



CONTINUED NEGLECT OF WOMEN

An analysis of media's representation of women as sources in top 10 trending topics of January to June, 2023.

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INTRODUCTION

Since January, 2023, different issues have been dominating media coverage – from loadshedding, the Thabo Bester saga to Cholera outbreak. The urgency of these issues being faced by South Africans that become hot topics in media coverage can not be denied. Further, while some joke saying, “Just another day in South Africa,” there are those dying to voice their views on the issues in the hope that the simple task of voicing their views will result in redress of the issues affecting their lives and livelihoods. The phrase, dying to voice their views might be too grave but its use is necessary to paint the picture. People from all walks of life want to add their views to the debate or discussion on the different issues that make it to the top of media’s top trending topics. Now, while a few do get the opportunity to share their views on important topics being reported in media coverage, many do not. Among these people that hardly get a chance to speak on issues they themselves, and their families, communities and country face are women!

Consistently, Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) analyses how media report on different topics, issues, events and demographics often with a focus, among other elements, that includes how women are represented as sources in this coverage. The focus on women is because for a long time, women have been given little chance to add their voice to debates/discussions on anything of national importance in the media. While this marginalisation in media coverage mirrors society, the media has a responsibility to serve society. This responsibility to serve society is achieved by also and importantly, ensuring that everyone, including women, has a voice in media coverage of issues affecting this society. Granted, “there is no law that places an obligation on the press to serve society: such a law would limit the freedom of expression guaranteed in the Constitution,” according to renowned journalist and former Press Ombudsman at the Press Council, Joe Thloloe in his publication, the [South African Regulatory Regime in Print, Broadcasting and Online](#) where he reflects on the South African media landscape. However, Thloloe goes on to state in the same publication that the media, by virtue of subscribing to the press council have “taken on the responsibility of ‘serving’ society and that is way beyond the obligations that the law imposes on them”.

Additionally, the South African Constitution in the Bill of Rights Section 16 guarantees freedom of expression for every South African. This coupled with media’s ethical responsibility and mandate to citizens means that every South Africans from all walks of life should be given an opportunity to speak in media coverage of the different issues of national importance. Other than being mandated through regulatory and ethical frameworks, speaking to citizens, all citizens, including women, benefits journalism as it enhances the public’s trust in the media as conduits of reliable and credible information as well as inclusivity.

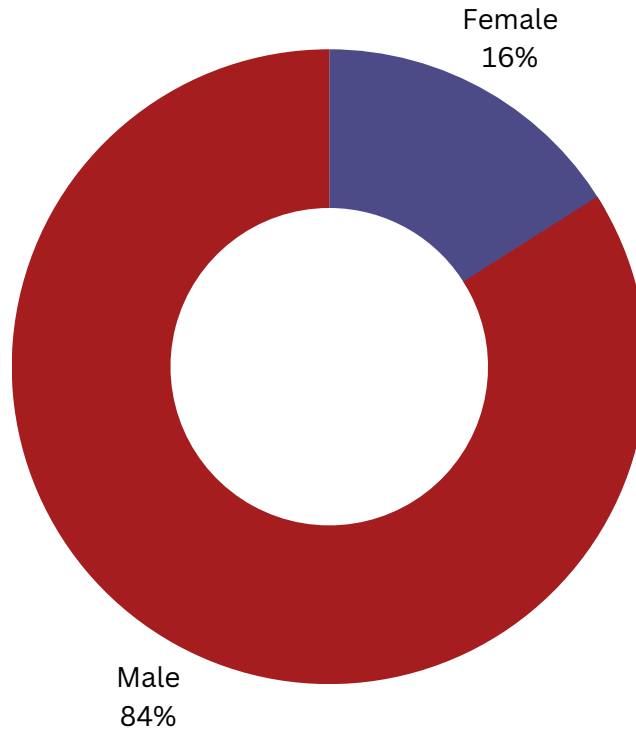
Since inception, MMA has taken up the role of keeping the media in check and helping hold the media and the powerful to account by promoting ethical and fair journalism which supports human rights. Fair journalism includes, among other aspects, equitably accessing as sources a diverse list of people which includes women. It is for this reason that MMA consistently checks how diverse media's sources list is in coverage of whatever issue or event being reported and whether women are adequately, fairly and equitably represented in this coverage. The findings are always disappointing as women often only make up less than 20% of sources accessed in whatever issue or event is being reported. For instance, almost 30 years into democracy, South African media accessed women as sources in coverage of the 2021 local government elections at only 19%. The findings are of course always shared with the media and recommendations given on how the media can do better. This is what makes it more disappointing that till this date, women hardly feature as sources in media coverage. This despite all the efforts by MMA and of course by different civil society organisations including government itself to raise the profile of women in communities and nation. The continued sidelining of women implores the question, should women beg to be accessed as sources in media coverage?

