

Gender Stereotypes in Georgian Media

Ketevan Mskhiladze

April 11- May 11, 2011

Briefly

Monitoring results

Monitoring, conducted within the frames of the project revealed that stereotypical thinking and attitudes dominate in Georgian media. Coverage of women related issues does not decrease, but, on the contrary, strengthens the gender stereotypes. Journalists are not aware of gender issues and, subsequently, operate within the realm of gender stereotypes reinforcing existing stereotypes through print, spoken text and video and photo images, as well as through non-gender sensitive coverage of issues.

1) Gender balance

Gender balance is not preserved by Georgian media. As a rule, disbalance favors men. Men prevail among respondents and commentators on TV channels, as well as in print media. The frequency of appearance of respondent/commentator woman depends on the covered beat or the issue. For example, women respondents are in evident minority in stories on politics, economy, security, and defence. As for expert opinions, female respondents, in fact, do not come across at all. Women are often found commenting on education, medicine, social problems, psychological issues, and media, or on spheres in which, traditionally, more professional women are involved and thus, it is not hard for journalists to find female respondents. This is the typical picture of journalism in Georgia, and examples are easily found in media every day.

2) Frequency of media coverage

Television reports and newspaper articles on women and women related issues are rarely prepared. One observation should be underlined here: as a rule, the respondent women are titular women: government officials, public figures involved in cultural or social spheres. Media usually is not interested in opinions of ordinary women. Thus, the gender balance is violated in Georgian media. Women's opinions are not heard and various issues are not covered from woman's perspective. Women's views are generally ignored. This reinforces the existing stereotype that man's opinion is more important as the men are cleverer than women.

3) Coverage of violence against women and crime committed by women

Violence against women, and stories about female criminals and suspects, are mainly offered in media if news occurs. As a rule, the coverage is limited to a simple descriptive news story. Media rarely offers the wider coverage of issues in the context, raises the problems, offers analysis, or tries to find solutions; qualified commentary is rarely offered. In addition to plain, superficial coverage of issues, the monitoring also revealed the traces of stereotypical thinking. In crime stories covered by media the most striking finding is the journalists' unawareness with the principle of gender equality. Journalists often unreasonably identify the criminals' or suspects' gender. This is also the result of stereotypical thinking: woman is a virtuous, good-tempered creature that never commits crime.

4) Sexist language

Monitoring revealed the single fact of use of sexist language in media. The problem of sexist terminology and phrases is less pressing mainly due to the general lack of pieces on women issues in Georgian media. The sexist language was used in an article published by newspaper “Alia,” April 13, titled “What a monstrous rules were adopted by Kalakhelidze, which prisoners irritate the Minister unlike Akhalaia, and how prison chiefs earn money.” This is the interview with the anonymous respondent discussing the general situation in Georgian prisons. Journalist asks a question: “so, the female minister proved to be stronger than Bacho Akhalaia?” This is the typical sexist comparison and an example of stereotypical thinking: how could woman be stronger than a man. Such phrases diminish females’ potential, and are insulting for women.

5) Gender sensitivity of journalists

The examples of journalists ‘stereotypical thinking were quite multiple over the monitoring period. Due to the lack of education on gender issues, journalists unintentionally strengthen gender stereotypes diminishing the role of woman within the society.

It should be stressed, that during the monitoring period, we came across the cases of neutral coverage of gender issues. However, journalistic pieces strengthening existing stereotypes prevailed. Of course, journalists do not act on purpose. The reason is that they themselves are the victims of these stereotypes, often sharing them, and spreading existing stereotypes among society. We believe that improved gender education of journalists is the key with this regard.

The detailed report is as follows

I. introduction

The main goal of the monitoring was to reveal gender stereotypes in media, more specifically, to study existing stereotypes in media covering the stories about women and issues related to women. The subject was selected due to several factors: (1) despite the recent change in attitude towards women in the country, Georgia still remains as a deeply patriarchal society, and gender equality is still a pressing problem; (2) nowadays, women in Georgia live quite active social lives, but the stereotypical attitudes towards women are still dominant; (3) professional standard of media is usually abused while covering gender issues; and (4) proceeding from the scale of the monitoring, we consider it more appropriate to narrow down gender issues by focusing on one certain aspect, i.e. gender stereotypes towards women.

