newspapers, maintaining a more suitable and less stigmatizing tone.

Table 1: Examples of Theme 1 – Utilization of derogatory terms in news reporting

Code number/s	Conclusion	Evidence
Mawbima/2020-09-01/01 Mawbima/2020-09-01/02 Mawbima/2020-09-02/04 Mawbima/2020-09-02/05 Divaina/2020-10-07/16	Each article highlight the case of a young girl or a woman who experienced abuse perpetrated by a man. The media often employ terms like "dooshanya" (polluted) and "kelesima" (defilement) when reporting on sexual crime or abuse incidents. These terms carry connotations that portray the victim as dirty and defiled, which can lead to marginalization and social disdain. In such instances, it would be more appropriate for the media to use terms such as "Lingika aparadaya" (sex crime) or, in the case of a minor, "Lingika apayojanaya" (sexual abuse).	"Baalawayaskaara dhariya dhooshanaya kala pudgalaya sapthambar 04 dhakwaa remand." (The person who sexually assaulted the minor girl was remanded until September 04) "Rathri geta pana niwasei thaniwa siti 80 hawiridhi katha kelesala" (The 80-year-old who was alone in the house at night was sexually assaulted) "Dhariyak rawata paasal nila andumin genagos kelasala" (A girl was tricked and taken while wearing a school uniform and sexually assaulted)
Lankadeepa/2020-09-16/10 Dinamina/2020-09-21/11 Divaina/2020-11-19/20	The continued usage of certain terms that have been entrenched in society raises the question of their appropriateness, particularly due to the stigmatizing and marginalizing attitudes attached to them. One such example is the term "Ganika" (Sex worker). The utilization of the term "Ganika" in Sinhala language media	"Ganikawak asurukara salli nogewwama hadunumpatha balen aran. Katha remand" (When he was in the company of a sex worker and did not pay, the identity card was taken by force and the woman was remanded) "Sisunta mathdrawya ganikawan alewi kala saka 13k aththadanguwata"
Mawbima/2020-09-09/08 Mawbima/2020-09-22/12 Divaina/2020-10-02/13	An inappropriate trend in various media is the use of offensive and demeaning language when depicting women can be observed. This includes the use of demeaning and disrespectful language that objectifies and marginalizes women and maintaining harmful stereotypes. The term "Kudu Katha" mentioned in one of the news reports, mentions a	"Biriya niwasei nathi atharei dhariyan thidenukata katha wadak kalai hamudha samajikaya aththadanguwata" (while the wife was not at home, a member of the armed forces was arrested for doing dirty work to three girls) "Tile chamindage kudu katha 25da thek ranndhawagena prahsna karanna awasara" (Tile Chaminda' is allowed to be detained and interrogated

| | derogatory term which carry stigmatizing and marginalizing meanings, particularly in relation to individuals with drug addiction. The news writer uses the term "sakakariya" in the body, while the heading refers to the suspect as "kudu katha," which conveys different meanings. Ethnicity of the women is specifically stated as Muslim in the body of the news article titled "Two women caught with drugs" in the Island newspaper. The contrasting interpretations between the Sinhala phrase and its English translation highlight the power of language in evoking both negative and positive connotations. | until the 25th in connection with the use of drugs) |

Source: Developed by Author

Theme 2: Negative emphasis on the presence of women in news reporting

In certain media news reports, a pattern can be observed where only women are prominently highlighted even when both men and women have committed the same crime and faced legal consequences. Thisdisproportionateemphasison a crime committedby a woman showsthe gender bias in the reporting. Such selective highlighting of offenses committed by women contributes to the marginalization of women based on their gender. The analysis revealed several findings related to the theme of "Negative emphasis on the presence of women" as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Examples of Theme 2 – Negative emphasis on the presence of women in news reporting

