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Methodological proposal for the evaluation of the ethical quality of news about violence against women

Abstract

Over the last decades there has been a significant increase in the academic literature focusing on the journalistic approach to violence against women in Spain. However, and despite the wide-ranging recommendations on how to tackle this challenge in an ethical and responsible fashion, there is still no tool that gathers and explains ethical criteria, thus helping journalists to address this type of news. On the basis of what is known as quality journalism, this paper studies available ethics-related documents in order to develop an analytical tool that evaluates the quality of news about violence against women. The potential of this tool lies, among other things, in its capacity to evaluate, both before and after, the ethical appropriateness of media coverage of this problem in line with the established consensus, with the aim of enhancing its communication and, thereby, heightening public awareness and contributing to its eradication.

Keywords

Communication, analysis, quality standards, ethics of communication, violence, woman, gender studies

1. Violence against women and journalistic responsibility

In Spain over the last decade there has been a significant increase in the number of studies dealing with the direct impact of news coverage of violence against women on the aggressions themselves. Among the most recent studies are those that dwell on the phenomenon's medium- and long-term effects, putting the accent more heavily on its cognitive, perceptive, and social sensitivity ramifications, than on its direct, individual, and behavioural consequences (Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010; Sanmartín, 2010; Vega, 2009). Furthermore, the studies addressing its direct and immediate effects (Lorente, 2009; Vives-Cases, Torrubiano &

¹ Violence against women, hereinafter VAW.

Álvarez, 2009; Luna, 2011) focus on its capacity to influence specific individual behaviours, and are also behind the theorisation of the so-called “pull factor”, “peer effect”, or “push factor”.

The presence of IPV² in television news reports would seem to increase the possibility of death from this cause by between 32% and 42%. News reports which focus exclusively on transmitting information about deaths from this cause would also appear to increase the possibility of death by between 28% and 32% (Vives-Cases, Torrubiano, & Álvarez, 2009: 594).

Thus, a number of studies reflect on the capacity of IPV in television news reports to influence individual actions, versus others that employ a referential framework based more on social framework and cognitive influences than behavioural ones.

The mass media play a crucial role in violence against women. Both as regards raising visibility, reporting, researching, and informing about the problem, and with respect to disinformation, forming preconceptions, promoting chauvinist and misogynist values, judgments, and interpretations (Largarde, 2007).

For that matter, some authors (Vega, 2009; Aznar, 1998, 2005, 2008; Lorente, 2009 a, b, among others) focus their proposals not so much on the immediacy, individuality, and possible prejudice of the effects, but rather on their influence at various levels such as those of visibility, awareness, and social sensitivity.

Carballido (2009), who has voiced her opinion to this effect, advocates for a greater proactiveness on the part of the mass media that can be perceived not only from a quantitative standpoint of the proliferation of news, but also from a qualitative perspective reflected in a greater involvement, meticulousness, and variety of approaches. For her part, Yébenes (2005) grants them the status of “disseminators of mechanisms that help to solve problems.” By the same token, Vega (2009) defends their capacity to both raise social and institutional awareness and contribute to eradicating this social scourge.

Through the prism of the media’s inherent social responsibility, and among the reflections on the need for quality information in an increasingly more complex society in the midst of a crisis of credibility affecting institutions, including the press, special mention should go to the joint work of Kovach (2003) and Rosenstiel (2001), who concluded that it is essential that journalism fulfill a series of requirements with the aim of providing citizens with the information they need to be free and govern themselves. Elements that seem evident but currently suffer serious overlaps: the obligation of truthfulness and discipline of verification, power control, a forum for critique and debate, comprehensive and balanced news, etc. (García Gordillo, Bezunartea Valencia & Rodríguez Cruz, 2013).

Nevertheless, journalism is intangible and gauging the quality of something impalpable is a complex matter. For years now scholars have raised the question of how best to go about this, while Gans (2003) has already underscored the urgent task of developing criteria for evaluating and judging news. However, all agree on the parameters that should be employed to define news quality, basing it on ethical principles – truthfulness, contrast, coherence, and fairness – which come up against the stumbling block of economic, ideological, and labour-professional constraints (De Pablos & Mateo, 2004; De la Torre & Téramo, 2004).

