



# Yemen: an Analysis of Women in the Media



March 2009



## **Yemen: an Analysis of Women in the Media**

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ARTICLE 19 welcomes any comments, questions or suggestions related to these research results.

Please note that the findings and recommendations in the report do not necessarily reflect the views of the NED.

*Cover picture:*

*Two Yemeni journalists learn how to monitor the media in July 2008.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A gender insensitive media is a double blow for human rights: women suffer the broad injustice of being second-class citizens in an unequal society and they are also unable to exercise their rights to full freedom of expression. ARTICLE 19, which has a central mandate to defend the right to freedom of expression enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is committed to combatting the discrimination of women in the media.

There are two areas of key concern when exploring issues of gender in the media. The ways in which women are represented in the print and broadcast media may perpetuate negative stereotypes, thereby often reinforcing oppressive cultural norms. Women may also be absent or under-represented in the media workforce, which means that it is mostly male voices which articulate and shape the issues of the day.

The promotion of gender-balanced media coverage is a vital step toward strengthening women's rights. Such media coverage can play a central role in reducing irrational prejudices against women, empowering women, and confronting extremist political agendas.

### 1.1. About the project partners

Since 2006, ARTICLE 19 has worked consistently with the Yemeni Female Journalists Forum to promote an enabling legal environment for freedom of expression in Yemen, through the activities of the Media Law Working Group (MLWG). In 2007, an assessment identified a need for professional training for women journalists in Yemen and a need to improve the image of women in the media. This research exercise, which involved monitoring the Yemeni media over a six-week period, goes some way to raising awareness of the representation of women in the Yemeni media.

ARTICLE 19 is an international human rights organisation founded in 1987 whose mission is to promote and defend freedom of expression and freedom of information. ARTICLE 19 takes its name from the corresponding article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which guarantees the right to freedom of expression and the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas.

A registered UK charity with offices in London, Kenya, Brazil, Mexico, Bangladesh, and representatives in Nepal, Senegal and Lebanon, ARTICLE 19 partners with dozens of implementing partners in countries across the globe. ARTICLE 19 works with local civil society groups, media professionals and government officials to build their capacity to campaign for the adoption of favourable freedom of expression legislation and media freedom.

The Yemeni Female Media Forum (YFMF) was founded by women members of the Yemeni media to support women's rights in the media. The organisation's main

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objectives are to develop the skills of women in the media, raise public awareness of the country's development issues, and promote equal opportunities and rights for women in the media sector.

The YFMF is dedicated to the promotion of broader journalistic involvement in the country's reform agenda, with a particular focus on the media's role in society. The Forum works to raise journalists' awareness of human rights and promotes freedom of expression for the media.

## 2. AN OVERVIEW OF POVERTY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN YEMEN

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Yemen is the poorest country in the Middle East and ranks 153 out of 177 countries in the world.<sup>1</sup> This means that about 41 per cent of the population lives in poverty in this mostly agrarian society, which depends on limited oil exports for much of its revenue. Nearly three-quarters of the twenty million Yemenis live in rural areas, with urban development concentrated around three centres: Sana'a, Aden and Taiz. The UN reports that nearly one in two children are malnourished in Yemen and rates of maternal mortality remain unacceptably high. Only a third of the population has access to safe drinking water.

The UN has identified Yemen as one of eight pilot countries to implement its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which include targets to reduce poverty, improve health and gender equality, and develop environmental sustainability by 2015.<sup>2</sup>

Although education is compulsory, many girls do not attend school and, in rural areas, may be married at very young ages. While nearly 70 per cent of men are literate, less than 30 per cent of women can read and write. The country has been making good progress on meeting its MDG target to achieve universal primary education, according to the UNDP, but improved education for Yemeni women does not necessarily mean that women are able to exercise the full spectrum of civil, political and economic rights.

Indeed, Yemeni women have seen many of their rights eroded by conservative cultural norms and legislative amendments in recent years.<sup>3</sup> For example, the Yemeni Constitution guarantees "equal treatment in the eyes of the law for all citizens". A 1994 amendment to this provision removed the additional words "based on sex, colour, racial origin, language, occupation, social status, or religious beliefs". In addition, another article (article 31) was added which states:

*Women are the sisters of men. They have rights and duties that are guaranteed by Shari'a and stipulated by law.*

This amendment has been heavily criticised by human rights activists in Yemen who object to the way the Constitution refers to women as subordinate to men. In an interview in

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP (2007), *Human Development Report 2007/2008*. UNDP; New York

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>

<sup>3</sup> Freedom House country profile: Yemen (located at <http://www.freedomhouse.org>)

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August 2007, Amal Basha, Director of the Sisters' Arabic Forum for Human Rights, questioned the use of the Islamic Shari'a only in relation to women's rights. While she is not opposed to the Shari'a in principle, she stressed that the use of this largely elastic code, which may be interpreted differently by the various schools of Islam, is subject to abuse.

