REPORT ON UGANDAN MEDIA COVERAGE OF SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

DECEMBER 2023

AFRICAN CENTRE FOR **MEDIA EXCELLENCE**

Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

This study, commissioned by Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), aimed to understand Uganda's media reporting of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). AMwA commissioned the African Centre for Media Excellence (ACME), a media support and research organisation, to conduct a comprehensive examination of SRHR coverage across print, electronic, and online platforms. The research period spanned from January 1st to June 30th, 2023, encompassing a diverse range of media sources and providing a valuable snapshot of how SRHR was represented in the Ugandan media landscape.

The study scrutinises the volume, nature, and framing of SRHR coverage across various media platforms. This approach delves beyond mere statistics to illuminate the dominant narratives and framing techniques employed by the media, shedding light on potential biases and prevailing perspectives surrounding these critical issues.

AMwA's ongoing commitment to achieving transformative change in the field of SRHR provided a valuable framework for developing the study and interpreting the research findings. The organisation's in-depth understanding of the complexities surrounding SRHR issues, alongside their work in promoting social justice, informed the analysis and ensured that it extended beyond a purely technical examination of data. By situating the findings within the context of AMwA's agenda for transformative change, the research broadens its scope to address not only the technical aspects of media representation but also the potential for media narratives to influence and reshape societal mind-sets, norms, and belief systems surrounding SRHR.

The study findings will inform future strategies and initiatives in the following ways:
1. Identify areas of improvement: By pinpointing the limitations and biases present in current media portrayals of SRHR, the study provides valuable insights for media outlets and journalists to improve their coverage. This can be achieved through capacity-building programmes and workshops focusing on ethical and sensitive reporting of SRHR issues, and the development of guidelines for journalists.
2. Promoting diverse voices and perspectives: The study's identification of key media sources and stakeholders shaping the SRHR narrative allows for targeted interventions to ensure a greater diversity of voices and perspectives in the public discourse. This can involve amplifying the voices of marginalised groups, engaging with civil society organisations working on SRHR, and encouraging media outlets to actively seek out diverse sources for their stories.
3. Enhancing public engagement: By understanding how the media portrays SRHR issues and how this portrayal influences public perception, the study provides valuable information for developing effective communication strategies to engage the public more effectively.
4. Fostering accountability: By identifying the key stakeholders shaping the SRHR narrative, the study highlights the importance of holding these stakeholders accountable for their actions and ensuring transparency in their reporting. This can be achieved through advocacy efforts aimed at media regulatory bodies, promoting media self-regulation, and encouraging constructive criticism of media coverage.

Ultimately, this study aims to spark positive change in the media landscape surrounding SRHR in Uganda. By illuminating the current state of affairs and identifying potential avenues for improvement, the study paves the way for a future where the media plays a constructive role in promoting informed public discourse, empowering individuals to make informed choices regarding their sexual and reproductive health and rights.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This research study analyses a comprehensive sample of 735 articles across diverse media platforms, including newspapers, television, online platforms and social media. It reveals a multifaceted picture with both strengths and weaknesses.

Platform landscape and content trends
Newspapers maintain their dominance, accounting for half of the analysed articles. However, a notable shift is observed with the emergence of Uganda Radio Network (URN) as a significant force in online coverage, surpassing established names like *New Vision* and *Bukedde*. This highlights the potential for new voices to challenge traditional hierarchies, emphasising the crucial role of editorial policies and individual priorities in shaping SRHR narratives.

The research also reveals intriguing fluctuations in coverage by volume across months, with a peak in March coinciding with the passing of the controversial Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2023. This underscores the impact of major events on media focus and agenda-setting. While newspapers and television displayed erratic patterns, online platforms demonstrated a more consistent volume, suggesting potential differences in editorial approaches and news gathering strategies.

Content focus
A striking contrast emerges in topic selection across platforms. Television prioritised issues like sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), likely due to its visual nature and ability to engage with sensitive topics. In contrast, newspapers offered a broader spectrum, encompassing essential aspects like maternal health, HIV/AIDS, and family planning, providing a more comprehensive and balanced perspective.

However, concerns arise regarding the underrepresentation of crucial SRHR issues such as sexuality education, fertility struggles, and sex work. This lack of attention creates knowledge gaps and hinders public awareness, potentially limiting access to information and services for individuals navigating these challenges. Additionally, the absence of coverage on adolescent health, sexually transmitted infections, and sexuality hinders informed discussion and potentially jeopardises public health efforts.

Twitter conversations on SRHR differed in range from those on TV and newspapers. Discussions lacked a central theme, driven by fleeting events or campaigns. Future research, conducted over a longer period of time, and involving multiple social media platforms, would facilitate the understanding of the drivers of SRHR content online.

Source representation and power dynamics

Examining the origins of news stories reveals a heavy reliance on official sources, with government activities and religious institutions dominating the narrative across all platforms. This dependence raises concerns about limited perspectives and dilution of diverse voices from civil society and independent investigations. The complete absence of investigative reporting further underscores the need for increased scrutiny and transparency in SRHR coverage.

While a positive trend emerges with a majority of reports utilising multiple sources, a closer look reveals a significant imbalance in source representation. Official voices, particularly government and religious representatives, exert a considerable influence, overshadowing the experiences of marginalised groups and individuals. The consistent underrepresentation of victims and the concerning gender gap, where male voices significantly outnumber female ones, highlight the need for a more inclusive and representative approach to SRHR coverage.

Newsmakers and the framing of issues

Institutional newsmakers, primarily government agencies, dominate the narrative across all platforms. Religious institutions also wield substantial influence, particularly on television and online platforms. While non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and development partners contribute to media coverage, their influence as agenda-setters and newsmakers appears relatively limited. This suggests a potential bias within the media itself towards prioritising official perspectives. It is also worth exploring whether this limited influence speaks to limitations in the media relations strategies of NGOs and development partners. Future research could examine their messaging, communication channels, and engagement with the media to see if there is room for improvement.

Newspapers tended to focus more on individuals categorised as perpetrators and victims compared to online and television platforms. Television, however, prioritised political figures as key newsmakers, suggesting a focus on policy and legislative aspects of SRHR issues. Interestingly, newspapers and television offered a more balanced representation with activists, advocates, and experts contributing diverse perspectives, promoting a broader understanding of SRHR challenges and solutions. This difference highlights potential variations in editorial styles and the prioritisation of specific narratives.

Framing analysis reveals a complex picture. Media coverage predominantly revolved around societal norms, religious considerations, and conflict, reflecting the deeply ingrained cultural and socio-political context of SRHR in Uganda. This dominant narrative underscores the need for critical analysis and the inclusion of diverse perspectives to challenge traditional framings.

However, a subset of coverage emerges focusing on human rights concerns, highlighting the struggles of marginalised groups and advocating for equality and recognition. This positive trend demonstrates the potential for the media to promote social justice and contribute to improved access to healthcare and services. Additionally, reports often intertwined sexual orientation, gender identity, and SGBV issues with societal conflicts, highlighting the impact of these tensions on the safety and rights of marginalised groups. This approach provides valuable insights into the complex interplay of social factors influencing SRHR.

Diverse topics generate significant engagement on social media

While online conversations (specifically on X, formerly known as Twitter) focused heavily on teenage pregnancy, other SRHR topics sparked extensive engagement: abortion (530 mentions), sexual and reproductive rights in Uganda (429 mentions), national community

SRHR advocacy (1,253 mentions), contraceptives (149 mentions), and the controversial Anti-Homosexuality bill/Act (70,620 mentions). This highlights the broad spectrum of SRHR issues discussed online and the platform's potential for fostering dialogue on diverse aspects of sexual and reproductive health.

Posts by civil society workers and individuals were particularly effective in generating engagement on SRHR topics. Their efforts significantly contributed to the volume and reach of online discussions, demonstrating the crucial role of civil society actors in shaping the online SRHR narrative and driving positive change.

CHAPTER 1 - BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The study of media coverage surrounding Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) in Uganda takes place within a robust legal and policy framework established by the National Policy Guidelines and Service Standards[1]. Defined within this framework, sexual health is more than the absence of disease, encompassing physical, emotional, and social well-being, encouraging positive and respectful sexual relationships. Reproductive health, a component of this framework, extends to complete physical, mental, and social well-being concerning the reproductive system, incorporating sexual health and supporting life enhancement and reproductive care. The United Nations Population Fund[2] further elaborates on good sexual and reproductive health, emphasising access to information, safe and affordable contraception, protection against sexually transmitted infections, and quality healthcare during pregnancy and childbirth as essential rights.

Despite Uganda's robust legal framework, an intersectional feminist analysis[3] uncovers critical gaps within the country's SRHR policies. These gaps notably disregard bodily autonomy, consent, and agency. Achieving comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights entails addressing often-overlooked rights, including control over one's body, defining one's sexuality, and accessing confidential and respectful services. Bridging these policy gaps necessitates societal recognition and acceptance of the SRHR for African women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals, especially for marginalised populations. The acknowledgment of these rights is imperative in actualising SRHR for all in Uganda.

Recognising the inherent social and political sensitivities surrounding SRHR, it becomes crucial to address the specific needs and concerns of marginalised groups like adolescents, impoverished women, persons with disabilities, and sexual minorities. This targeted approach is essential for guaranteeing Uganda's sustainable development by ensuring the well-being and empowerment of all individuals, regardless of their background or identity.

The limited societal awareness of rights and legal safeguards, coupled with a lack of societal acceptance, contributes to the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. These falsehoods stoke parental and public fears concerning access to safe abortion, comprehensive sexuality education, and other SRHR matters.

SRHR coverage in the media: A double-edged sword
The media plays a critical role in shaping public opinion and advancing the important field of SRHR. The Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA) recognises this crucial function[4], highlighting the potential of the media to bring SRHR matters to the attention of influential figures who impact public health policies. Journalists equipped with comprehensive SRHR knowledge can significantly contribute to positive change by addressing taboo subjects openly, encouraging public discourse, and holding governments accountable for fulfilling their commitments.

---

[1] The National Policy Guidelines and Service Standards for Reproductive Health Services. (2001, May). Reproductive Health Division, Community Health Department, Ministry of Health.

[2] https://www.unfpa.org/sexual-reproductive-health

[3] Tamale, S. (Ed.). (2011). African Sexualities: A Reader. Pambazuka Press, an imprint of Fahamu.

[4] Uganda Media Women's Association (UMWA). (2016, March). Reporting on Sexual and Reproductive Health: Media Guide for Journalists

However, the media landscape can be a double-edged sword. While acknowledging the immense power of media in promoting positive SRHR outcomes, reports indicate a widespread pattern of neglecting or misrepresenting SRHR issues. This is particularly true in sub-Saharan Africa, where weak capacity and insufficient motivation among media practitioners often lead to inadequate or inaccurate coverage[5].