Basing on the abovementioned information, the terms “gender”, “gender stereotype” and “sexist language” will be used only in the context of women in this report.

Gender – the aggregation of characteristics, social behavior, roles, and status defined for woman and man in a certain social and cultural environment, and society, in general;

Gender stereotype – widespread and often inaccurate views hold by the society about woman’s and man’s skills, nature, social behavior, and social functions;

Sexist language – words, expressions, or assessments discriminatory to human beings on the basis of their gender. The sexist language implies phrases diminishing the importance and contribution of women, and their role in the society, violates their rights and is offensive to women. For example, assessments of woman like: “she is equal to man”, “she is as clever as man,” and etc.

II. Legislative norms related to media coverage of gender issues:

Legal framework for media in terms of gender issues is defined by the Georgian Law on Broadcasting and the Code of Conduct for Broadcasters adopted by the Georgian National

Communications Commission, GNCC. It should be noted that these norms are only applicable to broadcasting media. Such norms do not exist when it comes to print media.

Besides general principles established by the law - the cornerstone of journalistic professional activity (accuracy, impartiality, balanced coverage, and etc.) - that specifically regulate the coverage of women's issues, certain legal norms refer to gender issues more broadly:

a) Georgian Law on Broadcasting obliges Public Broadcasting:

Article 16. Content Obligation

h) reflect ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, age, and gender diversity in programs;

Article 56. Prohibitions

2. Broadcasting license holders shall avoid broadcasting programs containing material to incite ethnic or religious hatred and which are of a discriminatory nature to any group.

3. Broadcasting license holders shall avoid broadcasting programs containing material to stir up hatred, discrimination, that is offensive to any person or group on the basis of ethnic background, religion, opinion, age, gender, sexual preference or disability, or any other feature or status. Special emphasis of these features or statuses is only permissible within the context of a program if it aims merely to illustrate such hatred or discrimination, as they already exist in society.

4. Television programs or advertisement including pornography, as well as obscenity and infringing a citizen's dignity and his/her basic rights, are prohibited.

b) "Code of Conduct for Broadcasters" adopted by the Georgian National Communications Commission, GNCC obliges broadcaster:

Article 3. Principles of the Code

1. The Code relies on broadcasting principles of:

b) Accommodating interests of various social groups regardless of their political affiliation, cultural, ethnic, religious and regional backgrounds, language, age or gender.

Article 31. Principle of diversity, equality and tolerance

Broadcasters shall refrain from publishing any material likely to incite hatred or intolerance on the grounds of race, language, gender, religious convictions, political opinions, ethnic origin, geographic location, or social background.

Article 33. Guidelines for diversity, equality and tolerance

3. Broadcasters should avoid causing offence to any religious, ethnic or other groups by using, among others, certain terminology and images. This does not prevent broadcasters from promoting informed and balanced discussions on intolerance or discrimination, or from reporting factual material or opinions prevalent in society.

4. Any unjustified referral to ethnic origin, religious faith, sexual orientation, family status, social standing or any other factor as to a cause of the problem, or the use of offensive terminology by a source in live broadcast or news programme should not go unchallenged and presenters should ask authors of offensive statements to substantiate their views.

Article 50. Guidelines for reporting crime and anti-social behavior

5. Broadcasters should not reveal identity of victims of sexual abuse, unless victims give their consents and there is the public interest.

Article 56. Guidelines for the protection from potential harm and offence

1. To avoid causing any offence to audience, broadcasters should make careful judgments about the use of offensive language.

5. Broadcasters should not exploit violence for sensational effect. It may be necessary to broadcast shocking images, but the decision to do so should be made only after very careful consideration.