Yemen, in line with many Islamic countries, acknowledges Islamic Shari'a law in its Constitution and legislation. Much of this relates to person status law, which governs marriages, divorce and inheritance.

For example, the Personal Status Law of 1992 uses discriminatory language which favours men in matters pertaining to marriage, family life, children and personal status. Under this law, when a bride is asked whether she consents to marriage, her silence is considered a sign of consent.<sup>4</sup> This law also legalises marriage of girls under the age of 15. The Yemeni Women's Union has campaigned to raise this minimum age, arguing that it goes against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (to which the Republic of Yemen is a signatory), and a parliamentary debate in 2009 resulted in a compromise age of 17.

Both the Personal Status Law and the Citizenship Law of 1990 stipulate that "a husband has the right to be obeyed by his wife", that she should allow him to have sexual intercourse and that she cannot leave the house without his permission.<sup>5</sup> This law affects women's equal rights in matters relating to marriage, divorce, testimony, property, nationality, child custody and inheritance.

Furthermore, a number of provisions in the Penal Code (such as articles 273 and 275) criminalise acts seen to violate "public decency" and are systematically used to prosecute women. A husband, brother or male relative who is convicted of an "honour crime", such as the murder of a female relative suspected of adultery, will usually receive a lenient sentence; article 232 does not define such crimes as murder at all.

Women in Yemen experience high rates of domestic violence, according to a report by the High Council for Women, which recommended amendments to legislation in order to protect women and guarantee their liberties.<sup>6</sup>

Statutes are enforced to varying degrees, with the more conservative North tending to apply the letter of the law more assiduously than the formerly socialist South.

There is also evidence to indicate that laws discriminating against women are enforced more rigorously than those laws which afford rights to women. This is the case, for example, with the inheritance laws. While the Islamic Shari'a clearly stresses a woman's right to inheritance, many Yemeni women are denied their inheritance rights, especially in the rural areas. Instead, women's property tends to be administered by their male relatives, without justification. In these cases, tribal laws and customs have supplanted inheritance laws based on Islam. Because very few women have official documents to prove their

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<sup>4</sup> Article 23 of the Personal Status Law No. 20 of 1992.

<sup>5</sup> Article 40 of the Citizenship Law of 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Reported in the *Gulf News*, 15/09/2008, <http://www.gulfnews.com>

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inheritance, they are unable to pursue justice in the courts. Instead they may be forced to sell their property at low prices.<sup>7</sup>

Yemeni women are finding it increasingly difficult to exercise their full civic, political and economic rights as national legislation and dominant cultural norms conspire to keep them in the margins of society.

Yemeni culture also plays a part in depriving women of their basic rights. Boys enjoy more advantages than girls who tend to grow up with a feeling of inferiority. Assertiveness is discouraged and women play a subordinate role in the family. This discourages women from playing independent roles in their communities or the broader society. There is a traditional proverb, for example, which states that “A woman’s correct opinion leads to seven crises” (“*Shour al mara al sayeb yedi sabe’ massayeb*”).

Women who attempt to take control of their lives or demand their rights may be considered outcasts and branded as immoral. This, together with their difficulties in attaining education or financial independence, makes it even harder for women to engage in public and political life. A *fatwa* issued by conservative religious leaders in 2008 specifically condemned women attempting to enter politics and smear campaigns which villify high-profile individual women are a common phenomenon.

Yemen is a representative democracy, however, and there are no official barriers to women’s participation in political processes. Women are active voters and nearly 43 per cent of women registered to vote in the 2003 parliamentary elections.<sup>8</sup> However, only 11 women stood for election, out of a total of 1,400 candidates. In 2003, only one woman was elected to Parliament and less than one per cent of local councillors are female.<sup>9</sup>

In its final report on the monitoring of the 2003 elections, the European Union’s Election Observer Mission concluded that “while the wider legal framework provided a strong basis for equal participation, there was no attempt to ensure its proper implementation to protect these rights”. It stressed that “problems were also observed in the approach of political parties, the election administration and the authorities towards women as voters, political party members and electoral administrators” and emphasised that while political parties were the “main source of pressure”, civil servants and electoral officials, among others, were also responsible for the low level of participation. In other words, the authorities failed to take appropriate policy and practical measures to ensure women’s effective participation in the electoral process.

