

THE CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN THE MEDIA WORK PLACE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges faced by female journalists in media workplaces in Zambia. Despite the increasing participation of women in journalism, many continue to experience gender-based discrimination that limits their professional growth and equal participation in the media industry. The research highlights key challenges such as financial inequality, limited access to leadership positions due to the glass ceiling, masculine newsroom cultures, and sexual harassment. It further explores how historical, cultural, and social factors have contributed to the persistence of discriminatory practices against women in the workplace. The study analyzes relevant national and international legal frameworks, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Employment Code Act, and the Gender Equity and Equality Act, which seek to promote equality and protect women from discrimination. However, despite these legal protections, many female journalists continue to face unequal pay, restricted career advancement opportunities, gender stereotypes, and unsafe working environments. The research concludes that gender discrimination remains deeply embedded within the Zambian media industry and continues to affect the professional experiences of female journalists. It emphasizes the need for stronger enforcement of existing laws, institutional reforms, and changes in workplace culture to promote equality, protect women's rights, and create a more inclusive media environment.

Keywords: *Female Journalists, Gender Discrimination, Media Workplace, Zambia*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Journalism has practically become a feminine profession across the world however female journalists and women working in other sectors of employment must deal with specific threatening environments that restrict their work.¹ From gender discrimination at work, sexist and misogynist comments, sexual violence and gender based killings of women these threats tend to be invisible and are not recognized as undue restrictions of their human rights by most colleagues, the media, and state authorities.² Female journalists in Zambia, like the rest of the world face a number of gender based challenges. This research discusses challenges faced by female journalists in the media work place.

2.0 GENDER DISCRIMINATION AT WORK

Discrimination against women is defined under the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.³ Female journalists primarily entered journalism to appreciate female audiences in the nineteenth century and were expected to write about topics to be considered of interest by women, such as food, fashion, family and furniture. Today, global research shows under representation at all levels of news organizations, with a glass ceiling among many other barriers preventing women from rising to the top positions. Although in recent years more and more women have been practicing journalism, social norms and gender stereotypes still present an enormous challenge to the ability of women to begin and persevere a career in journalism on equal terms with men.⁴

Barriers to women's ability to climb the cooperate ladder in the media industry and negative or gender-blind and biased attitudes in the media are varied.⁵ They include, women's low status in society, traditional and cultural expectations, heavy workloads, double shifts of working at

¹E Lanza, *Women Journalists and Freedom of Expression, Discrimination and gender-based violence faced by women journalists in the exercise of their profession* (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency 2018) 10.

²Ibid.

³Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

⁴E Lanza, *Women Journalists and Freedom of Expression, Discrimination and gender-based violence faced by women journalists in the exercise of their profession* (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency 2018) 16.

⁵R Nyondo, *Career Choices for female Journalism Student: A case in Zambia* (UNZA Press 2005) 3.

home and office , and their absence in positions of formal authority or decision making.⁶Gender discrimination in different institutions including media houses as observed today derives its roots from the time society begun differentiating roles between women and men. These roles were defined according to societal beliefs and customs. The customs and beliefs became the norm by adoption and compliance. Society started to perceive men's roles as being superior to those of women and the status of men was given a superior position. The superior status ensured men's dominance in all areas of human activity with exception of maternal roles of carrying a baby for nine months.

The colonial governments in Sub-Saharan Africa made it worse. Females were discriminated against in the education system and society accepted it. Interviews with older women in a literacy class revealed that females who pursued any formal education were even labeled as "prostitutes."⁷The colonial system gave education and employment to males, therefore, men became responsible for policy formulation and drafting rules and regulations. In the process, their priorities did not consider women's interests. The colonial governments, by empowering men with education and employment, automatically positioned them as the sole bread earners of the families. The important role that a woman held in the home was diminished more and more. This masculine culture reflected in society in general also penetrated media houses and other institutions and other social sectors.

3.0 THE CHALLENGES OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN MEDIA WORK PLACES

Gender discrimination generates inequalities between men and women. More and more women find that they have to prove themselves in their work places so that they are seen as equals to their male counterparts. Below are some of the challenges that female journalists encounter in their work places.

4.0 FINANCIAL INEQUALITIES

Financial inequality is where women earn a lower wage than men although they share identical professional qualifications and credentials.⁸In reality globally female journalists are paid less as compared to male colleagues in some media houses, and they work under huge social pressure and mobility problems. This is because journalism has been observed to be organized on masculine values notwithstanding the rise in the number of women entering the field.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

⁸LT Dibetso, *Airing out the Dirty laundry, Gender discrimination in Zambian media workplaces* (Fesmedia Africa 2015) 12.