Recent studies highlight that media coverage in Eastern and Southern Africa often centres on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) within SRHR issues, lacking depth and representation of specific populations[6]. Traditional media, notably radio, retains substantial reach, but the influence of social media influencers, particularly among young people, is increasingly significant. Both traditional and new media platforms, including social and digital spaces, play a vital role in shaping social norms and disseminating information. Engaging news media consistently is pivotal, not just for information dissemination, but also for generating counter-narratives and analyses that contribute to public discourse framing and portrayal of SRHR issues.

Furthermore, the media landscape is undergoing a dynamic shift. While traditional media formats like radio retain substantial reach, the influence of social media influencers, particularly among young people, is rapidly increasing.

Navigating this complex media landscape requires a nuanced approach. Engaging with news media consistently goes beyond mere information dissemination. It also involves generating counter-narratives and insightful analyses that challenge harmful stereotypes, promote informed public discourse, and contribute to a more accurate portrayal of SRHR issues.

Rationale for the study
This study is intended to understand how Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) are portrayed in Ugandan media coverage. It aims to identify the dominant narratives and perspectives presented by journalists and media actors, uncovering potential biases and prevailing misconceptions. This knowledge will empower civil society organisations, such as Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), to strengthen their relationships with media platforms and promote informed public discussion on SRHR. Additionally, the study seeks to address gaps in knowledge and evidence regarding the extent and quality of SRHR coverage by assessing information accuracy and media actors' understanding of the topic. This information will allow AMwA to develop impactful interventions and monitor media coverage to ensure comprehensive and balanced reporting, ultimately fostering a society where everyone has the opportunity to exercise their full SRHR.

Objectives of the study:
1. To analyse prevailing perspectives, biases and dominant narratives framed by journalists and other media actors in their coverage of SRHR.
2. To identify key media sources and stakeholders in Uganda's traditional and new media that influence media discourse on SRHR.
3. To identify and establish the different intersecting factors that contribute to the framing of women's rights and SRHR narratives within the media landscape in Uganda.

---

[5] Oronje, R.N., Undie, CC., Zulu, E.M. *et al.* Engaging media in communicating research on sexual and reproductive health and rights in sub-Saharan Africa: experiences and lessons learned. *Health Res Policy Sys* **9** (Suppl 1), S7 (2011).

[6] UNICEF. (2022). Retrospective Media Scan Executive Summary Coverage of Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights, HIV and Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Eastern and Southern Africa.

4. To identify enablers and obstacles within the media landscape in Uganda that shape and impact the sharing of narratives related to SRHR.

Research questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions:

a) What is the frequency and extent of media coverage on SRHR? How often are SRHR issues addressed in media reports?

b) How are different SRHR topics represented in media coverage? What is the distribution of coverage across various SRHR issues?

c) To what extent do media reports provide reliable and evidence-based information on SRHR topics?

d) How are SRHR issues framed and portrayed in media narratives?

e) Who are the key sources and voices that contribute to the framing of SRHR issues in media coverage?

CHAPTER 2 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Scope and sampling

The study analysed news content across diverse platforms from January 1st to June 30th, 2023. Content from the following media was assessed:

- Newspapers: *Bukedde, Daily Monitor* and *New Vision*. These were chosen because they are Uganda's only daily newspapers and have a significant influence on national discourse. A total of 367 articles were analysed across these three publications, providing insights into how SRHR issues are presented in traditional print media.

- Television: The national broadcaster, *UBC TV*, as well as *NTV Uganda* and *NBS* Television were selected due to their place as leading providers of public affairs programming. All three offer a national perspective and reach wide audiences. A total of 209 stories from the three television stations were analysed.

- Online news: *Uganda Radio Network (URN)*, is a subscription-based news agency, with a wide reach through radio stations, online platforms, and print publications. URN also distributes its content through its free-to-access website, making it a good source for understanding online discussions. 159 stories published by URN were assessed.

- Social media: *Twitter*, the third most popular social media platform in Uganda, was selected to explore how SRHR discussions unfold in online spaces.

Sampling limitations and future research

While the study encompassed diverse platforms, certain limitations require consideration. The analysis covered only newspapers with limited circulation compared to Uganda's population, potentially overlooking perspectives and information accessible to a wider audience. Notably, radio, the primary news and information source for many Ugandans, was excluded from the study. This omission leaves a significant gap in understanding how SRHR is portrayed across different media channels, especially since radio has a wider reach and influence than the newspapers included. Additionally, the Twitter data, gathered using a social listening tool, only provided insights from April 2023 onwards, restricting the analysis of the full six-month timeframe.

These limitations provide an opportunity for further research that incorporates radio content. A wider range of native digital news and social media platforms should also be studied, and data analysis should encompass a more comprehensive timeframe. This would provide a more nuanced understanding of how SRHR is represented in Ugandan media and its impact on public discourse.

Data collection and content analysis

The research employed a dual approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. The study utilised manifest content analysis. "Manifest content refers to what is explicitly stated and draws on the objective and replicable qualities of quantitative methods" (Hilton and Hunt

(2010).[7] Latent content analysis[8] was also employed selectively to delve deeper into the underlying meanings and messages conveyed within the media content.

To gain a holistic understanding of SRHR coverage, both in terms of quantity and quality, a detailed coding sheet was developed encompassing various variables relevant to the research questions. These variables included:

- Publication details: name, type, etc.
- Volume of SRHR articles or stories
- Prominence and placement of articles/stories • Types of SRHR articles published
- Origins of SRHR stories
- Reporting formats used
- Topics and themes covered
- Newsmakers featured in SRHR coverage
- Framing of SRHR stories
- Background and context provided
- Number and occupations of sources
- Gender of sources

Five research assistants trained in a dedicated workshop conducted the content analysis. Their intercoder reliability was assessed through a preliminary analysis, demonstrating a high level of agreement in coding practices.

Key informant interviews with selected journalists and SRHR sector stakeholders were conducted to gain in-depth understanding and context for the quantitative findings. These interviews explored journalists' perspectives on SRHR coverage, the challenges they face, and factors influencing their reporting practices. Additionally, stakeholders provided insights into the accuracy and adequacy of media representation of SRHR issues.

---

[7] Hilton, S. & Hunt, K. (2010). UK newspaper representations of the 2009-10 outbreak of swine flu: one health scare not over-hyped by the media?" Research Report, J Epidemiol, *Community Health*

[8] See, Krippendorf, K. (2004). *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

CHAPTER 3 – FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Volume and trend of SRHR coverage

I. Total volume of SRHR reporting

Media analysis between January and June 2023 reveals fascinating trends in SRHR coverage across the seven diverse outlets in this study. 735 articles discussing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) were identified across the three media platforms studied.

While newspapers produced the highest volume of reporting, claiming a hefty 50% of the total SRHR articles, both television and online platforms play significant roles, contributing about half of the total number of stories.

Volume by percentage of SRHR stories by platform

- 50.0% Newspaper
- 28.4% Television
- 21.6% Online
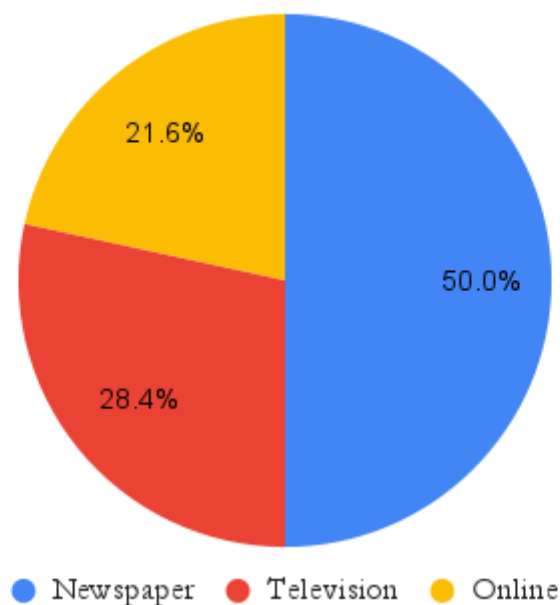
II. Volume of reporting per media house

Within newspapers, *Daily Monitor* led in SRHR reporting, publishing the most articles. Interestingly, URN, the sole online platform assessed for this study, emerges as a surprising force, exceeding both *New Vision* and *Bukedde*, two publications belonging to the same government-leaning conglomerate, Vision Group. Further intrigue arises when we examine the contrasting trends within Nation Media Group Uganda. Although *Daily Monitor* leads in overall coverage, its sister company, NTV Uganda, contributed only a fraction of the coverage in comparison to the newspaper. This suggests that media ownership structures alone do not dictate SRHR coverage; individual editorial policies and priorities play a crucial role in shaping the narrative.

No. of stories per media outlet

Media Outlet	No. of stories
Daily Monitor	176
URN	159
New Vision	96
Bukedde	95
NTV Uganda	83
UBC TV	77
NBS TV	49

No. of stories
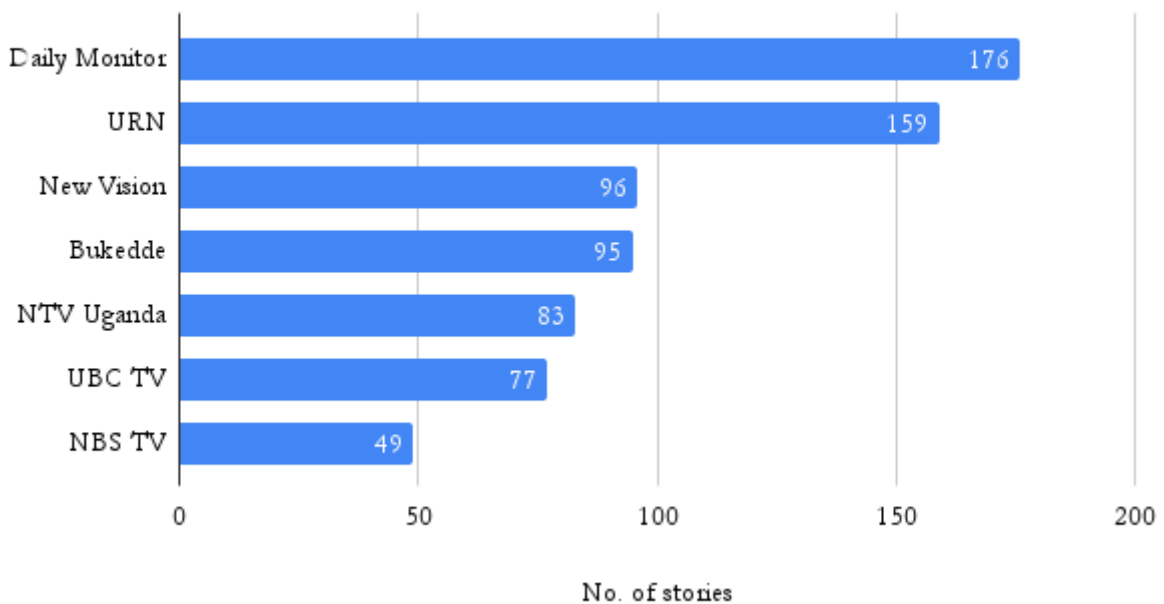
These findings paint a nuanced picture of SRHR reporting in Uganda, showcasing the diverse voices and approaches within the media sphere. While newspapers remain dominant, online platforms like URN are carving their own space, challenging traditional hierarchies and offering alternative perspectives.

