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## SENSATIONALISM AS A MODEL OF NEWS REPORTING ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN – A CASE STUDY OF MILENA RADULOVIĆ AND DANIJELA ŠTAJNFELD<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract.** The media play an important role in constructing public opinion on certain personas, topics and events. If they propagate stereotypes about men and women in news texts and articles, that can negatively impact the public opinion about violence against women. Although there are rare cases of the media trying to raise awareness of the problem of domestic violence and violence against women in general, the media mostly reports only on actual cases of violence when they occur. It is mostly reported in a sensationalistic way, which brings additional harm to the victims. In this paper, we researched in what way the news stories of raped actresses Milena Radulović and Danijela Štajnfeld were covered, i.e., how tabloids (Alo, Blic, Informer, Kurir, Srpski telegraf and Večernje novosti) reported on these cases on their front pages. By analyzing six daily newspapers (in the period from January 17 to February 2, 2021. and from March 23 to March 31, 2021), we found that the majority of these articles had been written in a sensationalist way, without respect for professional journalistic standards. Driven by the desire for greater circulation and profit, today's journalists of (semi)tabloid newspapers often turn a deaf ear to ethical norms, which every journalist should adhere to when performing his or her profession.

Keywords: analysis, rape, half-tabloids, tabloids, Milena Radulović, Danijela Štajnfeld

### 1. Media coverage of violence against women

Sexual violence has always been a way of imposing control over women, thus maintaining a power imbalance between genders and preserving male dominance (Popivoda et al., 2009: 6). This type of violence has several forms, the most common form includes sexual acts without the consent of the other person or using blackmail and/or threats or by using force to subdue the resistance to the unwanted acts. According to the book 'Rape is a Crime – a handbook for women survivors of violence', sexual violence includes:

- a) Sexual harassment through an offer, a joke, through conversation or pornographic content (photos and videos);
- b) Sexual blackmail a request or proposal of a sexual nature by a superior

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(employer, professor, CEO, etc.), which conditions a change of position, grade, etc.;

- c) Rape unwanted and violent sexual intercourse;
- d) Forced sexual acts touching the body, intimate parts of the body, masturbation, attempted rape;
- e) Incest sexual abuse by persons related by blood (Popivoda et al., 2009; 6-7).

'Other forms of sexual violence are: sexual slavery, prostitution, women trafficking, child sexual abuse, pornography, forced marriages, forced pregnancy, premarital women's virginity checks, etc.' (Popivoda et al., 2009: 7).

Sexual violence and harassment are widely recognized as globally significant and widespread human rights violations. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013), '35% of women worldwide report experiencing either physical or sexual violence from a partner or sexual violence from a friend, family member, acquaintance or stranger. Data from national studies and the police in various countries show a highly gendered pattern of sexual violence, with women continuing to make up the majority of victims and men, although not exclusively, the perpetrators.' (Powell, Henry, 2017: 3).

The beginning of tabloidization is connected to the 19th century. Tabloids differ from the serious press in the choice of topics that are mostly from the world of entertainment. Their content is easy and understandable, and the term tabloid is associated with the content of poor quality and immoral reporting. According to professor Jevtović, 'tabloidization in Serbia is reminiscent of a huge mousetrap in which a large number of mice, accustomed to all the dirty tricks, are trying to snatch small pieces of cheese in order to get a hold of as much power as possible.<sup>3</sup>' The task of the media is to raise awareness, to create a new system of values with different cultural patterns. The interest in tabloids is great, that is why they enable the information to penetrate the public quickly and strongly, and bring owners money and influence on the public. Journalism has an informative, educational, and entertaining role. In Serbia, when it comes to (semi)tabloid reporting, the last item is the most common, i.e., the entertaining role.