Less than nine per cent of the female population are in paid employment.<sup>10</sup> Prior to the country’s unification in 1990, half the judges in South Yemen were women. Since then, conservative forces in the judiciary have reassigned female judges to administrative or clerical jobs. Only a few female justices currently serve in the area surrounding Aden, according to the UNDP.

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<sup>7</sup> Arwa Al-Anesi, Yemen Times, March 1, 2009.

<http://www.yementimes.com/article.shtml?i=951&p=report&a=4>

<sup>8</sup> Freedom House country profile: Yemen (located at <http://www.freedomhouse.org>).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

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Yemen has ratified various international conventions, including the UN Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and Civil and Political Rights.<sup>11</sup> It is also a party to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women<sup>12</sup> and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the government is obliged to ensure that the provisions of these international instruments are properly enforced and enshrined in domestic legislation and policy. The progressive roll-back of many rights for women in Yemen is therefore counter to international human rights frameworks.

For example, article 5 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) states that :

*States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.*

As a member of the Arab league, Yemen should also, at the regional level, respect the Arab Charter on Human Rights adopted by the Council of Ministers of the League of Arab States in 2004. Although Yemen has not yet ratified the Charter, it does constitute the main human rights instrument of the Arab League. Yemen has pledged allegiance to the Arab League in Article 6 of its Constitution.

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<sup>11</sup> Ratified in 1987.

<sup>12</sup> Ratified CEDAW in 1984.

<sup>13</sup> Signed but not ratified.

## 2.1. The media in Yemen

The broadcast media in Yemen, including radio and television, is owned and operated exclusively by the government, through the Public Corporation for Radio and Television, thereby ensuring little diversity of perspectives and voices. Some areas can receive satellite television channels broadcasting from Oman or Saudi Arabia. However, the country's poor infrastructure means that there is little access to radio and television outside the urban areas anyway as the rural areas remain only partly unelectrified and the impoverished population are largely unable to afford television sets or radios.

Up to 70 per cent of rural women are illiterate, according to the UNDP, which means that their lack of access to broadcast media compounds their inability to exercise their full rights to information. Even though women are not prevented by law from accessing information, their day-to-day lives make it all but impossible.

There is more diversity in the print press, with newspapers and magazines published by the government, by political parties and by independent organisations. However, many of these are only distributed in the urban areas, thereby further impeding rural women's access to information.

The government reportedly occasionally censors the media by confiscating publications and suppressing sensitive political articles or websites. Official and quasi-official newspapers are often used as mouthpieces to aim public criticism at journalists or others who are deemed to have crossed a line – they may be labelled as “Zionists”, “apostates” or “foreign agents”. In 2007, 12 independent journalists were arrested, while others were harassed in public, according to Reporters without Borders.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2. Women journalists in Yemen

Women are under-represented in the Yemeni media, constituting fewer than 20 per cent of employees in the broadcast media.<sup>15</sup>

Women journalists or activists who criticise the government or its official policies expose themselves to government-instigated smear campaigns that aim to undermine their credibility, reputations and professionalism. In a country where the code of “honour” is crucial in preserving women's dignity, insults and insinuations that question women's morality are particularly damaging.

In June 2006, Samia al-Aghbari, a journalist at the opposition weekly *al-Wahdawi*, criticised the President after he decided to stand for elections in 2006, despite his earlier statement that he would not do so. A week later, the quasi-official newspaper *al-Doustour* published an article alleging that she enjoyed “white flesh” and had “immoral relations”

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.rsf.org>

<sup>15</sup> Freedom House country profile: Yemen (located at <http://www.freedomhouse.org>)

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with Syrian and Egyptian men. Al-Aghbari was one of very few women journalists who took their case to court. Although she won the case, the verdict, which included the publication of an apology in the newspaper, was not enforced.

While al-Aghbari had often written on political topics, articles critical of the President are considered to cross a line and journalists are often accused of being “traitors”. Indeed, in September 2006, al-Aghbari published a piece about the victory of an opposition candidate in the council elections, after which members of the security forces came to her home and threatened to “discipline” her. According to al-Aghbari, her extended family has also turned against her father for supporting her.