Recognition of their work and better wages are needed to encourage female journalists to stay in this profession. It can be opined here that some rules or practices appear on the surface to be neutral but in practice lead to exclusions, which excludes some women from certain opportunities in employment.⁹

'The Employment Code Act' under Section 5 (4) explicitly provides that "An employer shall pay an employee equal wages for work of equal value."¹⁰ Furthermore, Article 16 (1) (b) of the *'International Labor Organizations' Fundamental Conventions'* (ILO) under the equal remuneration Convention provides for equal remuneration for men and women workers.¹¹ In addition, Article 11 (d) of CEDAW Provides for "the right to equal remuneration, including benefits, and to equal treatment in respect of work of equal value, as well as equality of treatment in the evaluation of the quality of work."¹²

In chapter three it was noted that Section 5(4) of the *'Employment Code Act'* has a weakness. This weakness being that the *'Employment Code Act'* does not expressly provide means on how the equal remuneration principle can be achieved. Therefore because of such gaps in the current law female journalists still continue facing problems of financial inequality.

According to a central statistical survey with a population of 15 million, 400, 000 of Zambia's citizens are in formal, pensionable employment and the majority of these are male.¹³ While different gender activists have mouthed various campaigns to balance the gender scale in the country, they are most often met with resistance when it comes to addressing the salary or wage disparate between women and men.¹⁴ The more women we have in employment, the greater potential for economies to grow.¹⁵ Although many will argue that there is no clear connection between economic growth and all aspects of gender equality, an increase in the female labor forces results in faster economic growth.¹⁶

⁹Article 16 1 (b) of the International Labor Organizations' Fundamental Conventions.

¹⁰Section 5(4) of the Employment Code Act No.3 of 2019.

¹¹Article 16 (1) (b) of the International Labor Organizations' Fundamental Conventions.

¹²Article 11 (d) of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

¹³LT Dibetso, *Airing out the Dirty laundry, Gender discrimination in Zambian media workplaces* (Fesmedia Africa 2015)18.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Organizations for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Gender Equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship: Final Report to the MCM* <<http://www.oecd.org/employment/50423364.pdf>.> Accessed 9th December 2021 at 08:03.

In 2013, the male employment to population ratio stood at 72.2 percent while the ration for females was 47.1 percent.¹⁷ Women in most countries earn on average only 60 to 75 percent of men's wages.¹⁸ Financial inequality is a very problematic issue in many media work places across the country. The inequalities are not restricted to remuneration only. Female media workers also have challenges with regard to receiving benefits like housing and travelling allowances.¹⁹ A huge contributing factor to this form of discrimination is the view that women are economic dependents and the likelihood that women are in organized sectors or not represented in unions if they are not organized then those structures are weak.²⁰

5.0 THE GLASS CEILING CONCEPT

Glass ceiling is a situation where women are prevented from competing for higher positions and climbing the professional ladder through fair and equal promotion in the work place.²¹ According to Section 5 (1) of the 'Employment Code Act' under non-discrimination at undertaking "An employer shall promote equal opportunity in employment and eliminate discrimination."²² Furthermore, Article 11 (b) of CEDAW states that "the right to the same employment opportunities, including the application of the same criteria for selection in matters of employment." As discussed in the previous chapters of the research regardless of these international and domestic provisions established to promote gender equality, female journalists continue to face problems related to the glass ceiling.

As discussed through ought the previous chapters of this research journalism was basically viewed as a profession dominated by men in the past.²³ As it grew, women were restricted by custom, tradition, and religion from getting into the profession and those who dared were faced with significant discrimination. In spite of this, women are not relenting in their efforts to get to the top and desired positions like their male counterparts who are editors, reporters, sports analysts and journalists. Although, the profession is deeply characterized by gender segregation

¹⁷International Labor Organization, Global Employment Trends 2014: Risk of a jobless recovery? <<http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/dpcuments/publication/wcms23353.pdf>> Accessed 9th December 2021 at 08:12.

¹⁸World Bank Gender Data Portal <<http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/key%20gender%20employment%20indicators>> Accessed 9th December 2021 at 08:22.

¹⁹LT Dibetso, *Airing out the Dirty laundry, Gender discrimination in Zambian media workplaces* (Fesmedia Africa 2015) 19.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid at p.12.

²²Section 5 (1) of the Employment Code Act No.3 of 2019.

with women in the minority, they are still noticeable and found to be actively involved in journalism.