Thus, very often products that only meet some of the conditions of newsworthiness – i.e., novel or remarkable news – but omit requirements such as truthfulness, general interest, contrast, or context, are defined as “journalistic”. This raises a number of

² Intimate partner violence.

questions: how to recognise quality journalism and what should be its attributes, not in theory, but in parameters applicable to the real journalism that reaches the public (García Gordillo, Bezunartea Valencia & Rodríguez Cruz, 2013). And referring to quality, professional ethics, and good practice in terms of VAW, the academic community has begun to realise how useful the existing guidelines in this regard can be. Some authors (Marín, Armentia & Caminos, 2011) have already propounded the study of monitoring current ethical guidelines in the journalistic profession. However, these studies have no choice but to use some of the existing materials and guides as a benchmark, since there is neither a compendium nor even a professional consensus on what should be the indicators of quality journalism dealing with this social problem. Therefore, the research proposed here firstly involves compiling existing ethical-deontological proposals, and then, secondly, identifying consensuses and disagreements, before finally proposing an evaluation methodology that serves to help both professional journalists to write news items, and researchers to standardise studies of ethical codes.

2. Objectives, materials, and methods

The aim of this study is to review current ethics regarding journalism and violence against women in order to develop a methodological tool that contributes to the production of more sensitive news reports written to high ethical standards.

The sample contains well-known and relevant codes, handbooks, and documents pertaining to how VAW should be covered in the Spanish media.³ Although this research focused on documents clearly intended to be implemented in the workplace, two academic texts were expressly included since they were considered novel and representative of the position of the academic community in this respect.⁴

Figure 1. Sample. Ethics-related texts analysed.

Title	Authorship	Year of publication
1 <i>Decálogo de recomendaciones a los medios de comunicación para el tratamiento de la violencia contra las mujeres. Cómo tratar bien los malos tratos</i> [Handbook of recommendations to the media on how to cover violence against women. How to deal with abuse properly].	Andalusian Women's Institute	1999
2 <i>Las noticias sobre violencia contra las mujeres. Trátalas bien</i> [News about violence against women. Cover them properly].	Pamplona City Council	1999
3 <i>Noícies amb llaç blanc. Manual per a periodistes sobre la violència domèstica</i> [News with a white bow. Handbook for journalists on domestic violence].	Unió de periodistes valencians [Valencian Journalists' Union]	2002

³It is worth noting the scant involvement of the mass media, as front-line professional organizations, in the drafting of ethical codes addressing this problem. Their proactiveness in preparing their own codes is practically non-existent, delegating the task of establishing these guidelines to professional and political associations instead. This is the reason why it has been impossible to analyse a greater number of documents produced by the mass media.

⁴These exceptions have been considered appropriate in connection with three criteria: their relevance, novelty, and/or richness of content, and degree of recognition of the problem (according to the number of references found in the source texts and other documents). What is understood here by "code of ethics" is any document, style guide, compendium of good practices, or any other format that, for vocational purposes, spells out how media professionals must address the reality of VAW. Thus, the sample comprises all those materials encountered with these characteristics.

4	<i>Manual de urgencia sobre el tratamiento informativo de la violencia contra las mujeres</i> [Essential handbook on the media coverage of violence against women].	Official Institute of Radio and TV (IORTV)	2002
5	<i>Decálogo básico para iniciar el debate en los medios de comunicación</i> [Basic handbook for launching the debate in the mass media].	Saragossa City Council	2004
6	<i>Recomanacions sobre el tractament de la violència masclista als mitjans de comunicació</i> [Recommendations on the media coverage of male violence]	Association of Catalan Journalists, among others.	2004, up dated in 2009
7	<i>Decálogo para el tratamiento informativo de los malos tratos</i> [Handbook for the media coverage of abuse]	Balearic Women's Institute	2004
8	<i>Tratamiento de la violencia contra las mujeres en los medios de comunicación. Recomendaciones para las buenas prácticas en la información sobre violencia de género</i> [Media coverage of violence against women. Recommendations on good practices in informing about gender violence].	Spanish Press Federations of Journalists' Associations (FAPE)	2005
9	<i>Decálogo Recomendaciones para evitar una comunicación sexista y androcéntrica y para el tratamiento adecuado de la violencia de género</i> [Catalogue of recommendations for avoiding sexist and androcentric communication and for an adequate coverage of gender violence]	El Bierzo County Council	2005
10	<i>Código para el tratamiento informativo de la violencia de género</i> [Code for the media coverage of gender violence]	Castile and Leon Regional Government	2006
11	<i>Decálogo de buenas prácticas para informaciones sobre violencia contra las mujeres</i> [Handbook of good practices for news about violence against women]	<i>Red Internacional de Mujeres Periodistas y Comunicadoras de Cataluña</i> (XIDPIC.CAT)[International Network of Women Journalists and Communicators of Catalonia]	2007
12	<i>Ronda de conversaciones para implementar ciertas disposiciones en las cadenas de televisión</i> [Round of talks to implement certain provisions at TV companies]	Government of Spain	2007
13	<i>Las noticias de los malos tratos</i> [News about abuse]	Aragon Women's Institute	2007
14	<i>Protocolo de actuación periodística y publicitaria sobre igualdad de oportunidades entre mujeres y hombres y tratamiento informativo de la violencia de género</i> [Journalistic and advertising action protocol regarding equal opportunities between men and women and the media coverage of gender violence]	Cantabrian Regional Government	2007
15	<i>Propuesta de decálogo para el tratamiento de la violencia de género en los medios de comunicación</i> [Proposed handbook for the media coverage of gender violence]	<i>Club de las 25</i>	2007
16	<i>La violencia hacia las mujeres en los medios de comunicación. Transformando las noticias</i> [Violence against women in the mass media. Transforming the news].	Centro de Intercambios y Servicios del Cono Sur de Argentina (CICSA) [Centre of Exchange and Services of the Southern Cone of Argentina]	2007