In 2007, *Al-Doustour* published an article accusing journalist Aniseh Mohammad Othman of being funded by the security apparatus – after she had previously written a series of articles critical of the government in *Al-Wasat* newspaper.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.3. Representation of women in the media

Writing about issues of concern to women in Yemen’s conservative society is risky and complicated. In addition to the social constraints, it is difficult for journalists to obtain accurate and accessible information.

Taboo and sensitive subjects such as early marriage, sexual abuse and the electoral quota for women have been addressed recently in the media, primarily due to the efforts of civil society. According to Amel al-Ariqi, managing editor of the *Yemen Times*, reporters covering sensitive stories are often accused of airing Yemen’s “dirty laundry”, possibly doing so for international recognition. Yet this has not prevented human rights activists and committed journalists from doing their job and shedding light on women’s issues.

Al-Ariqi, who has written extensively on women’s issues, has admitted however that not all coverage is good. “Sadly, many reporters get involved emotionally, compromising their ability to be objective and neutral. Lack of journalistic ethics, blatantly stating one’s opinion, covering the story in overly-narrative style, depending on only one source and lack of background, discredit the story and the writer in the eyes of the readership,” she added.

However, the media has served as a prime instigator for change in some cases. One example is the case of a 16-year-old girl who was on death row for killing her husband. The story was first published by an Italian reporter, and later picked up by local journalists and documentary film maker Khadija al-Salami. The extensive press coverage of the case helped raise awareness and the young woman’s sentence was suspended – she eventually received a presidential pardon in 2007.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The article was published on 19 February 19 2007 and reported in the *Semi-Annual Press Freedom Report 2007* by Women Journalists Without Chains, a civil society group campaigning for media freedom in Yemen.

<sup>17</sup> Yemen is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which disallows for criminal prosecution of minor children in adult courts.

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In another case, an eight-year-old girl caused a stir when she requested a divorce from her 30-year-old husband. Considerable media attention was given to the case, both nationally and internationally, and resulted in a public debate about the minimum age for marriage.

Yet, as al-Ariqi points out, the majority of the coverage of women's issues depicts women as victims. The public does not get a chance to read about positive examples of women pioneers or workers. Also, women's roles and activities are often omitted from articles that cover politics, business and social issues.

### 3. WOMEN IN THE YEMENI PRINT MEDIA

#### 3.1. The research methodology

The media monitoring component of the project *Creating an Environment for Freedom of Expression and Gender Sensitive Reporting* was designed to identify trends in the representation of women in the Yemeni press.

A group of 10 monitors were selected by ARTICLE 19's Yemen partners on the basis of their analytical skills, knowledge of Yemeni politics and society, and experience with the Yemeni media. A number of them were journalists. They were trained how to monitor the media through a customised approach which was developed by ARTICLE 19, based on a standard media monitoring methodology.

We decided to monitor the print media, rather than radio or television, as it remains the most diverse avenue for expression in Yemen. Publications were selected to reflect the full spectrum of the Yemeni press: *Al-Siyassah*, *al-Sahwa* and *al-Wahdawi* represent the views of various political parties; *al-Jumhuriyya* and *Al-Thawra* are produced by the government; while *al-Wasat*, *al-Nidaa*, *al-Share'e*, *al-Ghad* and *al-Ayyam* are all independent.

With the exception of the daily papers *al-Ghad*, *al-Jumhuriyya*, and *al-Thawra*, the rest are all weekly publications. All the publications are produced in Arabic, the country's official language.

The monitors analysed nearly one thousand individual articles, captured over a six-week period from 13 July to 26 August 2008. These items included news, editorials, cartoons and letters that related directly and indirectly to the perception of women. There were no extraordinary events during this time period – instead, it was simply a moment in time, reflective of the ordinary, daily coverage of events in Yemen by the Yemeni press.

The methodology combined quantitative and qualitative analysis. First, the monitors recorded the type of article, its placement in the paper (whether prominent or not), the sources accessed and the space given to each item. Then, a number of likely key messages about women were identified and the monitors were asked to record whether the items reflected one or more of the following:

1. Women are immoral
2. Women are vulnerable or in need of protection
3. Women are inferior to men
4. Women are equal to men
5. Women in the public sphere and decision making positions
6. Men as the main players in the public sphere
7. The male perspective is dominant (Women omitted)
8. Women blamed for violations
9. Women's rights must be promoted
10. Women portrayed as sisters, wives and mothers

The monitors could select more than one key message for each article, although they were coached to only select messages that were explicitly expressed.