6. When deciding on portraying violence, broadcasters should consider a number of factors which, in combination, can increase the impact of violence on audience:

a) Violence in daily life: domestic violence, brawls in amusement and catering places, hooliganism, road rage and mugging;

d) Incidents where elderly, disabled people, women and children are the victims;

e) Verbal and physical aggression;

7. Sexual or any other violence should not be condoned.

** The gender identity is not specifically mentioned in these norms, but they, as general norms, are to be considered as related to the coverage of women as well.*

III. General overview of the monitoring

Monitoring covers the period from April 11, 2011 to May 11, 2011. Twelve media outlets were observed and studied: five TV channels and six newspapers. Namely:

a) Broadcasting media: 1 Channel; Rustavi 2; Imedi, Maestro, and Kavkasia.

** TV media monitoring focuses on prime-time news programs only.*

b) Print media: Rezonansi, Asaval-dasavali, Alia, Kviris Palitra, Qronika, and 24 Hours.

Media pieces on women and women related issues were the focus of the monitoring. The main objective was to reveal the general tendency: whether the journalistic materials help to decrease gender stereotypes or, on the contrary, strengthen them. In order to meet this challenge, attention was paid mainly to the following aspects:

1. Gender balance and the scale of coverage: whether the gender balance is observed in media coverage; do journalists provide commentary of women and men equally; are women's opinions and assessments presented on the whole variety of issues (politics, economy, culture, and etc); and how often women related issues are covered.

2. Covering the facts of violence against women, and committed by women offenders: how media covers the facts of violence towards women (for example, family violence, trafficking, and sexual violence), and crime committed by women.

3. The use of sexist language: whether the sexist language used in media reports, i.e. words and expressions insulting for women.

4. Gender sensitivity of journalists: whether journalists are well aware of gender issues; does their way of thinking and presenting material reveal gender stereotypes, or media professionals are free of such stereotypes.

5. The level of professionalism: are abovementioned issues covered in compliance with professional standard of media, for example, do journalists use material (text, images, and photos) strengthening gender stereotypes, does sensationalism prevail in coverage of violence towards woman or crime committed by a woman; do journalists reveal information aimed at identifying the victim of sexual violence; and whether the violence towards women and pornography is promoted.

These issues are of key importance in defining whether media strengthens gender stereotypes or helps to eliminate them.

IV. Monitoring results

General tendencies

Monitoring revealed that stereotypical thinking and approaches dominate in Georgian media. In many cases journalism pieces on women and women related issues do not decrease gender stereotypes, but, on the contrary, strengthen them. Journalists are not well aware of gender issues and, consequently, they themselves are carriers of stereotypes, thus strengthening them through print, spoken text, and images, as well as through non- gender sensitive reporting.

1) Gender balance

Gender balance is not observed in Georgian media. Disbalance, as a rule, favors men. Men prevail as respondents and commentators in broadcast and in print media. The frequency of appearance of respondent/commentator woman depends on the beat. For example, women respondents are in evident minority when it comes to politics, economy, security, and defence. As for expert opinions, female respondents, in fact, do not come across at all. Women are frequently found commenting on issues of education, medicine, social and psychological issues, and media, or in spheres in which professional women prevail and they are not hard to find for journalists. This is the typical picture of any media outlet and cases can be found in Georgian media almost every day. We'll bring several examples:

In one of the political stories of the news program "Qronika" on "Imedi" TV, aired on April 11, [the press service of "Free Democrats" blamed TV Company "Imedi" for inadequate interpretation of Irakli Alasania's earlier statement], commentaries were only made by men. In the following story of the same news report focusing on education, [in which cases teachers' salaries increase by 200 GEL: Ministry of Education offers teachers passing combined exams and any teacher who already passed the certification exam is eligible] all respondents were women.

The same picture could be observed on Maestro channel, news program "Akhali Ambebi." For example, the news story on the US State Department Humans Rights Report in Georgia aired April 11, only men were interviewed. In the news program, aired on April 13, two stories - the problems of Georgian media and NDI annual report 2010, and journalists' and NGOs' joint efforts to improve media environment in the country - gender balance was deviated in favor of women as one man and three women were interviewed.