17	<i>Medios de comunicación e violencia de xénero. Manual de redacción xornalística</i> [Mass media and gender violence. Journalistic style guide].	Galician Government	Regional	2007
18	<i>Decálogo para informar sobre la violencia de género</i> [Handbook for informing about gender violence]	<i>Público</i>		2008
19	IFJ Guidelines for Reporting on Violence Against Women	International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)		2008
20	<i>Decálogo para el tratamiento periodístico de la violencia hacia las mujeres</i> [Handbook for the media coverage of violence against women]	<i>Periodistas de Argentina en Red (PAR)</i> [Network of Argentine Journalists]		2008
21	<i>La igualdad de género no es cuestión de suerte. Catálogo de recomendaciones para el tratamiento de la violencia de género en los medios de comunicación</i> [Gender equality is not a question of luck. Catalogue of recommendations for the media coverage of gender violence].	Cabildo de Tenerife [Island Council of Tenerife]		2008
22	<i>Recomendaciones para un tratamiento informativo adecuado de la violencia contra la mujer en los medios de comunicación (“Declaración de Valencia”)</i> [Recommendations on the adequate media coverage of violence against women (“Declaration of Valencia”)]	Valencia Government	Regional	2008
23	<i>Recomendaciones para el tratamiento mediático en casos de violencia de género</i> [Recommendations on the media coverage of cases of gender violence]	<i>América Latina Genera</i>		2009
24	<i>Decálogo sobre el tratamiento informativo de la violencia de género en los medios de comunicación</i> [Handbook for the media coverage of gender violence]	<i>Agrupación de Mujeres Periodistas de la Asociación de la Prensa de Granada</i> [Women Journalists’ Union of the Granada Press Association]		2010
25	<i>Acuerdo marco del compromiso de los medios de comunicación y los periodistas de Extremadura contra la violencia hacia la mujer</i> [Framework agreement of the commitment of the mass media and journalists of Extremadura to combating violence against women]	Press Associations of Caceres, Badajoz, and Merida		2010
26	<i>Código de los profesionales de CSTV para la elaboración de informaciones sobre violencia machista</i> [Code for professionals at CSTV for covering news about male violence]	<i>Canal Sur Televisión (CSTV)</i>		2010
27	<i>Proyecto de Ley para el tratamiento mediático de la violencia de género</i> [Bill on violence against women in partner relations]	Ferrari, G. (<i>Frente Peronista Argentina</i>)		2011
28	<i>“Cómo informar sobre la violencia contra la mujer en las relaciones de pareja”</i> [How to report on violence against women in partner relations]	Fernández, A. & Noblejas, M.		2011
29	<i>“Propuesta para un tratamiento eficaz de la violencia de género”</i> [Proposal for an efficient coverage of gender violence]	Bandrés, E.		2011

Compiled by the authoresses.

The research technique employed here for the comparative ethics analysis was qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 1999; Piñuel, 2002). The category system took into account the areas of interest in the ethical proposals and the thematic areas shared by them. Lastly, a consensus map for ethical recommendations was constructed.