To paint a picture of just how marginalised women are as sources in coverage of issues of national importance, MMA collated a list of issues that dominated media coverage from January to June, 2023. This is not an exhaustive list as there were many topics that were dominating media coverage during this period. However, the list is made up of topics that either dominated media coverage for a longer time than others or were topics and issues that relate to media and human rights. Using Dexter, an inhouse media monitoring tool, the following topics were collated and analysed; Loadshedding, Back to school, SONA, Crime statistics, Floods, SABC Board, Thabo Bester, Cholera Outbreak, AmaBhungane vs. Moti case, Youth Month.

MMA analysed how the media represented women in coverage of these topics separately and combined. Graph A below shows how women were represented in media coverage of the combined hot topics list where gender could be determined. The graphs from graph 1 to 10 show how women were represented in each of the trending topics where gender was determined. A total of 20, 494 articles on the top 10 topics were collected and analysed and these articles represented a percentage share of 26 from the 79, 994 total number of stories on all other topics collected.

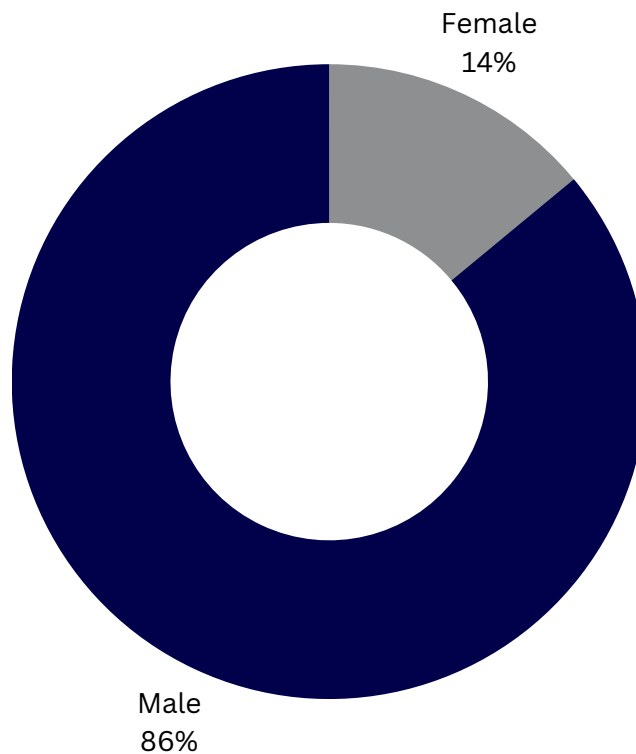
GRAPH A: Representation of women as sources in top 10 trending topics of January to June, 2023 (Loadshedding; Back to school; SONA; Crime statistics; Floods; SABC Board; Thabo Bester; Cholera Outbreak; AmaBhungane vs. Moti case; Youth Month).