III.   Trend of SRHR reporting over six months

Trend of SRHR coverage by platform

● Newspaper (n=3)   ● Television (n=3)   ● Online (n=1)

Month	Newspaper	Television	Online
January	54	14	21
February	68	30	24
March	88	60	47
April	58	63	24
May	57	29	19
June	42	13	24
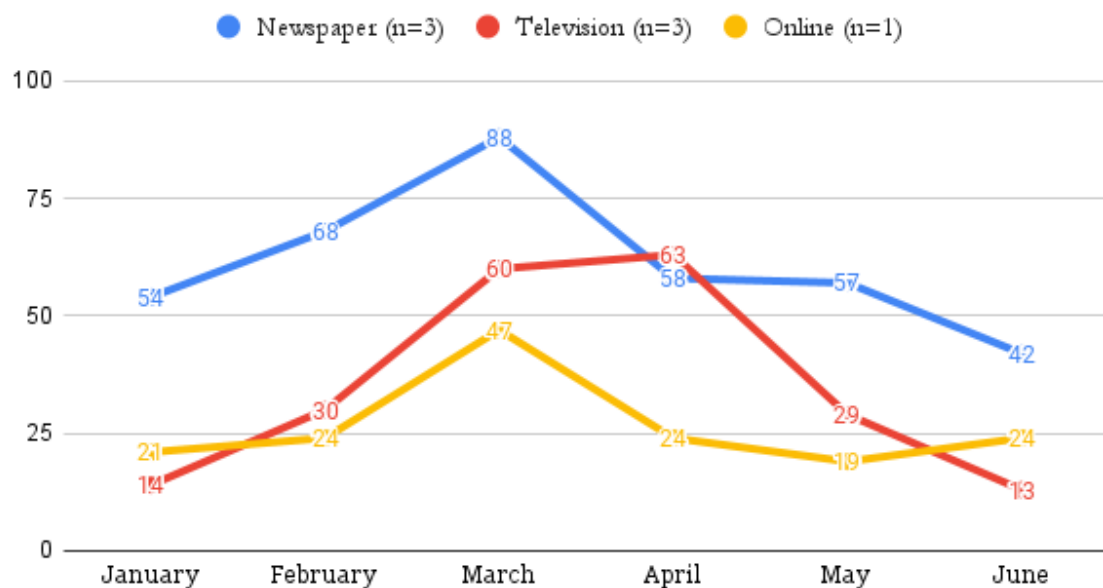
For all media types, there was a significant increase in SRHR coverage between February and March, with March recording the highest volume of stories for newspapers and Uganda Radio Network. This surge coincides with the reading and subsequent passing of the controversial Anti-Homosexuality Bill 2023 in Parliament that ignited widespread media discussion and debate surrounding SRHR issues.

For newspapers, the number of stories produced fluctuated, notably peaking in March with 88 stories before declining in subsequent months. Television reporting displayed an erratic pattern, with significant peaks in March (60 stories) and April (63 stories), followed by sharp declines in May and June. However, the online platform, represented solely by Uganda Radio Network, demonstrated a more consistent trend with moderate fluctuations, maintaining a relatively stable reporting volume across the period.

Overall, the trend suggested a degree of volatility in reporting for newspapers and television, contrasting with the steadier reporting pattern observed in the online platform. This volatility was explained, in part, by editors interviewed as key informants to this study.

"Many journalists and editors covering SRHR-related issues focus their coverage around news events, like international days of commemoration, and so on. This may have affected the overall coverage between January and June. That said, there was an opportunity missed to do some good reporting around International Women's Day in May, International Day of Families and others."[9]

Another senior editor further highlighted the broader challenge of sensationalism in SRHR reporting: "Generally SRHR issues are quite wide, and often, regrettably, they attract the attention of news media when there is a sensational event. The ups and downs in reporting could be helped by more awareness of key issues in newsrooms, but also with players in this area doing stronger messaging on current issues related to SRHR."[10]

Based on the insights from the key informants and the observed volatility in traditional media, forecasting future SRHR coverage is challenging. Without a critical incident sparking media attention, coverage in newspapers and television is likely to remain uneven. This suggests a media agenda that is reactive rather than proactive in its approach to SRHR issues. Further research would be beneficial to track trends over a longer period and to assess the impact of any interventions aimed at improving media coverage of SRHR issues.

The what, why and how of SRHR topical reporting

I.   Selection of SRHR topics by media type

The media's selective reporting of SRHR holds immense power. By directing attention toward certain themes and neglecting others, it shapes public perception and fuels societal conversations. The emphasis on gender-based violence, for instance, has the potential to influence attitudes and policies toward these issues. Conversely, the silence surrounding adolescent health and STIs leaves these issues on the periphery of public discourse, potentially hindering their effective management.

---

[9] Key informant interview, August, 2023.
[10] Key informant interview, August, 2023.

Topics	Newspaper Freq	Newspaper %	Television Freq	Television %	Online Freq	Online %
Sexual orientation/Gender identity & gender expression	116	31.6	124	59.3	47	29.6
SGBV and harmful traditional practices	105	28.6	21	10.0	52	32.7
Maternal health	42	11.4	17	8.1	9	5.7
HIV/AIDS	13	3.5	22	10.5	18	11.3
Early and forced marriage	20	5.4	5	2.4	4	2.5
Family planning & contraception	10	2.7	6	2.9	8	5.0
Teenage pregnancy	6	1.6	1	0.5	8	5.0
Menstrual health	5	1.4	7	3.3	2	1.3
Health care financing & investment	9	2.5	1	0.5	2	1.3
Gender equality/equity	9	2.5	0	0.0	3	1.9
Sexuality education	11	3.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Access to health care	7	1.9	1	0.5	3	1.9
Fertility/infertility/surrogacy/Ass. repro. tech.	5	1.4	0	0.0	2	1.3
Other	5	1.4	2	1.0	0	0.0
Sex work	2	0.5	1	0.5	0	0.0
Sexuality	2	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
STIs	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.6
Adolescent health	0	0.0	1	0.5	0	0.0
Total	367	100.0	209	100.0	159	100.0

Analysis of the topic selection by the media assessed shows a mixed approach to reporting on SRHR matters. Television channels dedicated significant airtime to issues like sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual and gender-based violence. Newspapers, on the other hand, paint a broader picture. They reported on a wider array of SRHR topics, including maternal health, HIV/AIDS, and family planning, offering a more balanced and comprehensive perspective. URN, the only online source assessed, while exhibiting some alignment with newspapers in their coverage, generally provided less extensive reporting.

However, a significant gap exists in the media's portrayal of several critical SRHR issues. Topics like sexuality education, fertility struggles, and sex work remain largely invisible across all platforms. This lack of coverage raises concerns about the potential for underrepresentation and limited public awareness of these crucial matters. Similarly, issues concerning adolescent health, sexually transmitted infections, and sexuality are relegated to the shadows of media attention. This absence could contribute to a lack of understanding and informed discussion around these topics, potentially hindering efforts to improve public health and well-being.

A health reporter interviewed for this study, working for one of Uganda's daily newspapers, provided insights into the decision-making processes of journalists and media organisations regarding SRHR topic selection:

"Agenda-setting for SRHR in our newsroom is driven by many factors. Breaking news events, like a surge in HIV infections or a controversial policy change, can grab our attention. However, in-depth pieces on under-reported issues like sex education or fertility struggles

require more time and resources to develop, which can be a challenge in a fast-paced news environment."[11]

A TV news editor shed light on the broader context:

"SRHR can be a sensitive topic, and navigating it requires careful consideration. We prioritise stories that are newsworthy, have public interest, and can be reported responsibly. Issues like sexuality education or gender identity can be controversial, and striking a balance between informing the public and avoiding sensationalism is crucial."[12]

II. Newspaper front page coverage of SRHR topics

Over the six months of reporting analysed, there was a clear disparity in the coverage of different sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) topics on the front page of Ugandan newspapers. Sexual orientation/gender identity and gender expression, and SGBV and harmful traditional practices dominated the headlines. Other topics received significantly less attention, accounting for only a small fraction of the total coverage.

While heightened awareness of LGBTQ+ issues and gender-based violence was crucial at the time, given external policy and legislative activities, the underrepresentation of other important topics, such as sexuality education and maternal health, raises concern about the public's understanding and engagement with these matters.

Front page coverage	Frequency	Percent
Sexual orientation/Gender identity and gender expression	15	48.4
Sexual and gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices	9	29.0
Early and forced marriage	2	6.5
Fertility/infertility/surrogacy/Assistive reproductive technologies	2	6.5
Sexuality education	1	3.2
HIV/AIDS	1	3.2
Maternal health	1	3.2
Total	31	100.0

Daily Monitor led the way in featuring SRHR articles on their front pages, with 16 articles representing 51.6% of the total. *New Vision* and *Bukedde* followed with 8 and 7 articles respectively, accounting for 25.8% and 22.6% of the total front-page SRHR coverage.

Front page	Frequency	Percent
Daily Monitor	16	51.6
New Vision	8	25.8
Bukedde	7	22.6
Total	31	100.0

In an interview[13] with a senior reporter at Nation Media Group, the parent company of *Daily Monitor*, it was revealed that the newspaper's extensive coverage of Uganda's controversial

---

[11] Key informant interview, September 2023.
[12] Key informant interview, August 2023.
[13] Key informant interview, September 2023.

"anti-gay bill" during the study period may have contributed to the higher prominence of SRHR issues on its front page compared to competitors. This focus on a specific SRHR-related legal development could explain why *Daily Monitor* featured a significantly larger proportion (51.6%) of front-page SRHR articles compared to New Vision (25.8%) and Bukedde (22.6%).