As stated in the book by Jevtović, Petrović and Aracki, messages lurk from all sides with the basic task of informing us, but also with the desire to entice, seduce and convince. 'Short, large and creative' is the basic motto, so we shape our consciousness not only under the influence of classical media but also a number of different forms that offer new meaning and consciousness to the mass audience. (Jevtović et al., 2014: 19). The authors say that good journalism means accuracy (conveying facts as they are, giving real meaning to what is said), balance (involving all stakeholders in the story), responsibility (towards the people being reported, but also towards the society being informed) and reliability (citizens can make the right decisions only if they are provided with quality information) (Jevtović et al, 2014: 47).

Neda Necić says that the media have a key role in constructing attitudes towards violence, the circumstances in which it is (not)tolerated, when it is repeated

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Source: https://www.danas.rs/nedelja/medijsko-reketiranje/, retrived June 19, 2021

or condemned, and thus have a certain impact on the audience. The way in which the audience creates attitudes about gender and gender roles usually depends on the media. (Necić, 2019: 38). On the basis of such representation of women and men, a picture of violence against women is built.

'The media write about violence only when it happens, and there are a small number of analytical and preventive texts that indicate the need to prevent it (Aleksić, Đorgović, 2011: 53-61). Some authors distinguish two tendencies in contemporary media practice when it comes to reporting on this topic' (Mršević, 2013: 135-136; Vulić, Pavlović, 2014: 116-117; Mršević 2015: 61, by Lacmanović, Milanović, 2017: 14). With the sensationalist way of reporting on violence the media do not provide support to victims of violence, while with the analytical approach, through professional reporting, they point out the problem and actions in the fight against violence.

When violence against women is reported, it is most often sexual and physical violence, while other types of violence, such as economic and psychological, are omitted or insufficiently present (Lacmanović, Milanović, 2017: 14). 'Media reporting on violence against women and violence in general, on the social context in which it occurs and the position of women are a good and useful source of information' (Mršević, 2008: 71). In the race for profit, through sensationalism, they sell ugly titles, photos, and texts. One of the well-known examples of poor reporting on this topic is 'media lynching of Ksenija Pajčin' (Mrševič, 2008: 72), when the print media hinted on their front pages day after day what could have been the motive for the brutal murder of the pop singer, calling the murder 'the tragic end of great love.' Instead of reporting and raising awareness about the problem of violence against women, the lack of reaction of the police and other institutions to the reports against the perpetrators, the media glorified the crime, and in a way justified it. Later, (semi) tabloids once again proved that they didn't learn from their mistakes when they reported on the murder of Novi Sad model Vladislava Cervenko in 2014 and on the murder of singer Jelena Marjanović in 2016.

'There are many elements of media reporting on violence against women, which can be corrected by a more professional approach, and, above all, by eliminating stereotypical portrayal of gender relations, as well as social and family roles and life's adversities of women' (Mršević, 2008: 72).

Journalists often justify and encourage violence by perpetuating stereotypes about men and women in articles, regardless of the fact that that wasn't the intention of the text. However, there are positive examples when by reporting on violence against women, they inform the public and raise awareness on this problem, its causes, and consequences. 'Words and constructions used for the titles of the articles or the announcement of the report are of special importance because they directly suggest what attitude the audience should take towards the problem/content of the article. An inappropriate title can relativize responsibility and diminish the experience of real consequences (murder for instance) and that is why the role of the editor is important here as well' (Mršević, 2008: 76).

'If the media wrote about it like this, if the media have already condemned the victim, how would anyone believe me? So, I would be like this woman from the article accused of causing violence or that the problem was in me... they (victims) become even more demotivated. Also, with such reporting, the media create an atmosphere in society so that the victim's environment begins to believe that she caused the violence, that she is guilty, that something is wrong with her and thus reduces the support she can get in her environment from family members or friends' (Lacmanović, Milanović, 2017, by Necić, 2019: 45).

Journalists who report on violence against women must know and understand the key characteristics of this problem, neither harming the victim by their texts and articles, nor condemning anyone until the court proves that someone is guilty, because that would be a violation of the Code of Journalists of Serbia. Expertise is crucial when it comes to eliminating the popular 'three S's' (sex, scandal, and spectacle) in reporting on violence against women (Mršević, 2008: 78). The mass media have a big role in creating public opinion, so journalists who write and report, especially on sensitive topics, must respect the Code of Journalists of Serbia.