WOMEN AS SOURCES IN TOP 10 TRENDING TOPICS



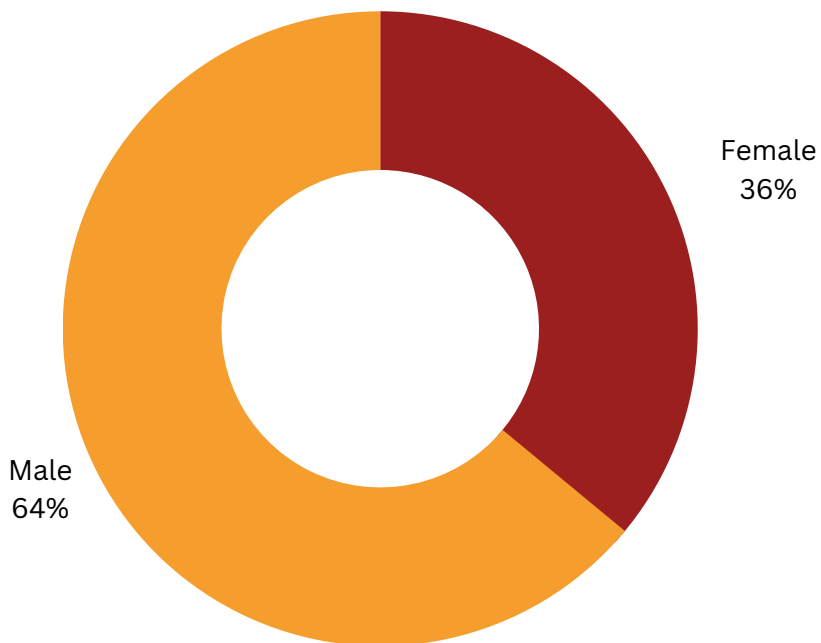
GRAPH 1: Representation of women as sources in media coverage of loadshedding (January to June, 2023) of which total number of articles collected and analysed was 15, 748.

GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES IN LOADSHEDDING COVERAGE



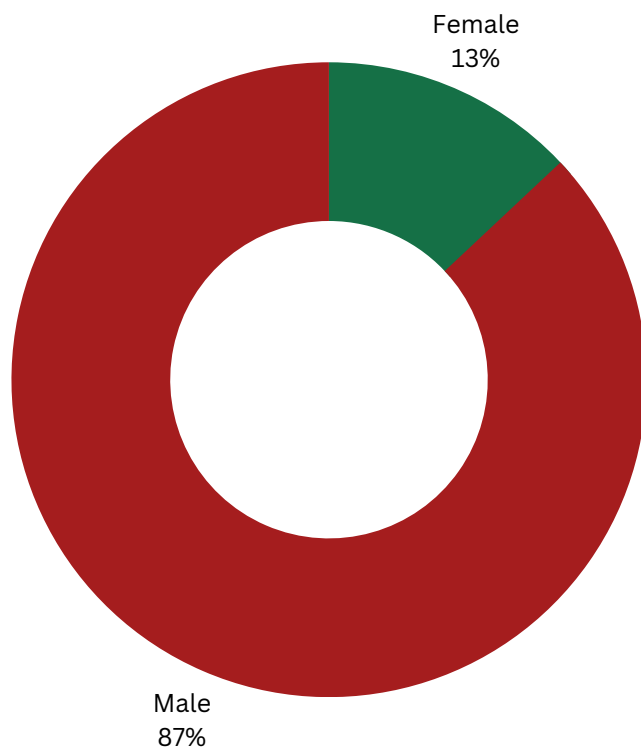
GRAPH 2: Representation of women as sources in media coverage of #BackToSchool (January to June, 2023) of which total number of articles collected and analysed was 542.

GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES IN #BACKTOSCHOOL



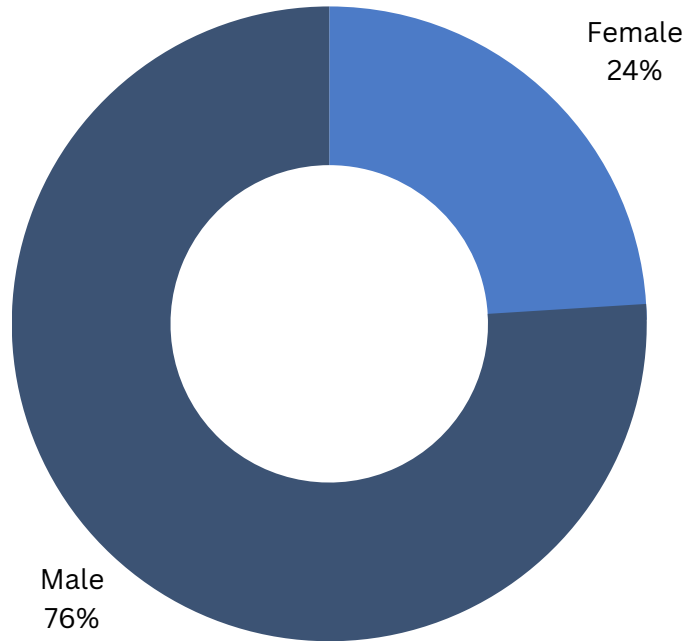
GRAPH 3: Representation of women as sources in media coverage of the State of the Nation Address (January to June, 2023) of which total number of articles collected and analysed was 1, 561.

GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES IN SONA



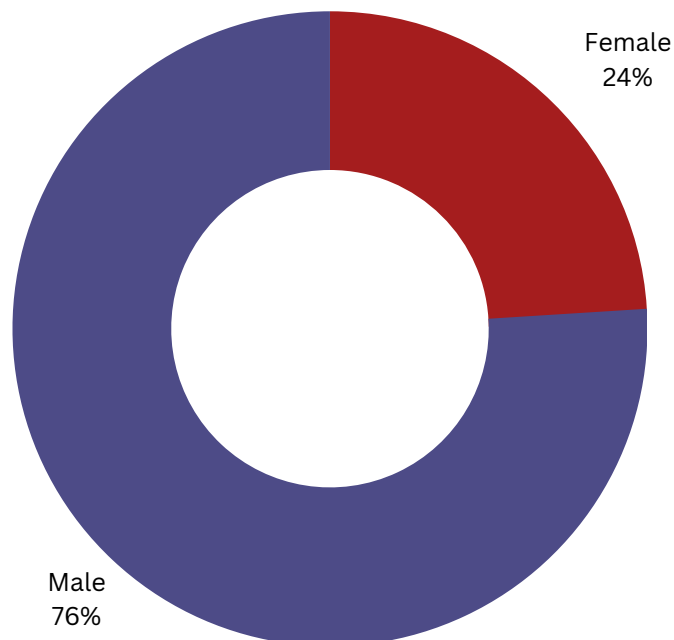
GRAPH 4: Representation of women as sources in media coverage of crime statistics (January to June, 2023) of which total number of articles collected and analysed was 313.

GENDER BREAKDOWN OF SOURCES IN CRIME STATISTICS



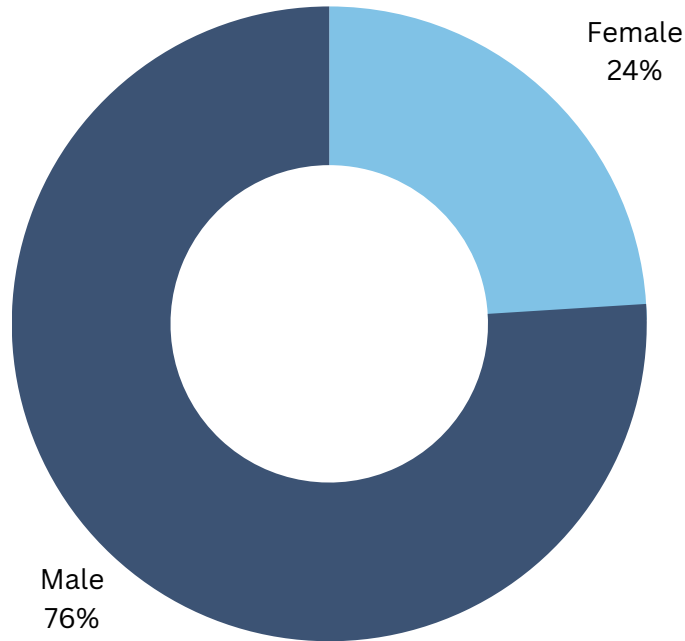
GRAPH 5: Representation of women as sources in media coverage of floods (January to June, 2023) of which total number of articles collected and analysed was 1, 911.

GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES IN SONA



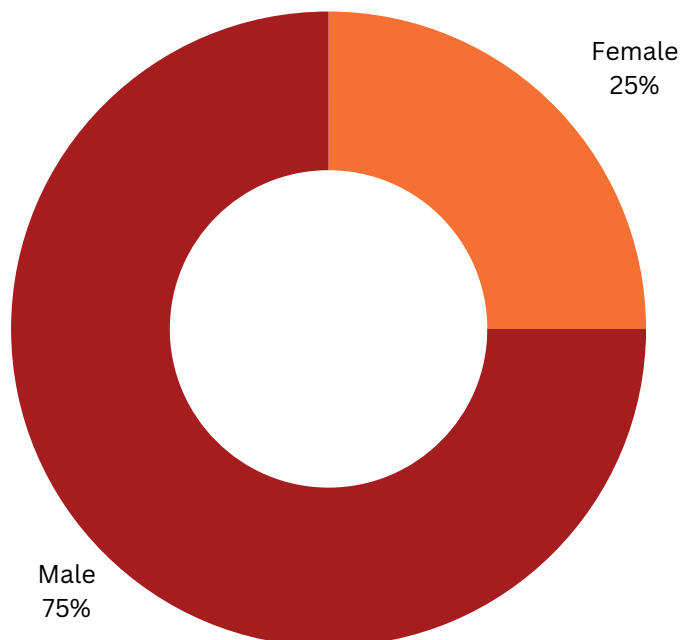
GRAPH 6: Representation of women as sources in media coverage of the SABC board (January to June, 2023) of which total number of articles collected and analysed was 105.

GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES IN SABC BOARD



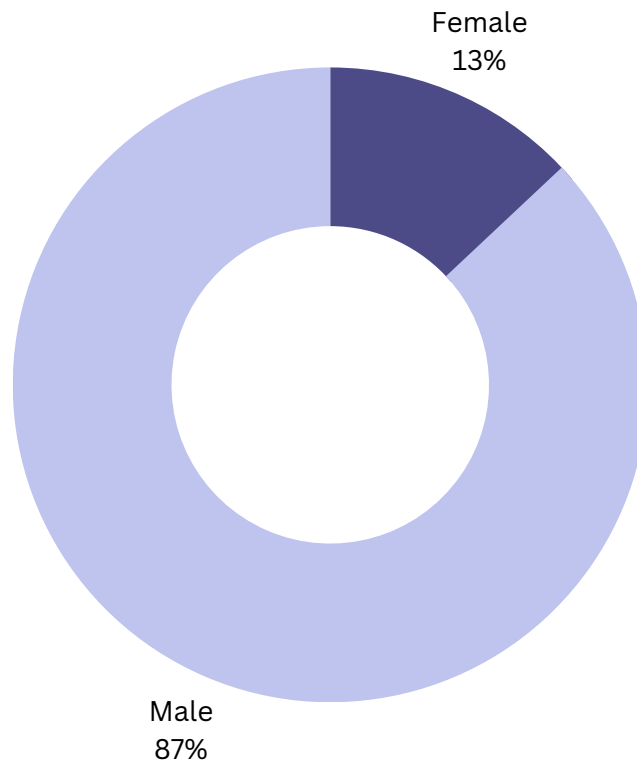
GRAPH 7: Representation of women as sources in media coverage of the Thabo Bester case (January to June, 2023) of which total number of articles collected and analysed was 1,303.

GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES IN THABO BESTER CASE



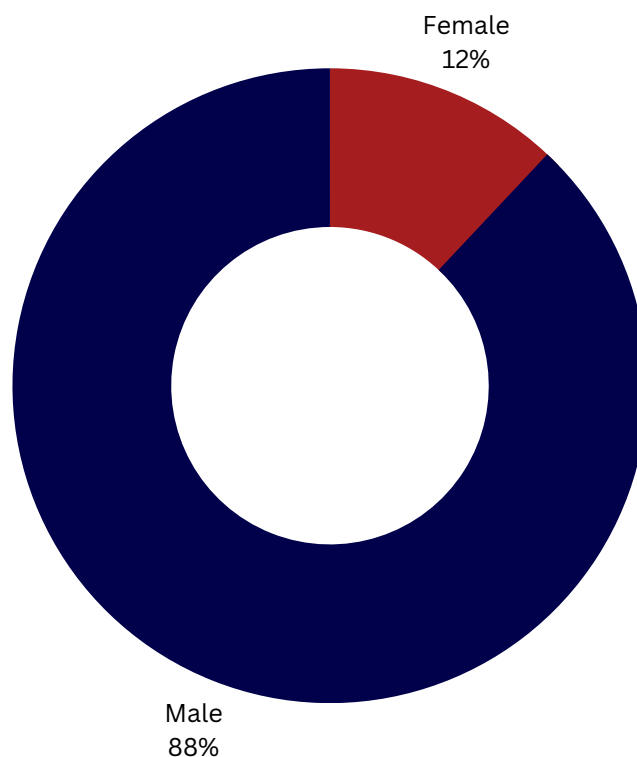
GRAPH 8: Representation of women as sources in media coverage of the cholera outbreak (January to June, 2023) of which total number of stories collected and analysed was 730.

GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES IN CHOLERA OUTBREAK



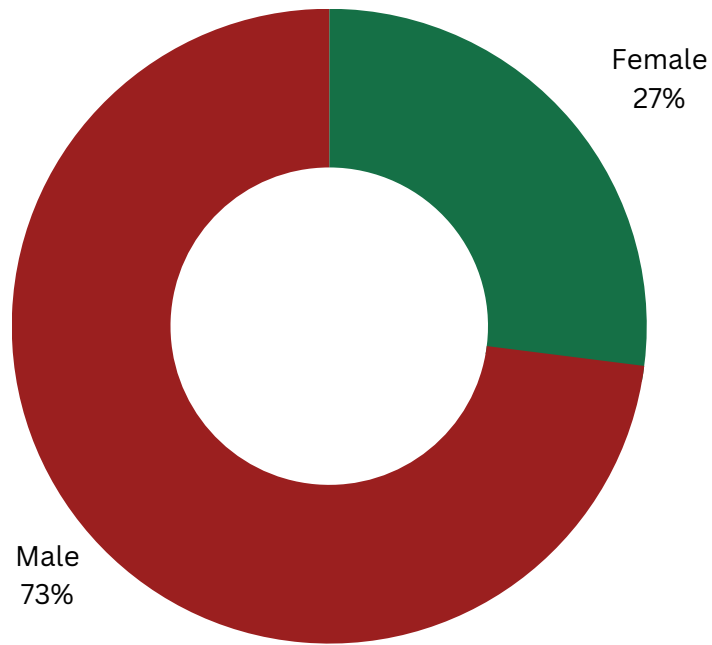
GRAPH 9: Representation of women as sources in media coverage of the AmaBhungane vs. Moti case (January to June, 2023) of which total number of articles collected and analysed was 102.

GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES IN AMABHUNGANE VS. MOTI CASE



GRAPH 10: Representation of women as sources in media coverage of Youth Month (January to June, 2023) of which total number of articles collected and analysed was 144.

GENDER REPRESENTATION OF SOURCES IN YOUTH MONTH





ABOUT MMA

Media Monitoring Africa's vision is a responsible, quality media that enables an engaged and informed citizenry in Africa and across the world. MMA aims to promote the development of a free, fair, ethical and critical media culture in South Africa and the rest of the continent. To achieve MMA's vision, the three key areas that MMA seeks to address through a human rights-based approach are: media ethics, media quality and media freedom.

For more information about MMA, visit www.mediamonitoringafrica.org

For more information:

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