The objective reason of the lack of women-respondents is quite obvious: there are fewer women in politics than men in Georgia. However, professional women prevail in education and media. The violation of gender balance in abovementioned cases is a result of reporters' unawareness of gender issues: they do ignore the gender issue, consequently, making no extra efforts in order to find women-respondents.

There are cases when the story covering the beat, non-deficient by women, does not include commentary of a woman. For example, the news report of “Kurier” by TV company “Rustavi 2,” aired on April 25, in the story, festival “From Easter to Ascension,” in which Georgian Catholicos-Patriarch’s new song was performed, journalist used women only as a background image while interviewing seven men, despite the fact that prominent women singers were participating in the concert (as was mentioned in the story). The reporter did not approach women for a commentary and they appeared only in wide shots as a sort of background for men, as a decoration. Such attitude is insulting for women.

There are positive exceptions, but such rare cases do not affect the whole picture. For example, two stories of the news program “Dges” of TV company “Kavkasia,” aired on April 11, 2011, were relatively balanced: the story - US State Department human rights report, Ambassador’s related video statement, and political assessments – included commentary of two women and six men; for the second story - Tbilisi City Council session discussing the issue of pensions, and partial exemption of Tbilisi residents from land tax – three women and seven men were interviewed. However, in two stories of the news program - National Council opens regional office in Saburtalo and criticizes NDI study; and the leader of the movement “Protect Georgia” Davit Mgeladze presented new project, Georgian conservatism - respondents were only men. It is evident that gender balance is not an established norm for this TV Company, but it should be stressed that in terms of gender balance TV Company “Kavkasia” presented more promising picture than other TV companies observed within the monitoring time-frame.

The situation in terms of gender balance is identical in newspapers.

2) Frequency of coverage

TV stories and newspaper articles about women and women’s issues appear rarely. For example, one article about Eliso Virsaladze was published by newspaper “24 Hours” during the monitoring period, April 27. Three interviews with women - Naira Gelashvili, April 18; Marina Chitashvili, April 20; and Lamara Chkonia, May 6 - were published by “Rezonansi”. One of these interviews was a reprint from other media outlet. Several women related articles were published by print media: “Young people pay less attention to dowry,” in “Rezonansi,” April 27; and “Increase in number of childless women expected in coming years” in “Kviris Palitra,” May 7. Useful advices from women are often published by newspapers (self-care, cosmetics, treatment, and etc).

It should be noted that women - respondents, as a rule, are titular women such as government officials, and popular public figures. Media usually is not interested in opinions of ordinary female citizens.

Finally, gender balance is violated in Georgian media. Women’s voices are not heard, and issues are not covered from woman’s perspective. The views of women are often ignored. This strengthens existing stereotypes about women: man’s opinion is important as men are generally considered to be cleverer than women.

3) Coverage of violence against women and women suspects

Violence against women, as well as stories of women offenders are typically covered if such news occurs. Such stories are limited to a scale of descriptive news reports. Generalization of the issue, the problem setting, analysis, seeking for problem-solving ways, and qualified opinions rarely (almost never) offered. In addition to surfacial coverage of the issue, monitoring revealed traces of stereotypical thinking.

The story on domestic violence was aired by TV Company Channel 1 in the news program “Moambe” on April 27: 63 years old Tsismari Revazishvili was beaten by her husband and son, and thrown from the second floor balcony. The victim broke a leg and was taken to the hospital. The

author of the report briefly mentioned a sociological study, and offered the audience psychologist's commentary. The victim's image at the hospital was shown, and her commentary was aired as well. Although, it was evident from the story that the victim did not want the disclosure of her story: Tsismari Revazishvili told the different version of the cause of her injuries telling that she slipped and fell. It's most likely that the journalist had no permission to reveal the identity from the victim herself. Also, possible harmful effect of disclosure for the victim was not foreseen by the media outlet. Journalists should be more cautious when covering such sensitive topics. The same TV Company aired the material concerning the fact of domestic violence on April 20: 87 years old woman blames her own daughter and son-in-law in violence against her. According to the old lady, she is being beaten every day. The conflict over the real estate continues for several years. The victim was identified by the reporter, but in this case it was clear that the victim herself asked for the full coverage of the story.