Female journalists are aspiring to improve their status and to resist the culture of stereotype which has been the bane of the media industry, by embracing areas that had been traditionally occupied by the male such as hard news, crime and politics. Despite this effort, only a few of them have risen to the peak of the profession in Zambia. Generally, there are few women in government and senior positions in many private and public media companies. According to Ann Zulu a multi award winning *Zambian* journalist in an article titled *Zambian Feminine Pages*, she adds that despite having more female journalists than men in Zambia, majority of people who hold top positions in the media are men, while women are assistants or nothing.²⁴ In the *Zambian* media, it really doesn't matter whether the females are better, being female makes them only good enough to assist the male and be juniors.²⁵ She further goes on to say that senior positions are exclusively reserved for the best man, while the best woman is always his assistant or nothing.²⁶

Ann Zulu also adds that in many cases, the best journalists are women, but they are still made to aspire for the second best position or nothing, no matter how good they are.²⁷ She also highlights the issue of women in politics where she emphasizes that there are fewer females at the top because the enthusiasm to succeed, compete and beat the male counterparts has been killed.²⁸ Basically, very few women are able to break free from this societal inflicted mental incapacitation, and go higher.²⁹ And these few are most of the females you see at the top.³⁰

However, in spite of all these challenges female journalists are facing with regard to leadership roles in the media industry, we can see most female journalists in the country occupying leadership roles.

Despite the changes and progress, there are still low numbers of women representation in parliament which itself entails a lack of confidence in women's participation and authority in

²⁴A Zulu, A *Zambian Female Journalist's Perspective* <<https://www.zambianFemininepages.blogspot.com/202...>> Accessed 09th December 2021 at 09:54.

²⁵A Zulu, A *Zambian Female Journalist's Perspective* <<https://www.zambianFemininepages.blogspot.com/202...>> Accessed 09th December 2021 at 09:54.

²⁶A Zulu, *A Zambian Female Journalist's Perspective* <<https://www.zambianFemininepages.blogspot.com/202...>> Accessed 09th December 2021 at 09:54.

²⁷A Zulu, A *Zambian Female Journalist's Perspective* <<https://www.zambianFemininepages.blogspot.com/202...>> Accessed 09th December 2021 at 09:54.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

decision making positions. It further defies the provisions of the Constitution under Section 45 (1) (d), which provides that the electoral system shall ensure that gender equity in the National Assembly or council which has not been achieved.³¹ Furthermore, the provisions of the ‘*Gender Equity and Equality Act*’ provides under Section 24 (1) for the Ministry responsible for gender to ensure that there is equal representation and participation of both sexes in decision making. This provision has however, not been achieved as can be seen through National Assembly representation of men to women.

The aforementioned results further override the provisions provided for in the *Zambian ‘Bill of Rights’* under Article 23 which provides for the protection from discrimination on the grounds of ones gender. The ‘*Gender Equity and Equality Act*’ further provides for prohibition of discrimination and states that “*A person, public or private body shall not discriminate against any sex.*” In a nut shell this brings about the prohibition of discrimination of women whether in the household or social realm and indeed the corporate realm of society.

5.0 THE MASCULINE NEWSROOM CULTURE

The masculine newsroom culture is concerned with gender stereotypes whereby definitions of femininity and masculinity influence the types of jobs or story topics that female journalists are assigned compared to their male colleagues.³² A practical example is where editors have a tendency to assign soft news like entertainment and lifestyle and hard news such as politics, economics, and sports to male journalists.³³ Generally, the same gender biases found in the institutions of society are being filtered into media houses and newsrooms.³⁴ From the time of the dawn of the printing era of the 14th century, to the first female professional journalist Anne Royall of 1800s to the yellow press in the early 19th century, men supervised media houses and newsrooms.³⁵ Men constructed the rules and regulations and set the standards of what is newsworthy and what is good professional conduct.³⁶

The regulations and rules of conduct suited the masculine world and had little consideration for female interests.³⁷ The work schedules, the shift hours and assignments of different news

³¹Section 45 (1) (d) of the Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) No.2 of the Laws of Zambia.

³²LT Dibetso, *Airing out the Dirty laundry, Gender discrimination in Zambian media workplaces* (Fesmedia Africa 2015), 12.

³³Ibid.

³⁴R Nyondo, *Career Choices for female Journalism Student: A case in Zambia* (UNZA Press 2005) 3.

³⁵R Nyondo, *Career Choices for female Journalism Student: A case in Zambia* (UNZA Press 2005), 3.

³⁶R Nyondo, *Career Choices for female Journalism Student: A case in Zambia* (UNZA Press 2005), 3.