The category system was developed on the basis of an open system completed and defined by reading the documents (sources and units of analysis), following an “ethics-related” strategy for its implementation, it being understood that

[...] the specific and ultimate system of categorisation is the result of a heuristic compromise between both theoretical and pragmatic approaches. The resulting code is a map to which categories can be added at any time, as well as being eliminated or reformulated (Ruiz, 1996: 207).

The categories defined for the qualitative analysis were as follows:

1. Context. What is referred to here is the structural frame of VAW and the ideological approach offered.
2. Information sources. In this regard, recommendations relating to the use of information sources and reflections on the legitimacy of different kinds of sources were grouped together.
3. Approach. Observations on the limits of news coverage and calls for avoiding the over-simplification of this social problem,⁵ and the stance that should be taken vis-à-vis its conceptualisation, were included.
4. Resources. These involved both style-news resources (sub-titles, tickers, etc.) and an invitation to name the welfare resources⁶ currently available.
5. Identity and identification. This category deals with recommendations on identity protection, in addition to other issues relating to the identification of certain information elements (for instance, nationality).
6. Terminology. This item addresses lexical recommendations on the terms that should be employed when covering VAW.
7. Causes. Allusions to possible causes of VAW, differing from the structural and patriarchal circumstances of this kind of violence, were included.
8. Images. Given the importance of images for current society and social impact, and in the articles of the Organic Laws in this regard (which underscore the importance of paying special attention to them), the recommendations made in this respect were analysed.
9. Wording. The recommended guidelines for all types of wording to be employed, the use of specific expressions and adjectives, and the appropriateness of certain descriptions of VAM-related incidents were analysed.
10. News placement. In this category, assessments of the adequate placement of news about VAW were reviewed.

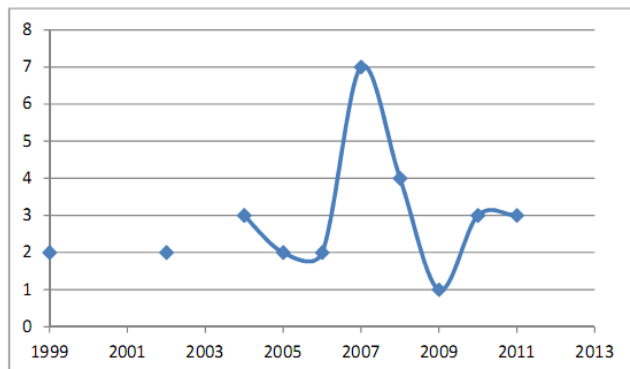
3. Ethical code study

Some interesting conclusions can be extracted from the results. Firstly, the proliferation of documents seems to be closely related to the degrees of social sensitivity that promote specific gender legislation.

⁵ Basically, there are several modes of violence, besides the physical kind, which are neither limited to partner relations nor linked to socio-economic profiles.

⁶ For example, 016, the toll-free helpline whose calls do not appear in the telephone bill.

Figure 2. Publication dates of the ethical-documental sample.

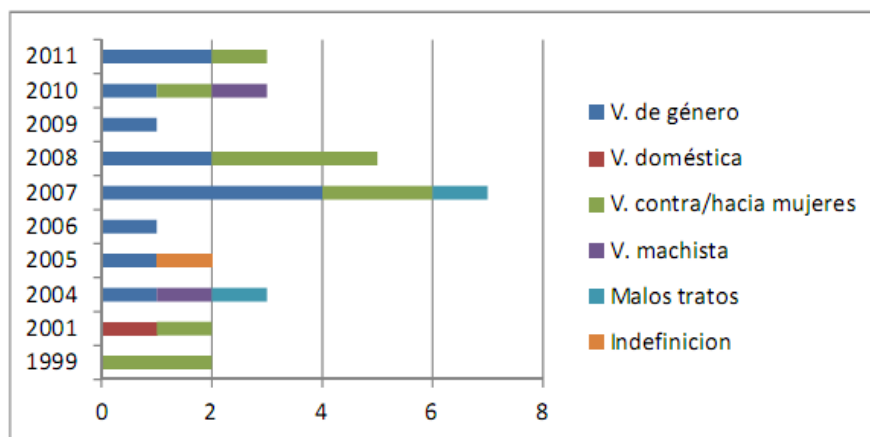


Compiled by the authoresses.

