

# The secondary role of the aggressor in television news on gender-based violence

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## *El rol secundario del agresor en las noticias televisivas sobre violencia machista*

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### **Abstract:**

Male violence against women is humankind's most notable example of lack of affection. Myths that have blamed women for the expulsion from Paradise, genital mutilation, domestic violence, the use of sexual violence as weapon of war, or women being stoned, are all reflections of the circumstances in which women are defenseless victims. In Spain, it appears that the influence of the media has failed to penetrate deeply into the social conscience, something that is needed in order to tackle this scourge. The aim of this research is to determine the influence that news-related television contents have had upon gender violence and, more specifically, the way in which the aggressor is depicted in audiovisual storytelling. This study encompasses both a quantitative methodology –which has been gathered from the analysis of the 3660 yearly news editions from five national Spanish networks– and a qualitative methodology as well, through the use of comprehensive interviews of the individuals who closely work with this social problem.

### **Keywords:**

Woman, gender violence, news programs, aggressor

### **Resumen:**

*La violencia machista es la más grande historia de desamor de la humanidad. Mitos que culpabilizan a la mujer de la expulsión del paraíso, la ablación, la violencia en el hogar, la violación como arma de guerra o las lapidaciones, reflejan circunstancias en las que las mujeres son víctimas indefensas. En el contexto español, parece que la influencia de los medios de comunicación no logra penetrar a fondo en la conciencia social contra esta lacra. El objetivo del presente estudio es determinar qué efectos tienen los contenidos informativos televisivos sobre violencia de género y, en concreto, cómo retratan al sujeto de la agresión en el relato audiovisual. El estudio recoge una metodología cuantitativa -a partir del análisis de los 3660 informativos anuales de las cinco cadenas nacionales españolas-, y cualitativa, a través de entrevistas en profundidad a personas que trabajan de cerca con este problema social.*

### **Palabras clave:**

*Mujer, violencia machista, informativos, televisión, agresor*

## 1. Introduction

Within the phenomenon of violence against women in a family context we can distinguish between two main players: the aggressor and the victim. The action of the former generates a scourge that has claimed (as of October 3, 2016) a total of 859 deaths since 2003, the year on which the Ministry of Health and Social Services officially began collecting statistics (<http://estadisticasviolenciagenero.msssi.gob.es/>)

Gallego (2003) pointed out that the historical invisibility of violence against women alongside the acquiescence of society was due to the complicit alliance of the different agents involved: 1) The police, who attributed the problem to the inherent nature of relationships between men and women, downplaying the allegations; 2) The doctors, who neither investigated the origin of the attacks nor denounced them, except in case of death; 3) The judges, who only intervened at the last minute and imposed light penalties; and 4) The media, that minimized these offenses and did not question police or judges.

Something has changed during the last decade. The efforts from all these above mentioned areas involved in men's violence against women have intensified and combined to provide enhanced visibility to this social wound. One of the most significant advances at the legislative level was the creation of the Organic Law 1/2004 on measures for comprehensive protection against gender-based violence (Ley Orgánica 1/2004 de 28 de diciembre, de Medidas de Protección Integral Contra la Violencia de Género) which has served as inspiration for other European laws.

But also, as Varona and Gabarron (2015) confirmed in their study, gender-based violence has become a recurring topic within the Spanish political agenda in recent years, as well as within the social one. In this same study, the authors argue that the perception of violence against women as a public issue depends primarily on the intensity of media coverage and not on other variables. Therefore, it is not only important that it is transmitted by the media, but also the way in which information is presented and which content is emphasized.

Herrera and Expósito (2009) found that the public perception of gender-based violence is closely linked to the way information on this topic is transferred by the media to its recipients. In their study, they found that the media framing of this matter conditioned the group's position, in a way that when the information was focused on the aggressor, the group interpreted the events around him; when it was focused on the victim, she was the center of the arguments; and when the information was given in neutral form, the group appealed to those elements that culture has created around such violence, such as jealousy or economic problems. Thus, according to these results, it was concluded that media framing is one of the most influential factors in the individual's perception of gender-based violence and its acceptance.

Therefore, the role of the aggressor in this kind of news seems to have great importance if we want to raise public awareness about this social ill. In this context it is important to clarify some concepts or preset ideas on aggressiveness that often appear in the media. For example, aggressiveness is not exclusive to a given profile of people; although some classical

studies, such as Conger and Miller's (1966), affirm that there is a higher percentage of psychopaths and neurotics among violent men, this fact is not sufficient to conclude that men who do violence to their partner necessarily suffer from a mental disorder, as some media seem determined to suggest.