Identifying sources helps indicate which individuals and institutions are shaping of (positive or negative) perceptions of women. Sources had to be identified from a finite list, which comprised:

1. President
2. Government
3. Religious leaders
4. Women's activists
5. International NGOs
6. Experts
7. General people
8. Parliament
9. Opposition parties
10. Police/ law enforcement
11. Media/news agencies
12. Other

It was important to record the gender of sources, to assess whether or not women themselves are perpetuating or contradicting stereotypes. The number of sources in each article also indicated the level of professionalism and balance of the items. The more varied the range of sources, the greater the balance of the reporting. One source (or an absence of sources altogether) normally signifies an item is one-sided.

Monitors also recorded the page on which the monitored item was published and the newspaper's total number of pages. For instance, if the story fell on the second page and the newspaper comprised 10 pages, the monitors recorded 2/10 for prominence. Since the newspapers varied in the number of pages, the results were compounded in quarters so that the most prominent items fell in the first quarter of all newspapers.

Finally, the monitors identified one primary theme in each monitored item, to be selected from the following list:

1. Education
2. Politics
3. Social issues
4. Beauty and Fashion
5. Family
6. Arts and culture
7. Human Rights
8. Women's rights and empowerment
9. Sports
10. Crime
11. Religion
12. Other

After the monitoring, a total of 942 records were analysed statistically. Two charts were produced: one comprising the overall outcome of all 942 observations to obtain the general overall result, with a second chart highlighting the results of five newspapers that had been selected on the basis of statistical relevance and their position on the political spectrum. *Al-Siyassah* was selected to represent the partisan newspapers, *al-Jumhuriyya* and *al-Thawra* were selected to represent the official newspapers and *al-Wasat* and *al-Share'e* were selected to represent the independent newspapers.

In the final process, *al-Wahdawi* had to be discounted as it was not actually published during the monitoring period. Also, another paper, *al-Doustour*, was dropped from the final analysis when one of the monitors failed to complete their tasks.

ARTICLE 19 analysed the data with the assistance of a panel of local experts, consisting of Yemeni journalists and gender specialists.

## 3.2. Research findings

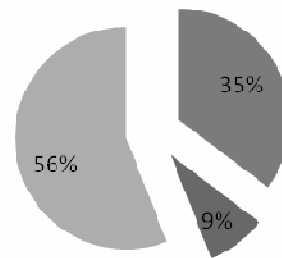
### 3.2.1. Gender of journalists

A total of 56 per cent of the articles monitored did not include the author's name. The 44 per cent with bylines were predominantly written by men. Women only wrote nine per cent of the total number of articles monitored.

It is safe to conclude that men dominate the journalism profession in Yemen.

**Sex of the journalists**

■ male ■ female ■ not given



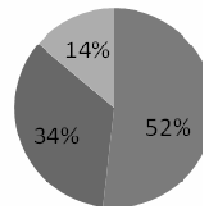
### 3.2.2. Gender of sources

In those articles where one or more sources were used, 52 per cent were male, 34 per cent were female and 14 per cent did not specify.

Of the newspapers selected for more in-depth analysis *al-Jumhurriya* and *al-Siyassah* appeared to use the highest number of female sources (40 per cent) while *al-Share'e* used the least number of female sources (15 per cent). Meanwhile, *al-Thawra* had the highest percentage of male sources, citing male interviewees in nearly 60 per cent of its stories whereas only 30 per cent of its sources were women.

**Sex of quoted source in %**

■ male ■ female ■ not given



### 3.2.3. Category of sources quoted

After government institutions such as the Supreme Council for Women and the Women National Committee, the leading sources on articles pertaining to women in Yemen are the general public, civil society groups and news agencies.

Of the newspapers selected for more in-depth analysis *al-Thawra*, *al-Siyassah* and *al-Jumhurriya* relied mostly on government sources for articles relating to women. Government officials or representatives comprised 25 per cent of all sources. This is not surprising as *al-Thawra* and *al-Jumhuriyya* are both official newspapers. The research, however, did not establish if any of the government sources were women.

International organisations, women's activists, and civil society groups were only cited in around five per cent of articles in *al-Thawra*, six per cent in *al-Siyassah*, and eight per cent in *al-Jumhurriya*.