III. Where SRHR news coverage originates from

Understanding the origin of news stories is crucial because it provides insights into the forces that shape public discourse and understanding of important issues.

Analysis of the origins of news stories related to SRHR reveals the following:
- Heavy reliance on official sources for news: Government and parliamentary activities collectively contributed the most news stories across all media. Police activity also played a significant role, especially in online media (23.3%).
- Strong influence of religious activity: Religious activities sparked a considerable number of SRHR news stories, particularly on television (18.0%).
- Limited role of civil society and independent reporting: While CSO/NGO activities contributed to SRHR coverage, their impact was relatively modest across all platforms (5.7% to 13.2%). Similarly, independent reporting and investigations represent an even smaller share of news stories (1.9% to 11.0%). This suggests a potential gap in the representation of diverse perspectives and investigative journalism on SRHR issues.
- Varied influence of other sources: Judicial activity and document releases had some impact, with their influence varying across platforms. Business activity and company news had the least influence on SRHR reporting.

|	Newspaper		Television		Online	
Origin of stories	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**	**Freq**	**%**
Government activity (both central and local govt.)	68	22.7	57	27.8	27	17.0
Parliamentary activity	44	14.7	32	15.6	9	5.7
Religious activity	20	6.7	37	18.0	12	7.5
CSO/NGO activity	28	9.3	19	9.3	21	13.2
Police activity	23	7.7	5	2.4	37	23.3
Independent reporting or investigation	33	11.0	18	8.8	3	1.9
Spontaneous newsworthy occurrence	37	12.3	7	3.4	3	1.9
Judicial activity	19	6.3	6	2.9	19	11.9
Activities of any other body, organisation or individual	16	5.3	14	6.8	7	4.4
Document e.g. report, study/research, etc.	9	3.0	1	0.5	15	9.4
Cultural activity	1	0.3	7	3.4	6	3.8
Company/business activity	2	0.7	2	1.0	0	0.0
Total	300	100.0	205	100.0	159	100.0

IV. Article and story types used

Type of newspaper articles on SRHR
News articles were the primary choice for reporting on SRHR across the three newspapers. *Bukedde*, particularly, leaned heavily on this format (92.6%).

Commentary or opinion pieces were less prevalent across the board. This is interesting to note given that the op-ed pages of all three newspapers regularly invite writers on a range of subjects, and publication is free. This suggests that many players in the broad SRHR field may be unaware of, or not taking advantage of, this opportunity to contribute their perspectives on these important issues.

Daily Monitor featured a moderate percentage of commentary pieces (15.3%). Other formats like feature articles, letters to the editor, advice columns, Q&A interviews, profiles, and editorials had notably lower usage across all three publications.
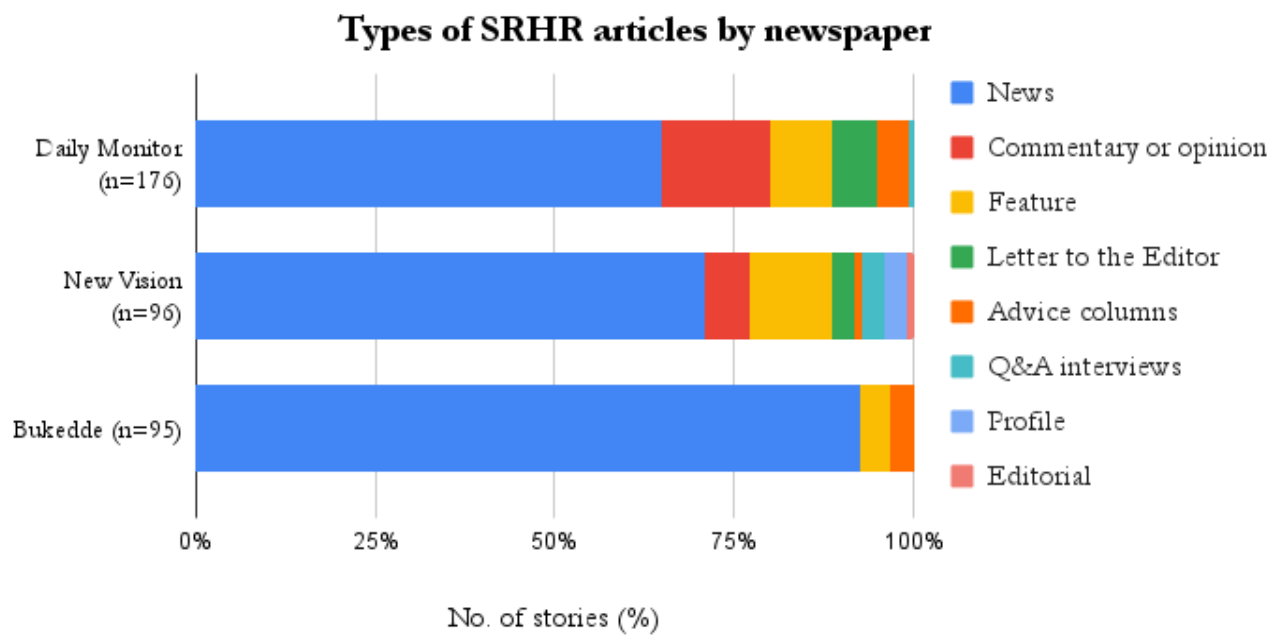
Daily Monitor offered a more diverse range of formats compared to *New Vision* and *Bukedde*, incorporating features like news articles, human interest stories, and analysis pieces. Neither the editors at *Daily Monitor* nor those at *New Vision* and *Bukedde* provided a clear explanation for this data point. This variation in format, however, presents a valuable opportunity. It suggests that media outlets could benefit from support in developing strategies to present SRHR issues – topics that often fall outside the realm of breaking news or traditional hard news formats – in a more engaging and informative way.

Type of TV stories on SRHR
SRHR stories presented as news were the primary format across all three stations. UBC stands out for exclusively focusing on news as a format (100%) without incorporating any feature or interview segments in its SRHR reporting. NTV and NBS showed some inclination towards diversifying their reporting with occasional feature segments and interviews.

In an interview[14] for this study, a UBC TV editor explained the lack of format diversity at her station:

"This finding that UBC exclusively presented SRHR stories as straight news reports reflects the realities we face in the newsroom. Resource constraints are a constant challenge.

---

[14] Key informant interview, October 2023.

Dedicating time and personnel to produce feature segments or in-depth interviews on SRHR requires careful planning and allocation of already stretched resources.

"There's also the issue of missed connections. Ideally, our SRHR reporting could be linked with other informative programming at UBC, such as health-focused shows or documentaries. To achieve this requires additional planning and coordination, which can be difficult in a fast-paced environment."

Types of SRHR articles by TV station
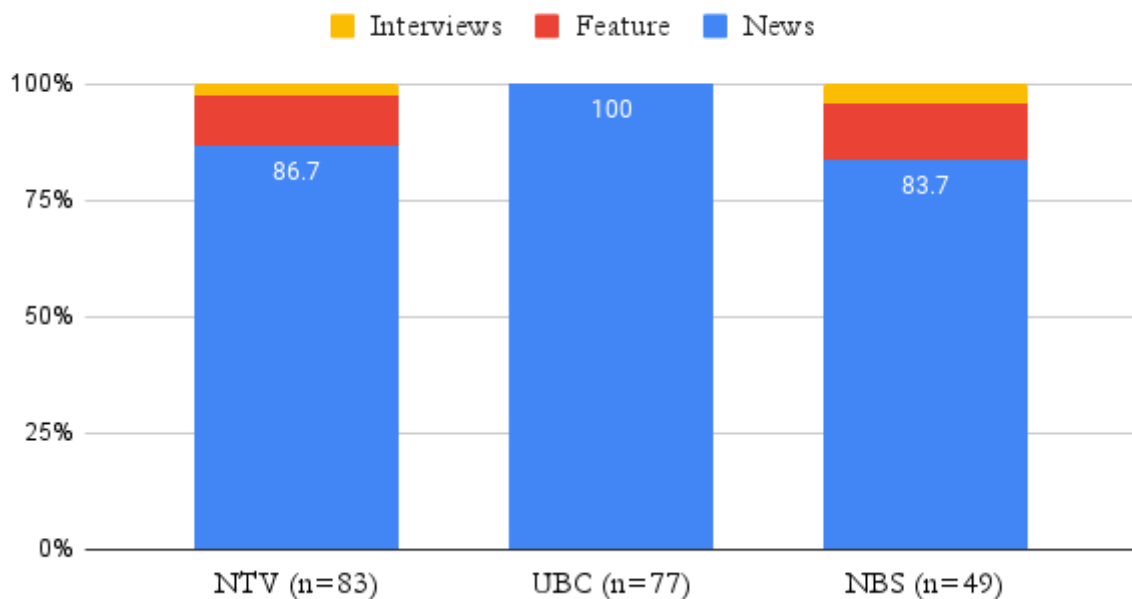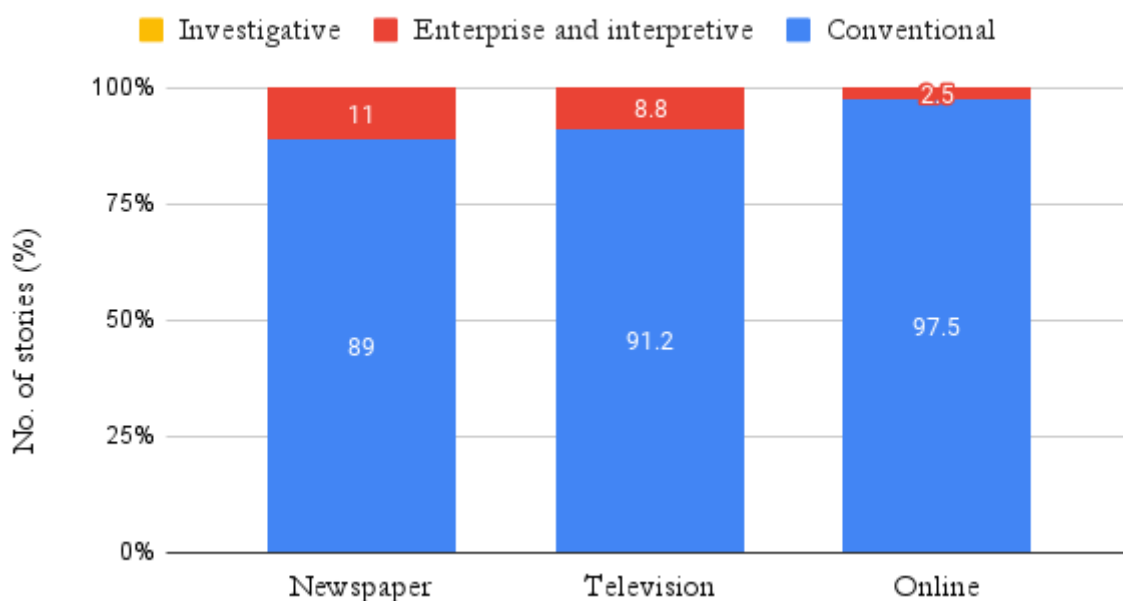

Type of online stories on SRHR
As previously mentioned, URN, the only online outlet assessed for this study, is a news agency that distributes content to various platforms, including radio stations, newspapers, and other outlets. From January to June 2023, all content it produced on SRHR was presented through news stories. The positive aspect of this strategy lies in providing concise, factual updates without the bias or subjective interpretation often found in opinion pieces. However, this exclusive reliance on news reporting might have limited the diversity of perspectives and depth of analysis available to subscribers.