Lopez's description (2004) of the characteristics of the aggressor emphasizes that violent men are not exclusive to a certain social class and can exist anywhere. He also considers that, although it is not possible to generalize about the personal characteristics of those who provoke such situations, there are certain peculiarities, experiences and specific situations common to most of them. Thus, a large percentage of abusers have been, for example, a victim or witness of abuse, ultimately adopting this behavior as a normal means of relation. They have experienced it as a system of power, learning that exercising it at home, they obtain control and get what they want. They also tend to have a very negative self-image, which leads to low self-esteem, and to the feeling of failure as a person. They therefore act in an omnipotent threatening manner, looking for their strengthening with every act of violence.

To Espada and Torres (1996), violent men are the result of a social system that provides ingredients to feed this course of action; The abuser aspires to exercise absolute power and control over his partner—over what they do and over their thoughts and innermost feelings and considers his partner as a possession they are entitled to control.

In the same vein, the Report of the Ombudsman (2008) on violence against women argues that violent aggressors do not belong to a particular social class and are not ill, but reproduce stereotypical attitudes and believe that, because they are male, they must exercise power within the family.

This same report recognizes that violent behavior is caused by genetic, social, cultural and psychological factors, although biological factors—hormones, neurophysiological dysfunction or inheritance—do not act specifically as a cause of violence. In addition, they cite several studies conducted in the United States, England, Scotland, France and the Netherlands to determine that violence is a learned behavior, since 81% of male abusers were witnesses or victims of abuse during their childhood.

Experts point to cultural principles, social customs and religious norms in this regard as determinants factors to exercise and justify violence against women and children. "In our culture, and for many centuries, parents have been awarded an unquestionable authority over their offspring, and the man has been awarded the same kind of authority and power over women. These irrational ideas have been passed down from generation to generation " (Office of the Ombudsman, 2008, p.103).

Ferrer and Bosch (2005) offer, based on a cluster analysis conducted with data provided by women victims of violence who were treated at different centers, a classification of four types of aggressors with a high homogenous percentage distribution: 1) a group of young abusers, less than 40 years old, poorly educated, problems with alcohol, without

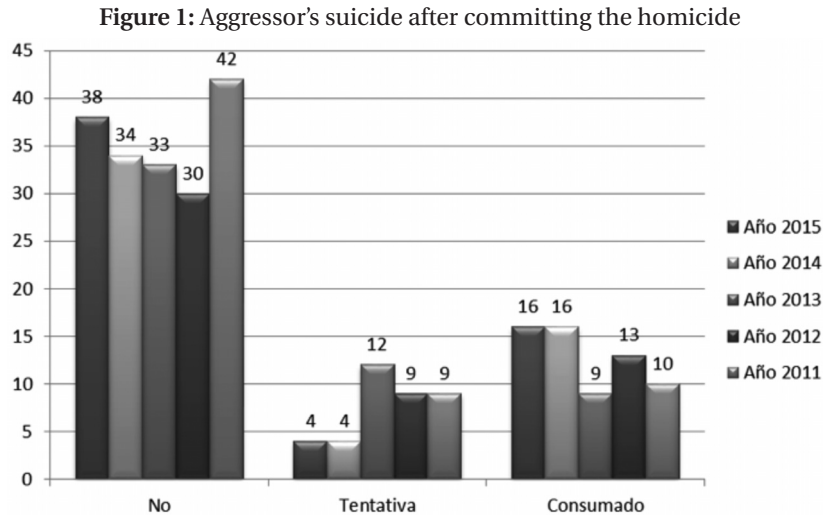
psychopathological problems, with domestic violence history, jealous and aggressive only within the family; 2) a second group similar to the first one but older and with no previous home violence history; 3) a third group of middle-aged abusers, well educated, with no home violence history nor psychopathological problems, without problems of drug abuse, jealous and violent only within the family; and 4) a fourth group of young abusers, poorly educated, with problems with alcohol consumption but not with other drugs, jealous, without psychopathological disorders and violent only within the family.

Subsequently, Expósito and Ruiz (2009) established a typology with two types of abusers: those who are characterized by a general compulsive-dependent personality and those who show antisocial, paranoid, narcissistic and aggressive characteristics.