Thus, at least two peaks of interest can be observed in 2004 and 2008, years in which the following legislation was passed: Organic Law 1/2004, of 28 December, on Integrated Protection Measures against Gender Violence, and Organic Law 3/2007, of 22 March, for the effective equality between men and women.

The impact of these legislative measures can also be seen in the terminological influence existing between the laws passed (equality, “gender”) and the terms employed in their titles. As can be appreciated in the following figure, from 2004 onwards the syntagm “gender violence” began to be used more frequently. This phrase, which could be called a “legislative expression”, predominates in the terminology employed in the documents analysed here.

Figure 3. Terminological forms of reference in the main codes of ethical conduct dealing with the media coverage of gender violence.



Compiled by the authoresses.

[Figure 3: Gender violence / Domestic violence / Violence against women / Male violence / Abuse / Indeterminate]

Secondly, there was a broad convergence between the ethical values expressed in the different documents, regardless of their nature.

On the basis of the category system designed here, the following should be highlighted:

1. Context. The recommendations are keyed to defining the problem as a social one and in the framework of human rights. In this respect, they include proposals for generally improving how women are represented in the mass media within a frame of equality with male representations.

2. Information sources. Most of the documents recommend that only official and/or technical sources be consulted and reflected in news reports, as well as bearing in mind women's and welfare associations.

3. Approach. On the whole, it is suggested that case coverage be used to explain and shed light on the magnitude of the problem. And, to this end, in addition to doing everything possible to explore the context of each case, it is recommended that other possible violence also be broached, using social pedagogy to help to identify different violent demonstrations and behaviours that contribute to preventing and exposing the phenomenon.

4. Resources. "Resources" are understood from a dual perspective: audiovisual resources and public resources. In the first case, it is advised not to employ recreations, reconstructions of the facts, or background music that evokes terror. From a perspective of journalism as a public service, reference is made to the resources mentioned above in the second item, i.e., welfare-related resources. The ethical codes of conduct analysed here recommend including the 016 helpline in news reports, as well as other available public resources or steps to be taken in cases of violence.

5. Identity and identification. With respect to the identity of those involved in cases of VAW, there is not the same degree of consensus as regards the identification of the female victims and their aggressors. As to the victims, it is generally recommend that their privacy and anonymity be protected. The same goes for any children involved, a point that most of the documents analysed here expressly mention. However, in the case of the aggressors, opinions are split.

6. Terminology. At the level of language use, attention is drawn, without exception, to the terms considered suitable for referring to VAW. Thus, there are prohibitive recommendations that advise (with a varying degree of forcefulness) against the use of references such as "crime passionnel". The repudiation of this expression, which appears in the majority of the documents on having been a popular way of referring to these crimes, is contended in an inadequate thematic frame: love and affection. With respect to the designation of the phenomenon itself, the documents generally agree on the relevance of the use of the institutionalised expression "gender violence". The recommendations in this regard are organized in two different modes of assessment. There are proactive documents that suggest the most adequate terms, according to their criteria, and prohibitive ones that advise against the use of specific terms. The abundant and varied ethical standpoints with respect to terminology have a heterogeneous relevance, apparent in a symptomatic referential chaos lacking in conceptual depth. Notwithstanding this, there is a clear consensus as regards generally accepted formulas (gender violence, male violence, and violence against women).

7. Causes. Regarding the mention of possible causes of VAW in news reports, the codes provide for the following: (a) special care must be taken with adjectives that could place aggressors at a different level than that of men in their right mind; (b) arguments or wording that could suggest non-existent motives or causes, mitigate the seriousness of the violence, or cast doubt on the real motives behind it, must be avoided; and (c) special attention must be paid to stereotyping. Basically, news reports must abstain from identifying aggressors with marginality, poverty, or nationality. The handbooks constantly insist that abusers have no specific profile.

8. Images. The main recommendations are related to the privacy and dignity of the victims and, generally speaking, endorse the view that images in which they or the crime scene can be identified should not be published. This protection is applied to a greater or

lesser extent, ranging from prohibiting the identification of the victims and their immediate environment (like, for instance, *Agrupación de Mujeres Periodistas de la Asociación de la Prensa de Granada*, 2010) to other codes that claim that the limit is to be found in the consent of the victims (PAR, 2008; XIDPIC.GAT, 2007).