V. The reporting formats of SRHR news

Assessing formats in SRHR reporting is crucial as it provides insights into how information is presented and the depth of analysis offered to audiences. Different formats offer varying depths of coverage. Investigative or interpretive formats often delve deeper into issues, providing in-depth analysis and context, whereas conventional reporting tends to provide a more straightforward, factual presentation. Assessing formats helps understand whether SRHR topics are receiving comprehensive coverage or only surface-level information.

The chart below shows that across newspaper, television, and online platforms reporting on SRHR, conventional formats dominated significantly. However, there is a notable difference in the prevalence of non-conventional formats between the mediums.

Formats used in SRHR coverage

■ Investigative   ■ Enterprise and interpretive   ■ Conventional

Platform	Enterprise and interpretive	Conventional
Newspaper	11	89
Television	8.8	91.2
Online	2.5	97.5

No. of stories (%) — vertical axis (0% to 100%)

Newspapers had a minor presence of enterprise and interpretive formats (11%), while television and online sources demonstrated significantly lower utilisation of such formats, with 8.8% and 2.5%, respectively.

Significantly, no investigative formats were identified in any SRHR articles across these platforms during the study period. This merits further attention. Investigative journalism plays a vital role in uncovering hidden truths, holding stakeholders to account, and providing critical insights that might otherwise remain unseen. Its absence suggests a potential gap in media coverage of SRHR issues, leaving crucial questions unanswered and potentially hindering accountability and transparency within the sector.

Contrary to popular belief, limitations on investigative reporting on SRHR may not solely stem from Uganda's media environment or regressive legislation concerning journalism and free expression. An editor from one of the surveyed TV stations highlighted the resource constraints that often impede investigative journalism: "Investigative journalism takes time and, more importantly, it costs a fair bit. My media organisation is a bit strapped at the moment, but we'd love to do more of it."[15]

This sentiment was echoed by an online news reporter who expressed a desire for more investigative reporting opportunities: "I have few opportunities to conduct investigations – not just on SRHR, but on all public issues. In my media organisation, the time needed to invest in a good investigative story is something we simply cannot afford. However, I would love to try this approach to reporting on everything, especially issues related to gender-based violence that I see in my area, which go under-reported because there is not enough investigative work done. Ultimately, I leave my audience wanting."[16]
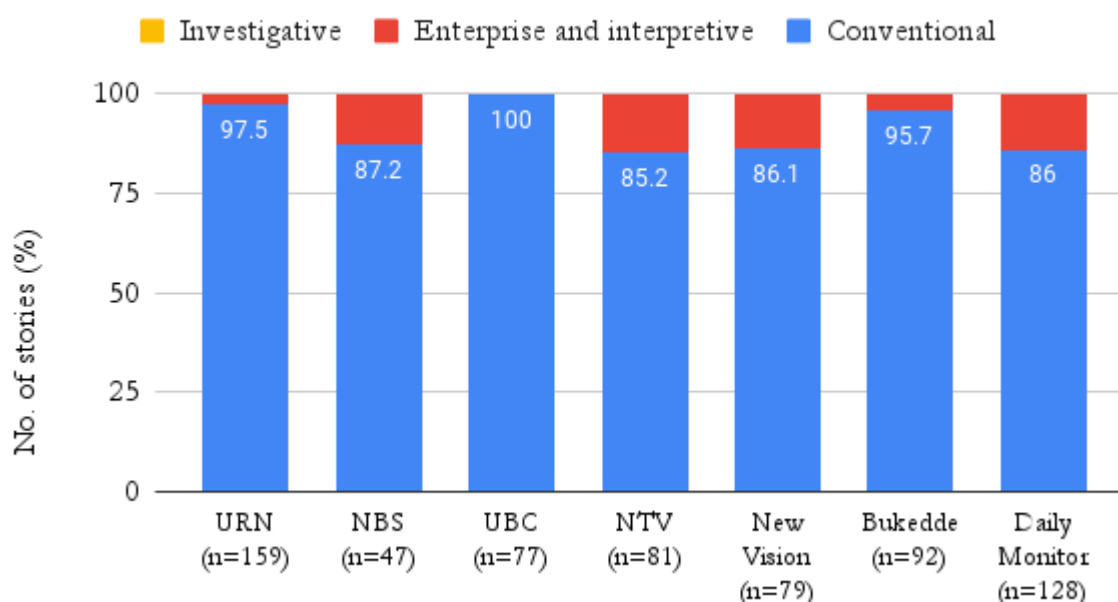
---

[15] Key informant interview, August 2023.

[16] Key informant interview, October 2023.

Reporting format per media house
As indicated above, all the outlets assessed largely utilised conventional reporting formats in their SRHR coverage. This suggests a trend toward straightforward, factual reporting without extensive analysis or interpretation.

However, there are variations, with a minor portion of articles categorised under enterprise and interpretive formats. The data suggests that while *Daily Monitor, Bukedde, New Vision*, NTV, and NBS do occasionally venture beyond conventional reporting formats, their use of enterprise and interpretive approaches remains limited. This points to moderate attempts at providing deeper analysis or contextual interpretation in SRHR coverage, but room for significant improvement still exists.

News formats per media house

Legend: ■ Investigative ■ Enterprise and interpretive ■ Conventional

Media house	Conventional (%)
URN (n=159)	97.5
NBS (n=47)	87.2
UBC (n=77)	100
NTV (n=81)	85.2
New Vision (n=79)	86.1
Bukedde (n=92)	95.7
Daily Monitor (n=128)	86

Y-axis: No. of stories (%)

Voice and representation
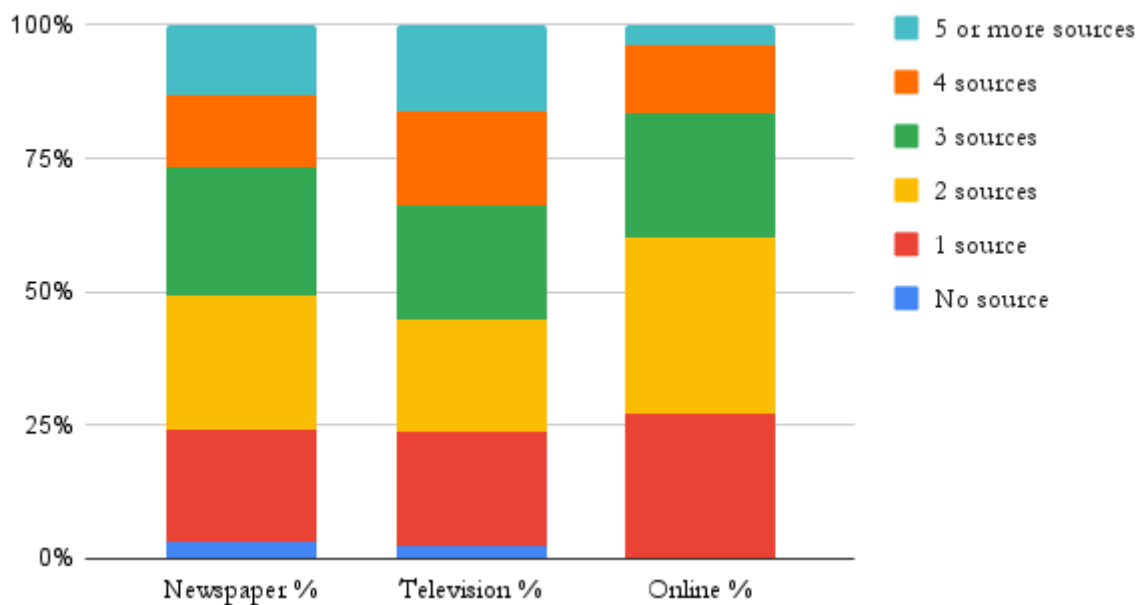
I.   Number of sources in SRHR stories

Responsible reporting on SRHR issues hinges on utilising multiple sources. This goes beyond just presenting different perspectives. By seeking information from a variety of individuals with diverse backgrounds and expertise, journalists can ensure their reporting is accurate, comprehensive, and balanced. This is particularly important in a field with complex and often contested information. Additionally, relying on multiple sources helps build trust with the audience, as it demonstrates a commitment to thorough research and avoids potential biases.

Analysis of the number of sources used in SRHR-related stories reveals that the majority of reports across all platforms (65.6%) utilised multiple sources. This highlights a positive trend towards incorporating diverse perspectives in SRHR reporting.

Distribution of sources:

- Two or three sources are most commonly used, with a range of 23.3% to 33.3% across platforms.
- Single and four-source reports are less frequent, indicating a move away from relying solely on limited perspectives.
- Extensive sourcing (five or more sources) remains the least common practice, particularly in online reporting (3.8%).
- Platforms exhibit a consistent distribution pattern regarding source utilisation, suggesting a standardised approach to sourcing information for SRHR reports.

No. of sources per story by media type

Number of sources in newspaper coverage

New Vision stands out with nearly six in ten stories (59.5%) featuring three or more sources, marking a significant depth of resourcing. Conversely, *Bukedde* had the highest proportion of single-sourced stories, accounting for nearly one in three (29.3%) of its SRHR-related stories.

Number of sources	Daily Monitor (n=129)	Bukedde (n=92)	New Vision (n=79)
No source	1.6	5.4	2.5
1 source	20.9	29.3	11.4
2 sources	20.9	30.4	26.6
3 sources	30.2	13.0	26.6
4 sources	14.0	8.7	17.7
5 or more sources	12.4	13.0	15.2

Number of sources in television coverage

For television, NTV Uganda aired nearly one in three stories (29.6%) with a single source, while NBS stood out with over half of their stories featuring three or more sources. UBC, however, had the highest proportion of stories with no source at all.