During the monitoring period, stories of domestic violence were covered by newspaper "24 Hours": "Domestic violence – personal statement or a crime", April 13; and by TV Company "Imedi": "Violence against pregnant women - the results of the survey," April 14.

Weekly newspaper "Qronika" has a rubric on domestic violence where stories of women left and cheated by men are consistently published. It's important that instead of covering this topic professionally, raising pressing issues, proposing solutions or the ways of mitigating them, professional advices, and legal mechanisms that could assist to solve the problem, the rubric is turned into a weekly "funny" reading. We believe that offering such stories as an entertaining reading strengthens the stereotypes about the general weakness of women and low importance of this problem.

The lack of education on gender issues and principles of gender equality is the most striking in terms of covering the crime beat in Georgian media. Journalists often note offender's gender unreasonably. This is also the result of stereotypical approach: woman is virtuous, good-tempered being unable of committing crime. For example, Channel 1 covered the trial of two Georgian women arrested for drug smuggling in Malaysia. Both reports were prepared properly by the journalist, but in both cases the host of "Moambe" mentioned suspects' gender in her text: "the photos of Georgian women spread," and "it's shown how Georgian woman is taken to the courtroom". The unreasonable selection of persons because of their gender is the violation of professional standard. But, again, we are dealing with the abovementioned stereotypical thinking: in case the suspects were men the anchor would have never said: "it's shown how Georgian men are taken into the courtroom."

The same was repeated by "Moambe" on April 13: Hotel "Bahar," Turk owner and his Azeri girlfriend were murdered. Georgian citizens are suspected. Turk law-enforcement officials are looking for three Georgians. The same was said here: "it's known that one of them is a woman". If the offenders were one man and two women, no one would ever say that one of them was a man. Most likely the text would be as follows: "it's known that two of them were women". Most importantly, identifying the offender by gender does not have informational value. An offender is an offender despite of his/her gender. On the same day, April 13, in the news program "Qronika" both, the anchor and the author of the story, said the following phrase: "it's known that the murder was committed by two men and a woman". TV companies "Rustavi 2" and "Maestro" covered the same story without identifying suspects' gender.

4) *Sexist language*

Media monitoring revealed the single case of the use of sexist language. This problem is less pressing, probably, due to the general lack of media coverage of women issues. The example of sexism - article "What a monstrous rules were adopted by Kalakhelidze, which prisoners irritate the Minister unlike Akhalia, and how prison chiefs earn money," published by newspaper "Alia" on

April 13 - is the interview with the anonymous respondent discussing the situation in prisons. Journalist asks a question: “so, the woman Minister proved to be stronger than Bacho Akhalaia?” The typical sexist comparison and an example of stereotypical thinking - how could a woman be stronger than a man? – diminishes female’s potential and is insulting for women.

5) Gender sensitivity of journalists

The cases of journalists thinking with gender stereotypes were quite multiple during the monitoring period. Due to the lack of education on gender issues journalists unintentionally strengthen gender stereotypes diminishing the role of a woman in the society.

For example, Channel 1 aired the story, “internet shopping - comfort and threats”, on April 27. The subject of the story was the rising popularity of internet shopping in Georgia and threats facing consumers. The main characters of the story were women, despite the fact that Georgian men pay no less attention to their wardrobes than women. The single man interviewed for the story was the employee of a tracking company. This is an example of stereotypical thinking – women are only interested in fashion and clothing.

Story, aired on May 6, by news program “Qronika” on “Imedi” channel, “Dgis show” is hiring a new participant - the casting week, covered the casting to reveal the co-anchor of TV “Imedi” daily show. The report was mainly focused on woman’s appearance and looks. For example, one of the candidates was asked, in fact jokingly, about her height, weight, and waist measures. The author of the story didn’t even realise that she was strengthening the existing stereotype that woman should be beautiful and her looks are key. In case if this journalist was aware of gender issues, she would try to do the story focusing on candidate’s intelligence and education alongside with her looks.