'We live in a time where profit is pursued in every sphere and every goal justifies the means. It is this race for profit and competition that encourages journalists to violate the code of ethics for the sake of sales and harm the dignity of the victim' (Necić, 2019: 45). Abominable front pages, headlines, and texts full of trivial information, photos, fill the pages of (semi)tabloids for the purpose of greater circulation and sales.

'Media articles are therefore a kind of speech of a culture. The fact that similar messages are generated by very different media indicates the existence of a dominant policy of representation that is in line with current cultural patterns. With individual messages, meanings are multiplied and amplified, forming interpretive frameworks in which new messages are later easier to interpret and understand. They build a common understanding of the world and a collective sense of community. By using these patterns, the media carefully cultivates desirable notions of gender identities and roles. From the symbolic exclusion to the 'ghettoization' of women's experiences and interests, they all have a common product – symbolic gender equality' (Milivojević, 2004: 44, by Necić, 2019: 45).

Such texts are with the statements of relatives, colleagues, friends, 'close sources', while in a large number of cases experts are ignored. 'Their statements sometimes represent the only source of information about the existence of decades of violence, but also about the unsuccessful attempts of the victim to obtain help from the competent institutions' (Mršević, 2013: 27, by Lacmanović, Milanović, 2017: 15). Through their inadequate reporting on violence, the media can make the victim relive the traumatic experience she has experienced, as well as public condemnation (as happened in the cases of Milena Radulović and Danijela Štajnfeld).

As Malešević points out, *Večernje novosti* and *Blic* are dailies that have taken the position of a semi-tabloid daily press with numerous short news and reports, taking the position between the sensationalist and serious daily press (Malešević, 2018: 34).

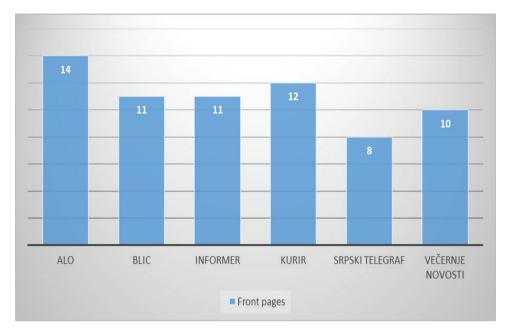
### 2. Cover page analysis

The analysis of daily (semi)tabloids<sup>4</sup>, in the period from January 17, 2021 to February 2, 2021, in the case of Milena Radulović, we found that this topic was represented on 66 front pages (*Table 1*) with seven consecutive days (from 18.01.2021. to 24.01.2021). In this period, *Srpski telegraf* and *Informer* also published double issues for January 23 and 24. The case of Milena Radulović occured 14 times in the daily newspaper *Alo*, and *Kurir* wrote on 12 front pages on this topic, while *Blic* and *Informer* reported on this on 11 front pages each. *Srpski telegraf* (8) and *Večernje novosti* (10) wrote the least about this case on the front pages (*Graph 1*).

Table 1: Representation of Milena Radulović's case on the front pages of (semi) tabloids

Date	Alo	Blic	Informer	Kurir	Srpski telegraf	Večernje novosti	In total
17.01.2021.	/	1	/	/	/	/	1
18.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
19.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
20.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
21.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
22.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
23.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
24.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
25.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	/	1	5
26.01.2021.	1	/	1	1	/	1	4
27.01.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	/	5
28.01.2021.	1	/	/	/	/	/	1
29.01.2021.	1	1	1	/	/	1	4
30.01.2021.	/	/	/	1	/	/	1
31.01.2021.	1	/	/	/	/	/	1
01.02.2021.	/	/	/	1	/	/	1
02.02.2021.	1	/	/	/	/	/	1
In total	14	11	11	12	8	10	66

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> As Malešević writes, *Večernje novosti* and *Blic* are dailies that have taken the position of a semitabloid daily press with numerous short news and reports, taking a position between the sensationalist and serious daily press (Malešević, 2018: 34).