Code number/s	Conclusion	Evidence
Dinamina/2020-09-02/03 Mawbima/2020-09-04/06 Dinamina/2020-09-04/07 Dinamina/2020-10-05/15 Lankadeepa/2020-10-20/17 Mawbima/2020-10-20/18 Divaina/2020-10-26/19	News reports tend to show how women's presence in a crime has been highlighted, when both men and women have faced the legal consequences. Women are portrayed negatively and highlighted in instances where mentioning the gender is irrelevant. This leads to unfair stereotypes, biases,	Polgedi thula heroine gena giya kathun 3k athulu pudgalayoe 5k dhale" (Five people, including three women, who were carrying heroin in coconuts, were caught)

| | and discrimination. Such portrayal can perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes, undermine women's achievements, and reinforce societal prejudices. This negative highlighting of women in irrelevant contexts not only distorts the public perception of women but also perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces societal biases. | "Sambahana madyasthanayak watalai, muslim kathakuth eh athara"

(A Muslim woman among those in a massage parlor that was raided)

"Mathkudu jawaram kala kaanthaawak athulu hayak polis dhalei"

(Six people, including a woman, are in the police net for drug trafficking) |

Source: Developed by Author

Theme 3: Exaggeration of women's physical appearance in news reporting

In news articles or media coverage, women may be depicted in a sensationalized manner that focuses on their appearance, personal lives or other irrelevant aspects rather than their professional accomplishments or the topic being discussed. This can result in objectifying women and reducing their value to superficial characteristics, disregarding their expertise, skills and contributions. It appears that the intention behind highlighting these details may be to attract readers' attention, rather than addressing the underlying social issues and the actual dangers faced by women. As a result, the news fails to adequately address the significant societal problem that exists. Some examples that relate to this theme are given below in Table 3.

Table 3: Examples of Theme 3 – Exaggeration of women's physical appearance in news reporting

Code number/s	Conclusion	Evidence
Divaina/2020-09-16/09	The paper article draws attention to the negative use of language, specifically pointing out the term "buurugassala" which does not convey a respectful tone. In this media report, there is a tendency to place more emphasis on the physical appearance of woman. The term "soorupi" (beautiful) is used to describe women in the content, even when it is not directly relevant to the news being published. This focus on women's physical characteristics, and the exaggeration of such features	"Jathyanthara pasale ingrisi teacher ge gei asse buruu gassala" (Gambling in the house of an English teacher at an international school)

	can detract from the actual content of the news.	
Lankadeepa/2020-10-04/14	In a news report published by Lankadeepa newspaper about a murder, it was evident from the content that there were references made to the physical appearance of the woman who was killed. Such a focus on women's physical characteristics, including exaggeration of these features, can divert attention from the substantive content of the news.	"Aniyam Pemwathiya mara pulussa maoyata damu penwatha" (The boyfriend who killed his mistress, burned and threw her to the Ma Oya)

Source: Developed by Author

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

The aim of this study was to examine the portrayal of women in contemporary Sinhala newspaper reporting. A qualitative research approach was followed in order to analyze the data. Information from newspaper extracts and secondary literature, which are qualitative data collection methods, was adopted to gather the data for the study. This study uncovered a depiction of women in a negative light, particularly in cases where media institutions fail to adhere to media ethics. Three themes were derived through the coding, which was done manually, and the data gathered was divided into those three themes.

The findings of this study have revealed distinct patterns in the portrayal of women in contemporary Sinhala newspaper reporting. The analysis of language use in news articles demonstrated three primary ways in which women are depicted, which were the three themes derived: using derogatory terms, emphasizing the presence of women negatively, and exaggerating their physical appearance.

Theme 1: Utilization of derogatory terms in news reporting

The media use terms like "dooshanya" (polluted) and "kelesima" (defilement), as shown below, when reporting on sexual crime or abuse incidents in newspapers. These words imply that the victim is impure and tarnished, contributing to their marginalization and societal disapproval. The Media Gender Charter(2020) developed by (Sekaram & Abdela, 2020) emphasizes that there is a need to use non-sexist and derogatory language that discriminates against, patronizes, trivializes or stigmatizes women.