9. Wording. As to wording, the main point of accord touches on the specificity of this type of information. What is called for is to frame this phenomenon as a violation of human rights, and the integrity, freedom, and dignity of women. Consequently: (a) it cannot be treated as a conventional occurrence; (b) frivolous language must be avoided; and (c) sensationalism and morbid fascination, as well as dwelling on scabrous details, must be eschewed. Another of the main focuses of interest concerning wording has to do with the efforts to combat the so-called “narcotic effect” or “social desensitisation effect”. In the handbooks, this effect is associated with recommendations to avoid repetitive and recurring formulas, such as “a new victim of...”, “another woman...”, or “another case of gender violence...” that contribute to the public becoming habituated to them.

10. News placement. As regards this item, it is generally accepted that what is involved is not an incident. And as such, cases of VAW cannot be included in sections specifically earmarked for current events. On the whole, the codes in which the issue is explicitly mentioned refer to sections of the printed press and assert that the “Society” section is the most suitable.

The ethical proposals, which concur for the most part as has been seen, disagree however on three points: the terminology to be employed; the legitimacy of using non-technical and/or non-expert sources; and ensuring the anonymity of the aggressors. Thus, for example, it is observed that, despite the fact that the terminology used is influenced by the date of publication of the different documents, there is still a certain degree of consistency in the diversity of uses of the terms “male violence”, “violence against women”, and “gender violence”. Although a large number of handbooks recommend the use of the legislative expression “gender violence”, the profusion of terms recommended and employed could lead to conceptual confusion and, consequently, diminish social gain.

In the case of the sources, though what is mainly advocated for is the use of those of a technical and/or expert character, there are three exceptions when other types of sources can be resorted to: (a) when they have been eyewitnesses to the incident (*Cabildo de Tenerife*, 2008); (b) should they provide “newsworthy information” (RTVA, 2010); and (c) if the sources condemn what has happened (Saragossa City Council, 2004).

Lastly, as to the “Identity and identification” category, different approaches to the media coverage that should be given to aggressors were observed. On the one hand, several codes support the publication of the identity of the aggressor (Andalusian Women’s Institute, *Unió de periodistes valencians*, IORTV, PAR, and Saragossa City Council, which also calls for an agreement for officially obtaining photographs of the aggressors). On the other, there are also those that address, with caution and nuances, the suitability of identifying them. Among those defending this posture is the newspaper *Público* (which considers that, to do so, there must first be a court conviction) and the Cantabrian Regional Government (which believes that, to disclose this information, there should be a court conviction or “the author’s confession”).

4. Results: a methodological proposal for the evaluation of the ethical quality of news about violence against women

After analysing the state of the question about how to address news dealing with VAW in an ethical and responsible fashion, and given the scant influence of this prolific documentation on the newsrooms of the Spanish media (Zurbano, 2015), a checklist was designed to assess the alignment of news reports with existing ethical recommendations.

By means of this elementary, but by no means simple or unsubstantiated, tool, the idea is to implement this evaluation in newsrooms, insofar as it seems clear that the failure to apply ethical-professional standards with respect to this problem is not so much due to insensitivity, but rather to a lack of awareness of many of the documents-handbooks, on the one hand, and enforcement, on the other.

They [the codes] appear to be keyed to their own audience, rather than to journalists[...]there is no intercommunication between those who draft documents for journalists and the journalists themselves (writer for *El Mundo*).

They have very little to do with reality. It is all well and good [...] it is a great marketing campaign for a school or press association [...] but it is the work of idealistic people who have very little to do with the journalistic profession, since life is hard, to practice journalism is very difficult (editor of *El Mundo*) (Zurbano, 2015: 294).

This proposal has been designed as a tool for helping professionals faced with ethical doubts and concerns to make decisions about a relevant topic without a prior taxonomy to assist them in this regard. The overall aim is to both offer professionals support and minimise the risks of offending sensibilities and the harmful effects that have already been addressed above. The checklist serves, therefore, to support decision-making on the basis of scientific rigour and criteria, as well as an ethical commitment, protecting both freedom of information (so necessary) and maximising the social gains of a well-thought-out news production.

Figure 4. Ethical checklist for news reports dealing with violence against women.