³⁷R Nyondo, *Career Choices for female Journalism Student: A case in Zambia* (UNZA Press 2005), 3.

beats all perpetuate the old acquired and learned biases in society.³⁸ Basically, rules of the game were blended to suit male conditions and their interpretations worked to the advantage of male journalists.³⁹

6.0 SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The *'Employment Code Act'* under the provisions of Section 95(1), makes it mandatory for the employer to have an employment policy on harassment. Sexual harassment is an unwelcome and inappropriate sexual advancement or a request for sexual favors such as other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature in exchange for various favors or security from the harassers.⁴⁰ While sexual harassment may often on first glance be taken as simple social ineptness or as an awkward expression of romantic attraction, researchers have spoken against these views as wrong and pernicious because they can lead women who suffer harassment to blame themselves, believing that something in their dress or behavior might have brought the unwanted attention.⁴¹

Many research experts on sexual violence state that harassment is a tactic used to control or frighten women.⁴² Sexual harassment is most frequent in occupations and work places where women are new and are in the minority.⁴³ In fact, no matter how many men they encounter in the course of their work, women who hold jobs traditionally held by men are far more likely to be more prevalent in work places where men fill senior positions, either as sub editors, managers or editors. It must be noted however that sexual harassment victims can be of any gender notwithstanding, the highest record of victims being female.

According to an article by Paul Mboshya titled *Game Stores manager arrested for sexual harassment*, the Zambian case involving the Game Stores manger Vincent Pallan clearly highlights the aforementioned position. In this case, Vincent Pallan was charged with indecent assault of women employees contrary to Section 137⁴⁴ and Section 137 (a)⁴⁵ of the *'Penal Code Act'* for sexual harassment. The case arose as a result of one of the former female employees

³⁸Ibid at p.5.

³⁹Ibid at p. 5.

⁴⁰P Michele, *Definitions and incidence of academic and workplace sexual harassment Sexual harassment* (SUNY Press 1991) 65.

⁴¹LT Dibetso, *Airing out the Dirty laundry, Gender discrimination in Zambian media workplaces* (Fesmedia Africa 2015) 20.

⁴²LT Dibetso, *Airing out the Dirty laundry, Gender discrimination in Zambian media workplaces* (Fesmedia Africa 2015) 20.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Penal Code Act Chapter 87 of the Laws of Zambia.

⁴⁵Penal Code Act Chapter 87 of the Laws of Zambia.

Ms. Mukamuluti Mwila who complained to the magistrate court after her dismissal following her refusal to his sexual advances.⁴⁶ This ordeal was supported by other victims who encountered a similar situation but because of the lack of supporting witnesses, the manager was acquitted.⁴⁷ This scenario among many other cases highlights the potential of various forms of harassment that women are subjected to and the disregard for the law regarding harassment of women.

As an extension of most of the above forms of gender discrimination faced by female journalists in their work places, age or ageism, as well as woman's physique and aesthetic appearance have been known to play a role on discrimination against women. This is persistent especially in the media profession, namely broadcast media, where age and appearance often dictates success.⁴⁸ Female journalists are also affected by inflexible working hours, limited or no access to affordable quality childcare, poor parental leave policies and social attitudes among many other factors.⁴⁹ The impact of these patterns of gender discrimination, which also affects other grounds of women in other fields of employment, is exacerbated by the long working hours typical of the organizational culture of many media outlets.⁵⁰ In addition, other reasons that prevent equal representation of women in the journalism industry has been attributed to women being seen as a cost because of the responsibility they bear such as paid maternity leaves and other child care or social responsibilities which would in most cases, render them absent from the work place.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This research has provided a clear picture of the effects and results of the gender imbalances in both society and in the media work place. Female journalists have the right to practice journalism free from gender discrimination. It is clear that persistent discriminatory practices, social norms and stereotypes among many other forms of discrimination perpetuate inequitable access to opportunities, resources and power exist within the Zambian media industry. Gender discrimination in Zambian media work places has been institutionalized and has become the

⁴⁶P Mboshya, Game Stores manager arrested for sexual harassment <<https://www.daily-mail.co.zm/game-stortes-mannager-arrested-sexual-harrasennt/>> Accessed 17th November 2021 at 21:37.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸LT, Dibetso, *Airing out the Dirty laundry, Gender discrimination in Zambian media workplaces* (Fesmedia Africa 2015) 12.

⁴⁹E Lanza, *Women Journalists and Freedom of Expression, Discrimination and gender-based violence faced by women journalists in the exercise of their profession* (The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, 2018) 18.

⁵⁰Ibid at p.18.

lived experience of many female media workers. The problem with institutionalization or normalization of gender discrimination is that media workers may dismiss some of it as part of acceptable newsroom culture. Finally, the following chapter shall give a general conclusion and findings regarding the preceding chapters. It shall then provide various recommendations which will subsequently answer the problem statement initially provided in chapter one and subsequently seal the gaps this research seeks to address.

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