However other categories, such as Parliament, the ruling party, the opposition parties and the President were very rarely quoted in the five papers. The one exception was *Al-Ayyam*, an independent newspaper, which had the highest percentage of opposition parties cited in its articles relating to women, although this category still remained the least quoted.

Another independent newspaper, *al-Shar'e*, emerged as the newspaper which relied most on ordinary individuals' views in the majority of its articles relating directly or indirectly to women.

Given the repressive circumstances of many ordinary women's lives in Yemen, it is unsurprising that so few women are quoted in the press – it is likely that journalists would struggle to gain access to ordinary women and that women would be reluctant to speak to journalists about personal issues.

### **3.2.4. Representations of women**

Just under half of the articles monitored depict women as equal to men and almost 40 per cent depict women in decision-making positions and in the public sphere. Furthermore, 46 per cent of the material monitored had a strong political message, insisting that women's rights must be promoted. Articles carrying these key messages include reports of meetings headed by the Minister of Social Works, the President inaugurating an exhibition of women artists, reports of young women graduating from university, the parliamentary speaker praising the role of women, amongst many others.

These results are thus quite encouraging.

However, the percentages of articles that represented women in a negative way was also considerable. Furthermore, many of the negative portrayals were "extreme". Twenty two per cent of the articles depicted women as immoral and 21 per cent blamed women for violations and problems in society. For example, an opinion piece published in *al-Nidaa* on 6 August on HIV/AIDS depicted women as the reason for the proliferation of the disease by performing "immoral" acts.

Yet another example was a so-called investigative piece published on 19 July arguing that women smoking cigarettes or *narguileh* is "immoral" and that this phenomenon is rejected by society. The article included a picture of a veiled woman smoking a water pipe with young men dancing in the background. Another piece published in the same newspaper on 4 August investigates an "honour crime" committed in the city of Lahij. The article describes how a father killed his daughter over some rumours he heard about her.

An opinion piece published in *al-Jumhuriyya* on 15 August listed the duties of a wife towards her husband. On 19 July, the same newspaper also printed a cartoon of a pregnant woman surrounded by many children. The caricature seemed to insinuate that it is the woman's fault for bearing many children.



A vast number of monitored articles depicted women as victims or disempowered. Thirty one per cent of the articles monitored depicted women as vulnerable and in need of protection. An article published in *al-Jumhuriyya* on 15 August was a survey (written by a male journalist) depicting mothers neglecting their children by leaving medicines within their reach. Articles depicting women as vulnerable included appeals made by women suffering from illnesses and in need of treatment.

An article published in *al-Share'e* on 5 July depicts a women facing harassment and losing her child after the death of her husband. On 26 July, an article in *al-Ayyam* reported on a man's decision to divorce his wife because she was watching the popular Turkish soap opera *Nour*.

Thirty four per cent of the articles portrayed women as sisters, wives and mothers. Although this may not necessarily convey a negative meaning, it is problematic when this is the dominant presentation of women.

While these types of articles may help raise awareness about the daily experiences of Yemeni women, they are rarely accompanied by analysis or even quotes from reliable sources. Instead, these articles tend to reinforce societal stereotypes, rather than empowering women or advancing the cause of women's rights.

Nearly 28 per cent of the articles captured for monitoring depicted women as inferior. *Al-Ayyam*, for instance, published two short pieces during the monitoring period congratulating two young men for their weddings. The names of the brides in both notices were not mentioned and they were solely referred to as the daughters of their fathers, who were named.

An article published in *al-Wasat* on 16 July reported on a *fatwa*, outlawing a quota for women in elected bodies. Also, an opinion piece published on 8 August in *al-Wahdawi* rejected the proposal of a women's quota in Parliament due to what it called "women's incapacities".

### 3.2.5. Topics of articles monitored

The majority of articles dealing with women's issues fell under social issues (17.8 per cent). Articles categorised under this topic mainly included reports on the phenomena of tourist marriages<sup>18</sup>, early marriages and divorce. The majority of articles categorised as social issues were published in *al-Jumhuriyya*.

Fourteen per cent of the items monitored fell under the topic of "women's rights". These articles included reports of conferences, workshops and violence against women. *Al-Ayyam* emerged as the newspaper reporting most on women's rights issues as well as on family and health issues, which comprised just under 12 per cent of the overall material monitored. Articles on family and health included articles on smoking, HIV/AIDS, a woman's duties towards her husband and stories of women neglecting their families.