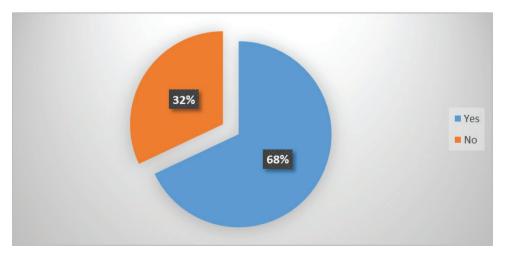
**Graph 1**: Representation of the case of Milena Radulović on the front pages of (semi) tabloids

Blic was the first to report on this topic on the front page (January 17, 2021). Only Srpski telegraf did not put the case of actress Milena Radulović on the front page on January 25, and the next day, January 26, in addition to Srpski telegraf, Blic did not write about this topic on its front page. Alo, Blic, Informer, Kurir and Srpski telegraf wrote about Milena on the front pages on January 27, while on January 28, this topic was on the front page of the daily newspaper Alo. The actress' case was the subject of four front pages (Alo, Blic, Informer and Večernje novosti) on January 29, and one each on January 30 (Kurir), January 31 (Alo), February 1 (Kurir) and February 2 (Alo). Out of the total number of analyzed daily newspapers (102), 66 (65%) had the case of Milena Radulović on their front pages, i.e., they did not report on this on 36 front pages, i.e., 35 percent of the total.

Qualitative-quantitative analysis of the front pages (Alo, Blic, Informer, Kurir, Srpski telegraf and Večernje novosti) (Photo 1) found that in the case of actress Milena Radulović and Miroslav Aleksić, in the period from January 17, 2021 to February 2. In 2021, there were 45 violations of the Code of Journalists of Serbia (68%) out of a total of 66 front pages that reported on this topic. This meant that the Code, when it came to this topic, was not violated on 21 (32%) front pages (Graph 2).



**Photo 1:** Examples of front pages of (semi) tabloids - the case of Milena Radulović Source: telegraf.rs; instagram.com/naslovnestrane365



Graph 2: Violation of the code on the front pages in reporting on the Radulović-Aleksić case

The code was most often violated by the daily newspapers *Alo, Blic* and *Informer* (9 times each), as well as the newspaper *Kurir* (8). *Srpski telegraf* and *Večernje novosti* violated the Code the least on their front pages (5 times each) in reporting on the case of actress Milena Radulović and her acting teacher Miroslav Aleksić.

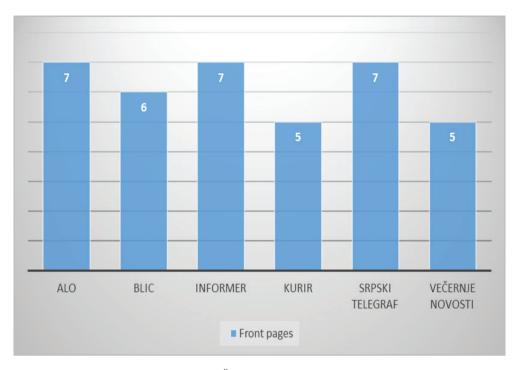
The sections of the Code of Journalists of Serbia that have been violated (most times) were: I –Truthfulness of reporting, IV – Responsibility of journalists, V – Journalistic attention, VII – Respect for privacy and VIII – Use of honorable resources.

Although the media reported on the case of Danijela Štajnfeld at the end of August 2020, when she revealed in her documentary 'Hold me tight' that she was raped by a powerful man from the film industry, in this research we covered the front pages of (semi)tabloids in the period from March 23, 2021 until March 31, 2021, when Danijela revealed the name of the alleged rapist to *Insajder*<sup>5</sup>. During this period, 37 articles were written about this topic (*Table 2*). Danijela Štajnfeld's case was found on the front pages of *Večernje novosti* and *Kurir* the least (5) times, while it was found on 6 front pages of *Blic*. Most times (7) this case appeared on the front pages of the tabloids *Alo*, *Informer* and *Srpski telegraf* (*Graph 3*).