Number of sources	NTV (n=81)	UBC (n=77)	NBS (n=47)
No source	2.5	3.9	0.0
1 source	29.6	15.6	17.0
2 sources	22.2	19.5	21.3
3 sources	13.6	28.6	23.4
4 sources	17.3	14.3	23.4
5 or more sources	14.8	18.2	14.9

In an interview conducted for the study, a UBC TV editor expressed concern over the lack of source attribution in their SRHR reporting. She said: "The finding that UBC had the highest proportion of stories with no source at all is concerning and, frankly, unusual. At UBC, like many media organisations, multiple sourcing is a fundamental principle. We take these findings seriously and will be reviewing our editorial procedures to ensure all stories adhere to our high standards, which include robust sourcing practices."[17]

Number of sources in URN coverage
In URN's SRHR-related stories, over a quarter relied on a single source, while one third used two sources. Notably, URN did not publish any stories without sources.

Number of sources	Frequency	Percent
No source	0	0.0
1 source	43	27.0
2 sources	53	33.3
3 sources	37	23.3
4 sources	20	12.6
5 or more sources	6	3.8
Total	159	100.0

II. Voice and source diversity in SRHR coverage

The table presents the following findings:
- Dominance of official voices across all platforms, civil servants, politicians, and government representatives constitute a significant portion of sources (17.7% to 28.3%). This suggests a high influence of official narratives on SRHR reporting in Uganda.
- Underrepresentation of marginalised groups: Victims are consistently underrepresented across all platforms. This highlights a gap in amplifying the voices and experiences of marginalised groups in SRHR reporting. Similarly, ordinary individuals are generally underrepresented across all platforms.
- Varying representation of experts and civil society: The presence of technical experts and CSO/NGO representatives varies across platforms (5.3% to 7.6%). While offering valuable specialised insights, this disparity suggests potential gaps in coverage for specific SRHR topics.

---

[17] Key informant interview, October 2023.

Platform-specific trends:
- Newspaper: Features the widest range of voices, including civil servants, politicians, ordinary people, religious representatives, and others. However, it also emphasises official voices (32% combined) and underrepresents victims and marginalised groups.
- Television: Offers the second highest source diversity, with a strong presence of political actors (29.6%) and religious representatives (13.2%). However, it also underrepresents victims (1.0%) and ordinary citizens (9.7%) compared to newspapers.
- Online (Uganda Radio Network): Features the least diverse range of voices, heavily relying on civil servants (28.3%) and political actors (6.4%). It also has limited representation of non-official voices, with ordinary individuals (7.5%) and religious representatives (8.0%) underrepresented. Notably, it has an increased focus on business perspectives (3.9%).

	Newspaper		Television		Online	
Sources	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Central/local govt. civil servant	149	17.7	87	14.3	106	28.3
Elected/unelected political actors	123	14.6	180	29.6	24	6.4
Ordinary person quoted in their individual capacity	130	15.5	59	9.7	28	7.5
Religious representatives	62	7.4	80	13.2	30	8.0
Members of cabinet	65	7.7	57	9.4	30	8.0
CSO/NGO representatives	64	7.6	46	7.6	38	10.2
Security/military representative	56	6.7	22	3.6	41	11
Technical/subject expert	54	6.4	32	5.3	23	6.1
Victim	56	6.7	6	1.0	23	6.1
Company/business representative	33	3.9	7	1.2	4	1.1
Development partners	20	2.4	7	1.2	9	2.4
Cultural representatives	1	0.1	12	2.0	10	2.7
Perpetrator	16	1.9	1	0.2	4	1.1
Other	11	1.3	12	2.0	4	1.1
Total	**840**	**100**	**608**	**100**	**374**	**100**

III.   Gender of sources in SRHR coverage

While SRHR stories largely focus on women, the analysis of source gender used in Ugandan media reveals a consistent and concerning gender gap. This manifests across all media platforms, with male voices consistently outnumbering female voices:
- Newspapers: 59.6% male vs. 40.4% female
- Television: 64.8% male vs. 35.2% female
- Online media: 67.9% male vs. 32.1% female

Examining specific source categories further underscores this disparity:
- Government and political actors: These categories are overwhelmingly dominated by male voices, with 70.5% and 67.9% male representation respectively.
- Religious representatives: A staggering 94.8% of religious representatives are male, highlighting a significant underrepresentation of women within religious institutions.
- Victims: While highlighting the need for amplified representation, victims are predominantly female (78.8%).

Certain source categories are strikingly devoid of female voices. Security/military representatives and perpetrators, as sources in SRHR stories are almost exclusively male, indicating a substantial lack of female perspectives.

While men still dominated SRHR news coverage, the proportion of women used as sources was slightly higher than what is typically observed in ACME reports on media coverage of public affairs. In the latter case, only two out of every 10 sources identified are women.

Some categories, however, exhibit a slightly more balanced representation:
- Ordinary individuals: These individuals, more likely to be quoted in their personal capacity, offer a more balanced view with 56.2% female representation.
- Technical experts and CSO/NGO representatives: While still favouring males, these categories show a relatively balanced representation compared to others.

Sources	Female (%)	Male (%)	n
Civil servant of central and local gov't organs	29.5	70.5	342
Elected or unelected political actors on the national scene who are not central or local gov't civil servants	32.1	67.9	327
Ordinary person quoted in their individual capacity	56.2	43.8	217
Religious representatives	5.2	94.8	172
Members of cabinet	52.6	47.4	152
CSO/NGO representatives	54.7	45.3	148
Security/military representative	17.6	82.4	119
Technical expert who is independent with specialised knowledge of, or competence to comment authoritatively on the subject	31.2	68.8	109
Victim	78.8	21.2	85
Company/business representative	38.6	61.4	44
Development partners	41.7	58.3	36
Cultural representatives	8.7	91.3	23
Perpetrator	42.9	57.1	21
Other	37.0	63.0	27

Balanced gender representation in the news is an unquestionable principle in journalism. However, there are outliers that contest this. The contrasting viewpoints expressed by colleagues at a single media house perfectly illustrate this point.

A TV news producer, when questioned about the gender gap, downplayed the issue with a traditional stereotype: "We, we try to get the best people for the story, and sometimes that means men have the most expertise. Honestly, a lot of these SRHR issues are very personal, especially for women. It can be tough for them to open up and talk about these things publicly. They often end up self-victimising instead of coming forward and sharing their experiences, which could be really valuable."[18]

A different perspective emerged from a colleague at the same media house: "It's frustrating to see women continue to be underrepresented, especially on issues that directly affect them. We need to make a conscious effort to identify female experts and ensure their voices are heard. Encouraging journalists to consider the gender balance of their sources early in the

---

[18] Key informant interview, October 2023.

reporting process, and actively seeking out women who may have valuable insights to share is important."[19]

Gender of sources by media type

Gender of sources by newspaper

Female   Male

Gender of sources by TV station

Female   Male

---
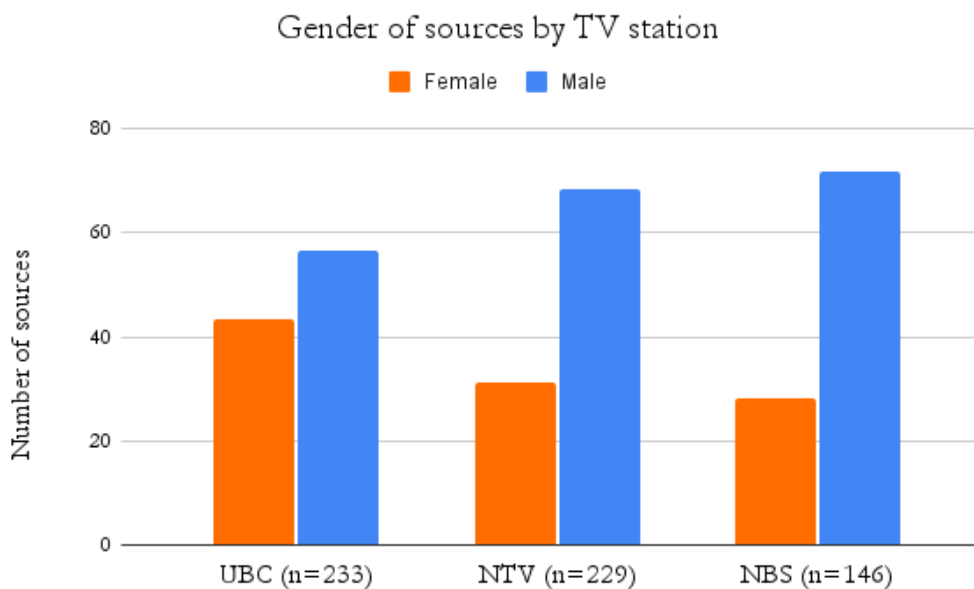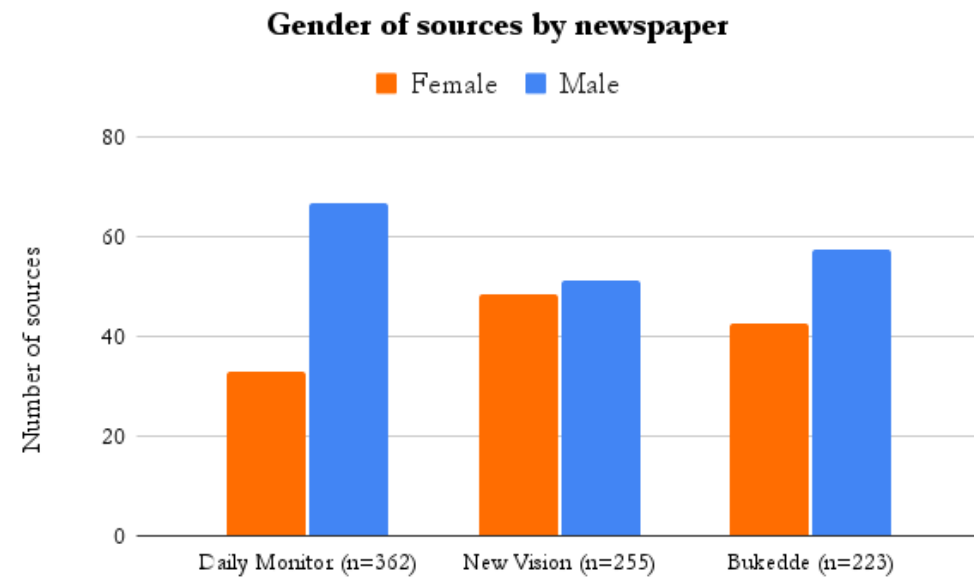
[19] Key informant interview, October 2023.
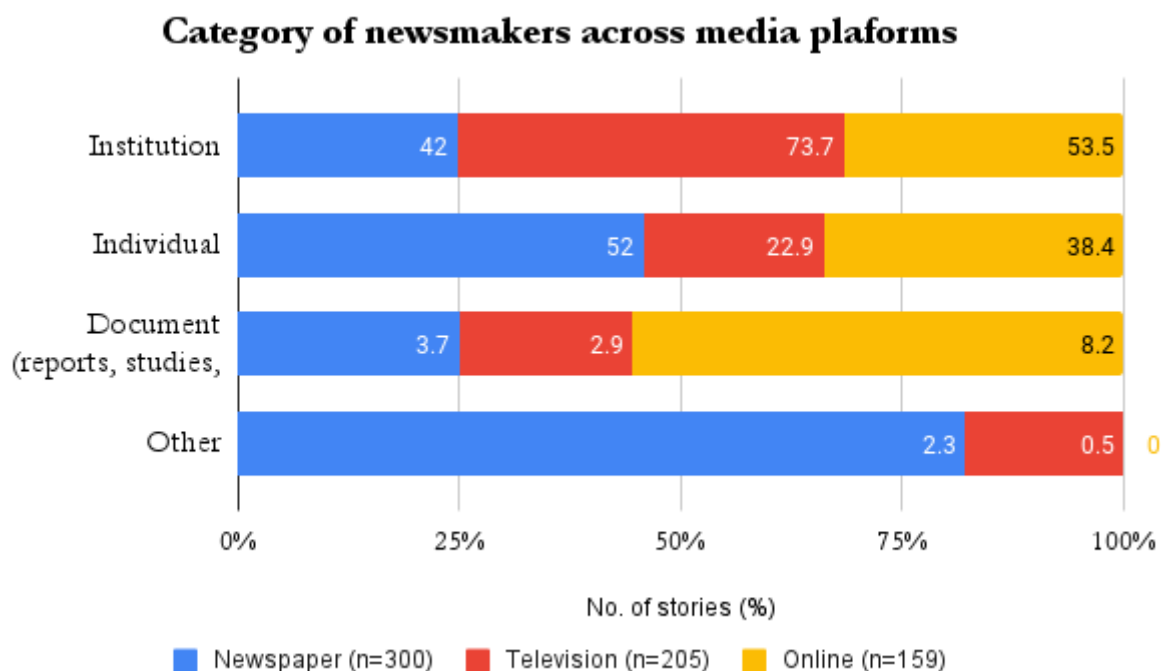
Who makes the news?