Category	Variable	Review
Context	1. In the text, some of following expressions are used: human rights, social problem, and/or structural problem.	✓
	2. Information is provided on the aggression being covered: reports or previous knowledge of the context and/or law enforcement agencies, measures or proceedings taken, etc.	✓
Sources	3. There are at least two information sources.	
	4. The sources employed are all official and/or expert.	
	5. Among the expert sources employed, one or several of them are women's and/or welfare organisations.	✓
Identity-Identification	6. The information provided in the news report does not allow for identifying either the victim or her immediate environment.	
Terminology	7. A specific ticker is used with the chosen term or this takes pride of place in the headline.	
	8. The terminology employed is included in the following list: violence against women, gender violence, or male violence.	
	9. Not more than two different terms are used in the text.	
	10. The following terms and/or syntagms do not appear in the text: domestic violence, abuse, love.	
Images	11. Images of condemnation and/or repudiation are included (demonstrations, public statements, etc.).	

Extracts of interviews with journalists of *El País* and *El Mundo* about their views on and the application of codes of ethical conduct vis-à-vis media coverage of VAW. Steps were taken to safeguard the anonymity of the respondents, according to the procedure described in detail in the source study.

	12.The images do not allow for the identification of the victim or her immediate environment (workplace, place of residence, etc.).	
Causes	13. There is an absence of causal explications for the violence covered.	
	14.Parallels are not drawn between the violence and mental problems or, if this does indeed occur, the specificity of the case is sufficiently explained, avoiding the mental association between violence against women and mental problems.	
	15. Information is not provided about the socio-economic status of the people involved, or about their nationality or religion. If strictly necessary, it is made sufficiently clear that aggressor and victim “profiles” do not exist on the grounds of gender.	
Wording	16.Details about the <i>modus operandi</i> are omitted.	
	17.Repetitive expressions, such as “a new victim...”, “another woman attacked...”, “a new case of...”, are not used	
	18. Adjectives to describe the people involved or their way of life are avoided.	
	19.The explanations for the aggression are narrated in a logical order: “A man attacks a woman resulting in x”. And not in a passive way, reversing the roles: “A woman dies after being stabbed by her husband”.	
Resources	20.The helpline 016 is mentioned, whether as an infographic resource or in the body of the text.	
	21.The news report includes information about at least one organisation specialising in women’s welfare.	
Approach	22.Mention is made to more than one form of violence and/or, in any event, to the fact that other forms exist, besides that being covered.	
	23.Information about violence against women at different levels (global, state, regional, etc.) is included to frame the case in hand in a more widespread social problem.	
Placement	24.The news report should appear in the Society section, whenever possible, if not, an effort should be made to give it priority as news of national interest and/or with references in highly visible media sections.	
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •From 1-6 points: Revision is recommended as the text does not comply with existing ethical standards. •From 7-12 points: The text meets some of the recommended criteria, but it can be improved before publication. •From 13-18 points: The text complies with a large number of ethical standards, therefore it seems to be suitable for publication. •From 19-24 points: Current ethical recommendations have been implemented systematically. The publication of the text contributes to social welfare. 	

5. Discussion

The mass media are responsible for shaping the common collective imaginary, as with public opinion on current events, and, furthermore, play an important educational role with respect to pressing social issues such as VAM. They are capable of setting the agenda (highlighting or concealing social problems), but once they have decided to draw attention to a problem, they can do so in several ways (prioritising issues and deciding on approaches, conceptualisations, and terminology). All this has enormous social repercussions.

In the case of VAM, the media are acknowledged by both the legislation, which relies on them as a tool to eradicate this problem (Zurbano & Liberia, 2014), and the profession and society as a whole, as is shown by the profusion of documents analysed here which attempt to standardise journalistic production in this regard.

These documents give us some idea of the relevance of the issue and its recognition by public institutions, professional associations, the academic community, and the mass media (private enterprises). All their approaches and objectives are bursting with good intentions. However, it could be argued that, to date, the recognition of the problem has not achieved the desired level of success and impact in its practical application by the media and their professionals.

Therefore, the tool proposed here is of great value in a dual sense. On the one hand, for professional journalists it is a useful instrument, based on those items that would improve the quality of news production, which can be applied rapidly and effectively in real contexts. On the other, this tool not only evaluates, but can also be used to chart a path forward; a path based on what for years has been defined as desirable ethics.

Emphasis should be laid on the value it has for communication researchers, since this text analysis tool endeavours to contribute to a standardisation that is vital for future research into the matter, be it the study of specific cases or that of the evolution of media coverage of the issue. Based on a wide-ranging and meticulous compilation and analysis of ethics-related documents, this standardisation must be confirmed by the scientific community for its future implementation.

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