The education and arts and culture categories received 11.76 per cent of coverage, mostly published in the daily *al-Thawra*. Examples of education-related pieces included articles on students taking tests and graduating as well as the high percentage of girls dropping out of school. Articles classified as arts and culture included stories about Lebanese pop star Haifa Wehbeh, artist Elissa and reports of Yemeni films and book signings.

Eight per cent of all monitored pieces belonged to the "human rights" category which was created to encompass articles that were not explicitly on women's rights but were on such issues as poverty, refugees in Yemen and other related issues.

Just over seven per cent of the articles relating to women covered politics and these included articles on the women's quota in Parliament and other political issues. About 6.47 per cent of the material monitored dealt with crime, as it related to women. Only 5.18 per cent of the articles were on women and sports and only two percent were on religion and women. An example of the items categorised under this category was an article on women and Islam.

Finally, less than one per cent of the material monitored covered fashion and beauty, a possibly peculiar result for a western audience. This however may be attributed to Yemeni conservatism, where women's adornments are frowned upon. It may also be simply due to the socio-economic circumstances and low literacy rates for women, meaning that women are not seen as a primary audience of these publications.

According to Amel al-Ariqi, the coverage of topics relating to social issues and women's rights is partly due to the government's gender-related development strategies, along with the efforts of local and international organisations working for women. Although the impact of the articles is difficult to gauge, it is reasonable to hope that positive stories about

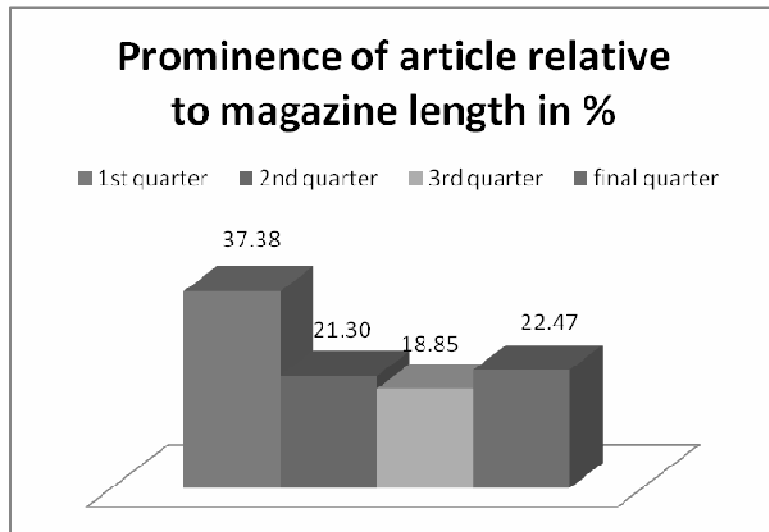
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<sup>18</sup> "Tourist marriages" are temporary marriages of young Yemeni girls, usually from poor families, to non-Yemenis, usually rich men from neighbouring countries, which have become more common in recent years. The CEDAW Committee has urged Yemen to prevent this phenomenon and also recommended an amendment to the Personal Status Law to outlaw the practice.

women, which are supportive of women's rights and full status in society, will help to shape public opinion.

### 3.2.6. Prominence of articles

One aspect of the research was to assess how prominently articles were being placed in the newspapers. Monitors were asked to record the page on which the article was located and the total number of pages in the newspaper. Just over 37 per cent of the articles on women's issues fell in the first quarter of the newspapers. *Al-Ayyam* and *al-Siyassah* carried most of their articles on women in the first quarter and had very few in the back pages. The majority of the articles fell in the middle of the newspaper and 22.47 per cent fell in the final quarter. *Al-Share'e*, *al-Thawra* and *al-Jumhuriyya* published a considerable percent of articles pertaining to women in the last quarter.



This indicates that the majority of articles on women and women's issues were covered in the news sections (i.e. the first quarter of the publication), with a lesser amount of content in the subsequent features, editorial, opinion and entertainment or culture pages. The data shows a fairly even split between positive and negative messages across all sections of the newspapers.