In journalism, a newsmaker refers to an individual, group or entity that generates news or becomes the subject of news coverage due to their actions, statements, events, or significance in society. They are the driving force behind news stories, shaping public discourse and influencing the information that reaches the audience.

Newsmakers and news sources play distinct yet interrelated roles in journalism. Newsmakers are the subjects or entities that create events, statements, or actions that *become the focus of news coverage* due to their significance, impact, or relevance to the public. They are the catalysts behind news stories, driving the narrative through their actions, influence or involvement in events. On the other hand, news sources are individuals, organisations or entities that *provide information*, quotes or insights to journalists to help construct news stories.

Analysing data on newsmakers is crucial as it provides insights into the key influencers, trends and topics that dominate news coverage.

Understanding the prominence and representation of different newsmakers sheds light on the dynamics of media attention, helps identify biases, and reveals the narratives shaping public perception. It also allows for the assessment of the diversity of voices represented in news, highlighting any potential imbalances or underrepresentation, which is crucial for ensuring comprehensive and inclusive reporting. Institutional newsmakers dominated coverage of SRHR issues on television (73.7%) and online media (53.5%) while individual newsmakers took the lion's share of coverage on SRHR in newspapers at 52%.

Newsmakers across media platforms

Category of newsmakers across media plaforms

Category	Newspaper (n=300)	Television (n=205)	Online (n=159)
Institution	42	73.7	53.5
Individual	52	22.9	38.4
Document (reports, studies,	3.7	2.9	8.2
Other	2.3	0.5	0

No. of stories (%)

The data indicates distinct newsmaker patterns in SRHR coverage across various media. In newspapers, individuals are the primary focus, followed closely by institutions. Television predominantly features institutions as newsmakers, with individuals comprising a smaller proportion. Online platforms display a more balanced representation of individuals and institutions. Documents such as reports, studies, or research make up a minor portion across all platforms, contributing to 3.7% in newspapers, 2.9% on television, and 8.2% online.

Institutional newsmakers
Across all media platforms, institutions play a dominant role in SRHR news coverage. Government agencies are the most prominent, accounting for nearly half of all institutional newsmakers (49.7% on television, 56.3% in newspapers, and 48.2% online). Religious institutions also hold significant influence, particularly on television (23.2%) and online platforms (16.5%).

While NGOs and development partners receive some representation, their presence is less pronounced, with local NGOs gaining more traction online (12.9%) compared to newspapers (7.9%) and television (4.6%). Academic and cultural institutions contribute minimally, with the exception of television featuring a small number of academic experts (5.3%).

Interestingly, political institutions are largely absent from online coverage as newsmakers, and appear only marginally in newspapers (0.8%) and television (3.3%).

	Television		Newspaper		Online	
Institutions	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Government	75	49.7	71	56.3	41	48.2
Religious institution	35	23.2	17	13.5	14	16.5
Local NGO	7	4.6	10	7.9	11	12.9
International NGO	8	5.3	4	3.2	6	7.1
Development partner	1	0.7	9	7.1	7	8.2
Academic institution	8	5.3	7	5.6	0	0.0
Cultural institution	7	4.6	2	1.6	5	5.9
Private institution	3	2.0	2	1.6	1	1.2
Political institution	5	3.3	1	0.8	0	0.0
Other	2	1.3	3	2.4	0	0.0
Total	151	100.0	126	100.0	85	100.0

Individual newsmakers
Newspapers notably feature individuals categorised as perpetrators and victims more prominently compared to online and television sources. Conversely, online platforms primarily highlight perpetrators as newsmakers, particularly perpetrators of SRHR-related incidents. Television coverage heavily emphasises political figures or actors as key newsmakers in this domain, with a substantial focus on politicians compared to other media types. Additionally, activists, advocates, and experts have a more balanced presence across television and newspaper sources, playing a notable role in shaping SRHR narratives.

	Newspaper		Online		Television	
Individual	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%

Perpetrator	46	29.5	48	78.7	10	21.3
Victim	56	35.9	8	13.1	8	17.0
Politician/political actor	27	17.3	1	1.6	17	36.2
Activist/Advocate	16	10.3	4	6.6	5	10.6
Expert	7	4.5	0	0.0	5	10.6
Other	4	2.6	0	0.0	2	4.3
Total	156	100.0	61	100.0	47	100.0

Framing approaches to SRHR in Ugandan media

I.   Description of frames identified in SRHR reporting

Frame analysis is a valuable tool for comprehending how media shapes public discourse. By examining the utilised frames in reporting, researchers can identify the prioritised values, assumptions, and issues within a specific topic. In the context of SRHR, understanding these dominant frames is crucial. Framing can significantly influence public attitudes towards topics such as sexual health education, access to contraception, and reproductive rights. Therefore, by identifying the frames most commonly used by Ugandan media, this study sheds light on the prevailing narratives surrounding SRHR and paves the way for further investigation into their potential impact on public opinion and policy.

The study identified these frames — human rights; service delivery; oversight and accountability; activism/advocacy; conflict; and access to information — as the most prevalent and commonly observed in the media's portrayal of SRHR issues.

- Human rights frame – This frame emphasises the inherent dignity and fundamental rights of individuals relating to their sexual and reproductive health. Stories presented within the human rights frame often highlight instances of rights violations, discrimination or denial of basic rights.

- Morality frame – Morality-based framing involves discussions that intersect with cultural, religious or societal norms regarding SRHR issues. This frame often reflects societal values, beliefs and ethical considerations related to sexual behaviour, reproductive choices or gender identities. Reporting within this frame may present debates, conflicts or challenges arising from clashes between traditional values, cultural norms and evolving social attitudes. It could highlight the tensions between conservative views and progressive advocacy for rights and equality

- Service delivery, oversight and accountability frame – This frame focuses on ensuring the quality and accessibility of SRHR services for all Ugandans. Stories within this frame often spotlight issues such as gaps in healthcare access, deficiencies in service quality, challenges in policy implementation, or instances of corruption affecting the delivery of SRHR services.

- Activism/Advocacy frame – The activism/advocacy frame involves highlighting efforts aimed at promoting change, awareness and advocacy for SRHR issues. It focuses on campaigns, movements or initiatives that seek to bring attention to specific SRHR challenges and drive societal, policy or attitudinal changes. Reporting within

this frame highlights the voices of activists, organisations or individuals advocating for policy reforms, raising awareness, and mobilising support for various SRHR causes.

- Conflict frame – The conflict frame delves into the intersection of power dynamics, be it official, between genders, caused by policy, or arising as a result of cultural or societal influences, with SRHR issues. It centres on how these power struggles influence the rights, access, and safety of individuals and communities within the realm of SRHR. Reporting within this frame sheds light on instances where power conflicts intensify SRHR challenges, like the escalation of gender-based violence, the amplified hardships experienced by marginalised groups, or clashes between conservative and progressive ideologies impacting SRHR policies.

- Access to information frame – This frame is used to report on the importance of information dissemination and access to knowledge related to SRHR issues. It highlights the significance of education, awareness, and access to accurate and comprehensive information for informed decision-making. Reporting within this frame often covers stories that address the need for increased education or awareness campaigns.

II.   Dominant frames used in SRHR reporting

Media coverage of SRHR in Uganda shows distinct framing patterns depending on the topic. While morality (86.1%) and conflict (77.2%) dominate narratives around sexual orientation, gender identity, and SGVB, service delivery takes centre stage for maternal health, HIV/AIDS, and family planning. Human rights and advocacy frames play a supporting role, particularly for LGBTQ+ issues, SGVB and adolescent health. Information access is the dominant frame used for stories on family planning and menstrual health.

This diversity of frames reflects the complexity of SRHR reporting in Uganda, with traditional perspectives still holding sway but alternative narratives gaining momentum.