Extremely interesting and typical case of stereotypical thinking is the story covered by two TV companies. This is an example of how TV stories should not be done. News on government initiative to issue driving licences at the age of 17 instead of 18 was covered. The stories were aired by all channels. For the proposes of this monitoring we focus on broadcasts by TV companies Channel 1 and Rustavi 2, aired on April 28, as these stories were most typical and revealing.

Rustavi 2 opened the report with the wide shots of school corridor showing boy students. Only boys were interviewed for the story. The only female respondents were parents. The report is discriminatory and stereotypical: driving a car is a man’s prerogative. The second stereotype: responsibility lays solely with the child’s mother, not a father, and, consequently, journalist interviewed mothers. Briefly, women don’t have to drive cars as they should take care of their children. It should be noted that the author of the story was a man.

The very pleasant, exceptional surprise turned out to be the story on Channel 1, by a female journalist: news report began with the classroom shots, the girls were shown in a close up, and boys appeared later in an expanded, wide shot of the classroom. Girls were interviewed as well as boys, but the first and the last comments of the story were made by girls. Such TV stories help to eliminate existing stereotypes.

The examples of stereotypical thinking are the photos published by “Kviris Palitra.” The newspaper has a rubric on medicine which offers advice on treatment and prevention of various diseases. Photos, as a rule, present women suffering from headache, and waist pain, or images of women’s faces suffering from pain. Probably, the rubric targets women readers, which explains this, but it should be taken into consideration that not only women suffer from headaches. Such selection of photos promotes stereotypes.

Stereotypical thinking is quite evident in media coverage of employment issues. For example, on April 25, “Rustavi 2” aired the story, Georgian nuts in Europe, on the plantations in Samegrelo owned by the investor, nuts factory, and exports. According to the report, many local residents were

employed by the factory, but only men were shown and interviewed, women were absent from the story. Such coverage strengthens the stereotype that employment is only important for men, men should work and women should stay in the kitchen.

Story aired by TV Company Imedi in news program “Qronika” on May 6: 10 most stressful professions. Pilots were on the first position, while public relations departments ranked the second on the list as well as company directors, followed by journalists. Respondents were women as well as men. The author of the story offered the audience an interview with a woman manager telling how she fainted while working. Doctors told her that the most probable cause of her illness was a stress. The woman’s interview was followed by a man manager stating that the stress and depression is unacceptable for them. The stereotype: woman is weaker, can’t handle the stress, thus working is not for women. Man is stronger and he can stand anything.

Finally, only one example of coverage in compliance with the professional standard was observed: news story on the reduction of driving license permit age aired by Channel 1. It should be mentioned that there were neutral coverage of women related issues during the period of monitoring. However, materials strengthening existing stereotypes prevailed. Of course, journalists do not act on purpose. The reason is that they themselves are the victims of stereotypes, sharing them and spreading existing stereotypes about women within society. We believe that improved gender education of journalists is of key importance in this regard.

V. Recommendations

Media outlets and media professionals

- a) Should allocate more time to reporting on gender issues, interview more women on all issues. Consult the gender experts while working on women related issues in order to help eliminate existing stereotypes.
- b) Should not use sexist language, gender discriminatory, and insulting comparisons, opinions and statements in their programs, TV stories, and articles. Use neutral and gender-sensitive language that does not strengthen stereotypes.
- c) Should not use photos and video that may strengthen stereotypes, represent a woman as a weak human being in the position of insulted and abused victim.
- d) Should take into account the probable negative effect of publication while covering domestic violence against women in order to minimize the harm from disclosure; refrain from revealing details helping to identify woman - victim of trafficking or sexual abuse. The victim can only be identified if she agrees to, and when journalist is confident that revealing identity does not pose a threat to the victim.