Table 2: Representation of Daniela Štainfeld's case on the front pages of (semi) tabloids

Date	Alo	Blic	Informer	Kurir	Srpski telegraf	Večernje novosti	In total
23.03.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
24.03.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
25.03.2021.	1	1	1	/	1	1	5
26.03.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
27.03.2021.	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
28.03.2021.	1	/	/	/	/	/	1
29.03.2021.	1	/	1	/	1	/	3
30.03.2021.	/	1	1	/	1	/	3
31.03.2021.	/	/	/	1	/	/	1
In total	7	6	7	5	7	5	37

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Danijela's interview for *Insajder*: https://insajder.net/sr/sajt/tema/23273/, retrived June 10 2021



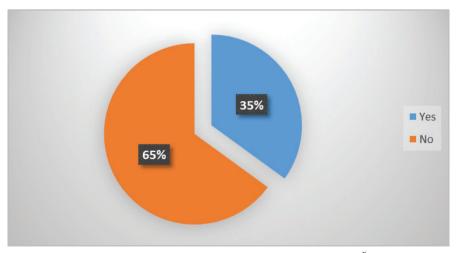
**Graph 3:** Representation of Danijela Štajnfeld's case on the front pages of (semi)tabloids

All (semi)tabloids reported on the case of the actress on their front pages on March 23, March 24, March 26 and March 27, while on March 25, only *Kurir* didn't write about this topic on its front page. *Alo* was the only newspaper to have the case of Danijela Štajnfeld on the front page on March 28. *Alo*, *Informer* and *Srpski telegraf* wrote about the Štajnfeld-Lečić case on March 29, and on March 30, *Blic*, *Informer* and *Srpski telegraf* wrote about it on the front pages. The only newspaper that dedicated its front page space to this case on March 31 is *Kurir*. Out of the total number of 54 daily newspapers, 37 had on front pages (69%) the case of Danijela Štajnfeld, i.e., they did not report on it on 17 front pages (31%).

In the case of Štajnfeld-Lečić, the Code of Journalists of Serbia was not violated 24 times on the front pages (*Photo 2*), i.e., 65 percent, out of a total of 37 front pages with this topic, but it was violated 13 times (35 percent) (*Graph 4*).



Foto 2: Examples of (semi) tabloid front pages - the case of Danijela Štajnfeld Source: telegraf.rs; instagram.com/naslovnestrane365



Graph 4: Violation of the code on the front pages in reporting on the Štajnfeld-Lečić case

Srpski telegtaf (4) has violated the Code of Journalists of Serbia in reporting on this case on its front pages most often. The daily newspapers Alo and Večernje novosti violated the Code 3 times each, while Blic, Informer and Kurir violated the Code twice.

As in the case of Radulović-Aleksić, the sections of the Code of Journalists of Serbia that have been violated (most times) are: I – Truthfulness of reporting, IV – Responsibility of journalists, V – Journalistic attention, VII – Respect for privacy and VIII – Use of honorable resources.

Based on the analysis of the front pages of (semi)tabloids (*Alo, Blic, Informer, Kurir, Srpski telegraf* and *Večernje novosti*), when it comes to reporting on the cases of actresses Milena Radulović and Danijela Štajnfeld, we can conclude that (semi)tabloids equally violate the Journalists' Code Serbia when they report on such sensitive topics on their front pages. What they most often publish are accusations and blaming the defendants, before the verdicts were rendered, as well as publishing details of their confessions, statements of colleagues/friends/family/experts regarding the case, and photos, which can harm the victims.