Reporting frames per SRHR topic
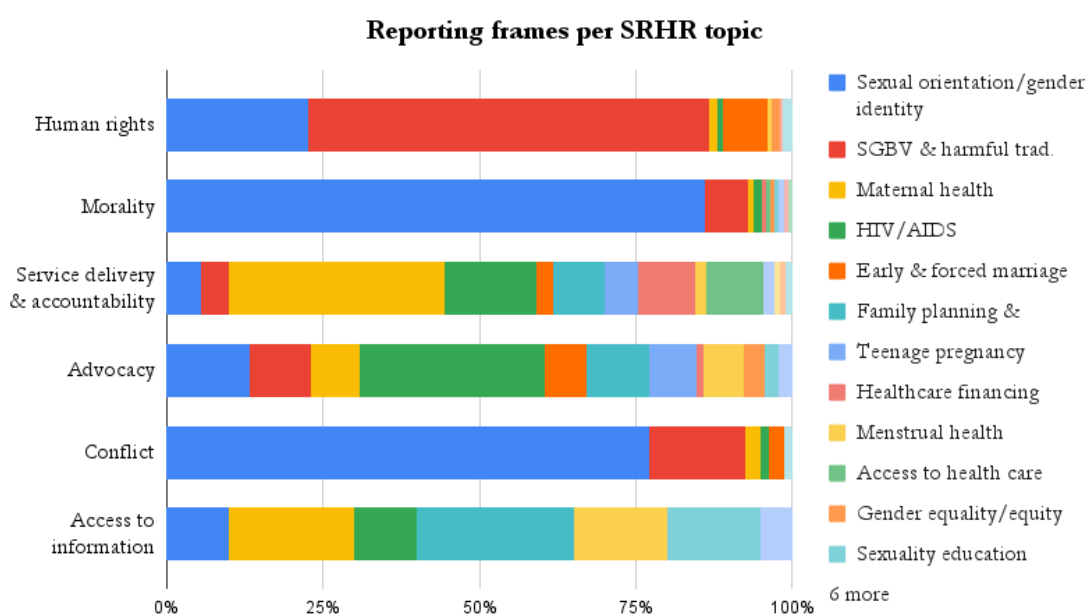
This framing analysis reveals the following:

- Media coverage around sexual orientation and gender identity in Uganda is largely framed within the context of societal norms and religious considerations, reflecting a strong emphasis on traditional perspectives (86.1% morality, 77.2% conflict).
- Amidst this dominant narrative, a subset of media coverage focuses on human rights concerns, shedding light on the struggles people most impacted by SRHR issues, and advocacy for equality and recognition.
- Reporting on sexual orientation, gender identity, and SGVB issues often intertwines with societal conflicts, highlighting the impact of societal tensions on the safety and rights of marginalised groups.
- Notable advocacy framing is observed in areas such as sexual and gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, and adolescent health/sexuality education, reflecting varied degrees of activism in different domains.

Does 'X' mark the spot? A snapshot of SRHR on social media

To provide a broad, time-specific assessment of SRHR issues on social media, Determ, a social listening tool was used. Due to the limitations of the tool, the assessment was only made of posts on the X platform (formerly Twitter) between April and June 2023.

The data gathered from the X platform reveals a vibrant online community engaged in a nuanced discussion of SRHR issues.

Key findings

- Total mentions: 3,219 mentions specifically focused on teenage pregnancy, with an additional 2,198 mentions intersecting with other SRHR topics.
- Top contributors: Civil society actors, including Centre for Health Human Rights & Development (CEHURD) and Reproductive Health Uganda (RHU), drove the conversation through webinars, stakeholder consultations, and online campaigns.
- The overall sentiment in posts on SRHR was positive, with a significant majority of mentions (70%) expressing support for initiatives addressing the issue. This highlights the growing awareness and concern about SRHR matters within the online community.

Major themes

- Gender-transformative approach: Discussions emphasised the importance of addressing gender inequalities in reducing teenage pregnancies.
- FGM and its impact: The harmful practice of FGM was highlighted as a contributing factor to teenage pregnancies.
- Advocacy for SRHR services: Online campaigns and discussions advocated for improved access to sexual and reproductive health services for young people.

Drivers of the conversation
Civil society actors, both organisations and rights-focused individual advocates played a pivotal role in driving the conversation through online events and campaigns. Webinars, consultations, and social media campaigns provided platforms for experts and stakeholders to share knowledge, strategies, and raise awareness about SRHR on X. These events contributed significantly to the volume and reach of online discussions.

Other SRHR topics:
- Abortion: 530 mentions, with discussions focused on safe abortion practices, post-abortion care, and legal frameworks.
- Sexual and reproductive rights: 429 mentions, covering menstrual hygiene, GBV, and access to SRH services.
- National community SRHR (Advocacy): 1,253 mentions, advocating for diverse SRHR issues like sex workers' rights and family planning.
- Contraceptives: 149 mentions, debating the government's agreement to promote modern contraceptives among teenagers.
- Anti-Homosexuality bill/Act: 70,620 mentions, sparking international outrage and debate on LGBTQ+ rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The study paints a multifaceted picture of SRHR media coverage in Uganda, highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement.

- **Content focus: Addressing knowledge gaps and prioritising sensitive topics**

A crucial observation is the underrepresentation of vital SRHR topics like sexuality education, fertility struggles, and sex work. This lack of coverage creates knowledge gaps and hinders public awareness, potentially limiting access to information and services for individuals navigating these sensitive and often complex challenges. Addressing these gaps requires a proactive approach from media institutions, prioritising these topics and providing comprehensive and accurate information to the public.

Conversely, television's focus on sensitive issues like sexual orientation and gender identity demonstrates the potential of the media to engage with challenging topics and promote understanding and acceptance. This trend should be encouraged and replicated across other platforms to expand the reach of sensitive SRHR issues and foster open and informed discussions.

- **Combating bias and promoting inclusivity**

A significant concern is the overreliance on official sources and the underrepresentation of civil society and independent voices in SRHR reporting. This raises concerns about potential bias and limited perspectives, hindering the presentation of diverse narratives and potentially influencing public opinion. To address this imbalance, initiatives aimed at supporting independent journalism and amplifying the voices of diverse stakeholders are crucial. This can include funding independent investigations, providing training and resources to civil society organisations on effective media engagement, and creating platforms for marginalised groups to share their stories and experiences.

Furthermore, the consistent underrepresentation of marginalised groups and women as newsmakers hinders balanced reporting and reinforces existing inequalities. This calls for a conscious effort to actively seek out and include these voices in SRHR coverage, ensuring inclusivity and promoting diverse perspectives. This can be achieved through targeted outreach to marginalised communities, partnerships with relevant organisations, and editorial policies that prioritise diverse source representation.

- **Challenging dominant narratives and elevating human rights**

The predominant focus on societal norms, religious considerations, and conflict in SRHR reporting requires critical analysis and active efforts to challenge these dominant narratives. Media literacy initiatives and capacity building for journalists are crucial to fostering a critical approach to reporting and enabling them to present information from diverse perspectives.

Encouragingly, a subset of coverage focusing on human rights concerns and advocating for equality and recognition offers a valuable counterpoint to dominant narratives. This trend should be amplified and integrated further into SRHR reporting to promote social justice and improve access to healthcare and services for marginalised groups.

- **Social media, a promising landscape for advancing SRHR in Uganda**

Examining online conversations on the X platform reveals a vibrant and multifaceted SRHR landscape in Uganda. The predominantly positive sentiment towards addressing SRHR

challenges suggests growing awareness and support within the online community. This burgeoning online discourse, coupled with the active involvement of civil society actors, paints a promising picture for advancing SRHR knowledge, access, and advocacy in Uganda, paving the way for a healthier and more equitable society for all.

Recommendations

Break down content gaps:
- Media institutions: Allocate resources and editorial support to journalists specialising in these topics. Partner with NGOs and healthcare professionals to ensure factual and sensitive reporting.
- Civil society: Develop comprehensive educational materials and resources for journalists covering sensitive SRHR issues. Collaborate with media organisations to provide training workshops and expert consultations.
- Government and policymakers: Review and revise existing media regulations and policies to ensure they do not stifle coverage of sensitive SRHR topics. Allocate funding to support investigative journalism and research initiatives addressing these gaps.

Expand source representation:
- Media institutions: Implement editorial guidelines that encourage journalists to actively seek out and include marginalised groups, victims and ordinary individuals as sources.
- Civil society: Advocate for media training programmes that emphasise ethical sourcing practices and inclusive storytelling techniques.
- Government and policymakers: Develop policies and guidelines promoting diversity in media ownership and editorial decision-making. Support initiatives that train and empower journalists from diverse backgrounds.

Shift the framing narrative:
- Media institutions: Encourage journalists to critically analyse existing frameworks and challenge biases in their reporting. Support investigative journalism initiatives that uncover discriminatory practices and promote human rights-based approaches.
- Civil society: Develop and disseminate alternative narratives that highlight the diverse lived experiences of individuals and communities. Partner with media organisations to provide training on inclusive storytelling techniques and human-rights-based reporting.
- Academic and cultural institutions: Conduct research and generate evidence on the impact of media framing on SRHR outcomes. Develop educational resources and public awareness campaigns to promote critical media literacy among audiences.

Promote collaborative action:
- Media institutions: Collaborate with civil society organisations, government agencies, and academic institutions to develop comprehensive strategies for improving SRHR coverage. Share best practices and resources to collectively raise the bar for SRHR journalism.
- Civil society: Partner with media institutions to develop joint training programmes and conduct research on media's influence on SRHR attitudes and behaviours.
- Government and policymakers: Implement policies that support independent media outlets and investigative journalism initiatives.

- Audiences: Actively seek out diverse media sources and engage in critical discussions about SRHR issues. Hold media institutions accountable for biased and inaccurate reporting.

Diversify, explore and engage:
- Media actors: Leverage diverse formats like video, podcasts, and infographics to engage wider audiences. Create safe spaces on organisational social media platforms for open dialogue that facilitates inclusive discussions on sensitive SRHR topics.
- Civil society: Maintain a strong presence on social media platforms to raise awareness, share resources and mobilise communities. Provide platforms and resources for young people and marginalised communities to advocate for their SRHR rights through social media.
- Government and policymakers: Use social media to collect and analyse data on public discussions and SRHR indicators to inform policy development and resource allocation. Communicate clearly, through a variety of social media platforms, about SRHR policies and programmes and hold stakeholders accountable for their implementation.

This study reveals a dynamic, yet flawed, media landscape where SRHR coverage presents both opportunities and challenges. While encouraging trends like the prioritisation of sensitive topics and the active online discourse offer a promising glimpse into the future, persistent content gaps, biases, and dominant narratives demand immediate attention. To truly advance SRHR knowledge, access, and advocacy in Uganda, a collaborative effort from various stakeholders is essential. Only through collective action and a shared commitment to ethical, accurate, and inclusive SRHR reporting can we create a media landscape that empowers individuals, promotes social justice and ultimately leads to a healthier and more equitable society for all Ugandans.