"Baalawayaskaara dhariya dhooshanaya kala pudgalaya sapthambar 04 dhakwaa remand." (The person who sexually assaulted the minor girl was remanded until September 4)

The media use the term "Ganika" in Sinhala language media reporting.

"Ganikawak asurukara salli nogewwama hadunumpatha balen aran. Katha remand" (When he failed to pay the sex worker he was with, the woman was placed under arrest and her identity card was removed by force.)

The media use the term "Kudu Katha" with stigmatizing and marginalizing implications, especially when referring to individuals struggling with drug addiction.

"Tile chamindage kudu katha 25da thek ranndhawagena prahsna karanna awasara" (Tile Chaminda' is allowed to be detained and interrogated until the 25th in connection with the use of drugs.)

Theme 2: Negative emphasis on the presence of women in news reporting

The media highlights the presence of women even when both men and women have committed the same crime and faced legal repercussions. It is evident that how women are portrayed in newspaper reporting affects and changes our view of women's place in society, as mentioned by (Rathnayake, 2017).

"Mathkudu jawaram kala kaanthaawak athulu hayak polis dhalei"
(Six people, including a woman, are in the police net for drug trafficking.)

Theme 3: Exaggeration of women's physical appearance in news reporting

The media exaggerates and sensationalizes the women, with an emphasis on their looks, personal lives, or other unimportant details. It states that "details of an individual's race, color, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story" and "press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, color, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability" when reporting about discrimination and marginalization. The below mentioned quote was related to an article on a murder of a woman who was killed, and physical attributes were mentioned in the content (Verité Research, 2020, p. 4).

"Aniyam Pemwathiya mara pulussa maoyata damu penwatha."
(The boyfriend who killed his mistress burned and threw her to Ma Oya.)

While the methodology effectively captured language patterns, a more extensive qualitative analysis could provide deeper insights into the context and intentions behind specific language choices. Future research might benefit from a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches for a more comprehensive understanding. Building on the current findings, future research could explore the impact of media portrayals on public perceptions and attitudes towards gender roles in Sinhala-speaking communities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the analysis, the following recommendations are made to reduce the discrimination and negativity faced by women in media portrayal:

Encourage the presence of various gender perspectives in newsrooms by aggressively seeking out and retaining female journalists. This can support bringing in diverse viewpoints and ensuring that women are fairly represented in news coverage. This commitment to diversity enhances the depth and accuracy of news reporting, reflecting a broader range of perspectives and ensuring a more representative portrayal of society.

Develop gender-sensitive guidelines. Establish clear policies or rules of behavior outlining the fundamentals of gender-sensitive reporting. The use of polite language, avoiding stereotypes, and encouraging positive stories about women should all be covered by these rules.

Implement regular sensitivity training for journalists through media organizations to develop gender-sensitive writing styles. These training sessions can offer insights into nuanced language choices, eliminate unconscious biases, and enhance awareness of gender-related issues.

Increase coverage of women's issues by dedicating specific segments or features to highlight diverse aspects of women's experiences. Give women's issues, such as gender equality, women's rights, and women's accomplishments, greater time and space to be discussed. Give women's experiences and voices a platform to be heard.

Policy makers can advocate for the inclusion of guidelines related to gender-sensitive reporting in media regulations. By actively supporting and promoting these guidelines, policymakers contribute to the establishment of a framework that encourages fair and inclusive representation of gender in the media. This advocacy can lead to the development of standardized practices across the industry, fostering an environment where media outlets are held accountable for promoting gender equality and avoiding stereotypes. Additionally, policymakers can collaborate with relevant stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of these guidelines, thereby promoting a more equitable and responsible media landscape.

Limitations of the Study

Few challenges/limitations were faced when conducting the research. The newspapers were chosen based on their wide circulation and significant readership; the findings may not be representative of all Sinhala newspapers in Sri Lanka. The limited sample size restricted the generalizability of the results to a broader context and focused on a specific timeframe, which limited the generalizability of the findings to other periods.

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