#### 3. Conclusion

The media, especially tabloids and semi-tabloids, violate the Journalists' Code on a daily basis with their reporting style. Sensitive topics, such as violence against women, children and domestic violence, suicide, bullying, etc., are presented in most media in an unprofessional way, trivialized and banalized. The code is mostly violated by relativizing violence, violating the right to privacy, dignity and integrity of the people that are written about, but also by violating the presumption of innocence. Disclosure of information that indicates the identity of the victim, even minors, is not rare. Craving for clicks, higher circulation and earnings, (semi) tabloids do not care whether they will cause even greater damage to victims and their families, but are primarily focused on the clickability of the headlines, which gives them an advantage in the fierce fight for advertisers. In this regard, media produce articles that are not in public interest and that encroach on the private sphere, and apart from the financial earnings, they only serve to satisfy the most primitive human urges. With this research, we found that journalists once again failed when it comes to reporting on sensitive social topics. Journalistic responsibility, sensibility and consistency in reporting on the Radulović-Aleksić and Štajnfeld-Lečić cases almost did not exist.

By quantitative-qualitative analysis of daily newspapers in the case study of actresses Milena Radulović and Danijela Štajnfeld, we determined that the media violated the Code of Journalists of Serbia. Out of 66 front pages related to the case of Milena Radulović, the Code was violated 45 times, which is 68 percent of the total number of front pages on which (semi)tabloids reported about it, while 21 front pages (32 percent) were in accordance with the Code's rules. When it comes to the Štajnfeld-Lečić case, the media wrote about it on 37 front pages, of which 13 (35

percent) violated the guidelines of the Code and 24, (65 percent) were in accordance with the Code of Journalists of Serbia.

Among the consequences of an inadequate, i.e., unethical and sensationalist approach to such topics is the normalization of such content, as well as the secondary victimization of victims who are reported on, but also of all others who share such experiences. In order to prevent such behavior of media workers, it is necessary that social responsibility prevails instead of profit. Journalists who report on these issues must be sufficiently educated and sensitized so as not to report on individual cases, but to offer the public a broader picture, with the obligatory consultation of experts in relevant fields. The focus of media content must be what the public has an interest in knowing, and not gossip, speculation and statements of anonymous 'well-informed sources'. In the modern multimedia society, all actors in the public sphere have access to numerous contents that prescribe adequate ways of covering sensitive topics and reporting on vulnerable and marginalized groups. However, what is necessary is a greater will of media professionals, i.e., that the educational role of the media takes over the role of entertainment, which should not be associated with such topics.

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# SENZACIONALIZAM KAO MODEL IZVEŠTAVANJA O NASILJU NAD ŽENAMA – STUDIJA SLUČAJA MILENA RADULOVIĆ I DANIJELA ŠTAJNFELD

Apstrakt. Mediji imaju važnu ulogu u konstruisanju stava u javnosti o određenim ličnostima, temama i događajima. U svojim tekstovima i prilozima često plasiraju stereotipe o muškarcima i ženama, koji utiču na kasnije formiranje stava kada je u pitanju nasilje nad ženama. Iako uglavnom izveštavaju tek kada se nasilje desi, retki su slučajevi medija koji utiču na podizanje svesti o ovom problemu. Uglavnom se izveštava senzacionalistični, nanoseći štetu žrtvama. U ovom radu bavili smo se temama silovanja glumica Milene Radulović i Danijele Štajnfeld, odnosno na kakav način su na svojim naslovnim stranama (polu)tabloidi (Alo, Blic, Informer, Kurir, Srpski telegraf i Večernje novosti) izveštavali o ovim slučajevima. Analizirajući šest dnevnih novina (u periodu od 17. januara do 2. februara 2021, odnosno od 23. marta do 31. marta 2021. godine) utvrdili smo da je najveći broj tekstova napisan na senzacionalistički način, bez poštovanja profesionalnog novinarstva i novinarskih standarda. Vođeni željom za većim tiražom i profitom, današnji novinari (polu)tabloidnih listova često se oglušuju o etičke norme, kojih bi trebalo svaki novinar da se drži kada obavlja svoju profesiju.

**Ključne reči:** analiza, silovanje, polutabloidi, tabloidi, Milena Radulović, Danijela Štajnfeld