### 3.3. Other challenges for the Yemeni print media

Although the primary purpose of the research was to look at gender bias in the print media it also unearthed another significant challenge for the profession. The research established that the majority of articles – 50 per cent – only used one source, whereas 34 per cent quoted no sources at all and only 16 per cent used two or more sources. This indicates three problems: poor journalistic standards and a lack of concern about presenting a balanced view of events; possible resource constraints (including time, financial pressure and training for journalists); and the possible difficulties of sourcing women for stories in a conservative culture. It suggests the need for more comprehensive support for the media in Yemen, to ensure both good, high quality journalism and better representation of women.

## 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The monitors, who were all already connected to the media, found the monitoring process highly relevant to their own work. One of the monitors, Moussa al-Nemrany, commented: “There is a pressing need for follow-up, not only to improve the standards of this profession, but also to change attitudes towards women.” Meanwhile, Wadad al-Badawi, a media monitor and *al-Jumhuriyya* journalist, said that the exercise had caused her to think differently about her work: “Currently, I consciously attempt to give space to women in articles on all topics... these details that are too easily overlooked have a very damaging and latent effect.”

ARTICLE 19 would like to conclude with the following specific recommendations.

### 4.1. To the Government of the Republic of Yemen

- Repeal all legislation that violates Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), especially legislation that includes overly broad conceptions of terrorist offences and that criminalises the "insult" of politicians, the courts and individual members of the judiciary.
- Put an end to all policies and practices that illegitimately or unnecessarily restrict freedom of expression, such as: withholding or withdrawing licenses; banning journalists from publishing; and “cloning” of NGOs, newspapers and websites.
- Protect individuals’ “right to know” and adopt a law on the right of access to information which meets international standards.
- Carry out timely and effective investigations into threats and attacks against journalists, and bring those responsible to justice.
- Stop carrying out or condoning slur campaigns against journalists, in particular through gender-based attacks that insult the dignity of women journalists or activists, undermine their credibility and put them at risk of reprisals by the community.
- Reform and strengthen the judiciary to ensure its effectiveness, impartiality and independence.
- Ensure that the future Press and Publications Law fully complies with Article 19 of the ICCPR and reflects best practices worldwide.
- Discontinue the state monopoly on broadcast and news agencies and allow private TV, radio stations and news agencies to operate freely.
- Implement the recommendations of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in particular those related to discriminatory legislation, and to empower women to exercise their right to freedom of expression.
- Ensure that all media laws guarantee equality of access to the media for women and men.
- Guarantee equal opportunities for female and male media professionals working in the media.

- Encourage and support women to establish their own media outlets, such as newspapers, magazines, websites or community radio stations.
- Increase the channels of communication between the government and women's organisations.
- Strengthen all efforts to combat female illiteracy.

#### **4.2. To media editors**

- Ensure that effective ethical and self-regulatory codes of conduct are in place, ensuring that such codes encompass a gender-sensitive approach to media work and prohibit the use of prejudicial or derogatory stereotypes of women.
- Promote and ensure gender-sensitive reporting, by being inclusive in the search for information, choosing topics that address the problems that women face, giving issues a human rights focus, using appropriate language and emphasising the centrality of woman-produced knowledge.
- Develop and implement policies ensuring that female journalists are given more editorial responsibility and are involved in the decision-making process within media institutions.
- Ensure equal working terms and conditions for men and women, including salaries.
- Prohibit all forms of gender discrimination in and around the news room.
- Design and deliver media training programmes which promote a better understanding of issues relating to gender discrimination by, among other things, developing gender-sensitive methodologies for the media, emphasising the centrality of women-produced knowledge and insisting on the adoption of a gender-sensitive approach to such matters as the story angle, the choice of interviewees, the choice of language, footage and images shown.
- Guarantee the rights of correction and reply.
- Address existing discrimination against women in the profession (for example, the under-representation of women within staff and management, unequal pay, limitations within what topics women journalists are "allowed" to cover) through targeted action and measures (equal opportunities policies, affirmative or positive action policies, and staff and management training).
- Strengthen co-operation with a variety of women's organisations and women activists to ensure public awareness of the role and image of women in a fairer and more accurate way.

#### **4.3. To civil society**

- Continue to raise awareness and combat gender discrimination and gender-based censorship within the media, including by reporting on the misrepresentation of women's issues, by demanding a right of reply or correction, and/or by proposing an alternative perspective on women's and gender issues.
- Initiate and/or strengthen dialogues and debates with broadcasters over the representation of women in the media.

- Support the development of publications on women's and gender issues, as well as of women-focused Internet and desktop publishing.
- Encourage the development of women-specific programming in the mainstream media.