Another feature that makes abusers different from other kind of offenders is the fact that they consider or even commit suicide after killing their victims. According to Fernández Teruelo (2011), this type of response diverts from the general patterns, even from those related to extreme violent crimes (with fatal results), which highlights the extraordinary uniqueness of these types of killings and the need to create different action guidelines and processes from those created for the rest of violent crimes. Dubugras and Guevara (2007) argue that the decision to murder does not result in a subsequent decision to commit suicide, but both behaviors are designed as a common plan, without any improvisation involved. Both authors argue that the profile of the murder-suicide is closer to the suicide profile than to a homicide profile. Montero Gómez states in the newspaper *El Correo* that domination is the basis of men's violence against women but also of the subsequent suicide of the perpetrator.

"In systematic violence, the abuser has built its vital universe around the traumatic domination of a woman. When extended, the subjugation of another human being ends up becoming the center of the aggressor's life; it becomes the reference point that gives meaning to his existence. When that reference point disappears, life loses meaning for the torturer" (*El Correo*, 2006).

In Spain, as shown in Figure 1, that contemplates the last five years and shows data extracted from the Spanish General Council of the Judiciary (*Consejo General del Poder Judicial*), almost one out of three aggressors attempts or manages to commit suicide after committing the crime. While these data cannot be compared with others concerning the relationship between homicides and afterwards suicide -since there are no complete statistics collecting this phenomenon- we can assume that the number of attempted or successful suicides regarding feminicides is high and has increased over the years, which updates and reinforces Dubugras and Guevara's (2007) approach.



Source: Spanish General Council of the Judiciary. Own compilation.

Regarding the causes of suicide after femicide, Fernandez Teruelo (2011) affirms that the theory stating that the abuser commits suicide after killing his partner or former partner because he cannot handle the social rejection of his killing is erroneous. He provides numerous experiences and studies on abusers in prisons to state that the man who kills a woman, with whom he had a romantic relationship, is poorly permeable to external stimuli. Rather he responds to a victimized subject, who is convinced of the aptness of his actions and thinks his partner had the 'deserved' punishment for having deviated from the obligations established by him.

"A significant number of the aggressors, who end up committing femicide, have shaped their vital outline on the basis of a relationship of absolute control over the partner, in which the violence is used as a tool to reaffirm that control. The sudden loss of this perceived power ends up with the physical elimination of the woman and sometimes with the death of the perpetrator, as he understands that his existence does not make sense without that control model " (Fernandez Teruelo, 2011, p.14).

Therefore, according to experts, the main difference between the aggressor who kills his partner or former partner and does not commit suicide afterwards and one who does commit suicide is the level of entrenchment of that model. In both cases, the most dangerous point is the break-up moment or its announcement: according to Campbell et al. (2003), the risk of femicide increases nine times if a woman tries to or threatens to end a relationship based on physical abuse.

However, despite these attempts to classify and make a profile of abusers in the context of violence against women, Álvarez-Dardet, Pérez and Lorence (2013), after a very detailed and thorough review of major studies on this topic, come to the

conclusion that it does not seem likely that we can talk about a homogeneous profile of those men who abuse their partners. This situation is probably an additional complication when informing society about this issue, as the media, specifically television, continue portraying both aggressor and the victim surrounded by clichés related to their origins or social and cultural status or to the aggressor's dependency, addictions or physical and psychological disorders. These arguments are also presented out of context and seem to justify the aggressor's actions, so that society can find a reason for such barbarity.

To Comas (2015), violence practiced by men against women in the family or domestic context has been widely tolerated and considered normal. One of the goals of feminism has been to make visible the “hidden” violence taking place at homes. The reason for this concealment is that it has always been culturally and even legally accepted and considered a private matter. According to this author, the change from opacity to transparency or from being something private to be a social issue is the result of complex interaction between social movements, politicians, citizens and the media itself.

This article tries to describe how the media, television and news media in particular, spread news on gender-based violence in which the abusers have a secondary role and are sometimes even removed from the description. This blurring of the aggressor role could have an imitation effect on those other abusers who feel reflected on what they see on television: the violence against their partners (what they would like to experience) and the lack of consequences on their own persona (detention and social and legal condemnation).

After analyzing 3,733 television news reports on violence against women and 340 on homicides, Vives-Cases, Torrubiano and Álvarez-Dardet (2009) concluded that reports on murders of women increased the possibility of a new killing between 32 and 42 percent, while the news focused on laws or experts' statements could have the opposite effect.

In the same vein, the Spanish Government Office for Gender-based Violence (Delegación del Gobierno para la Violencia de Género) conducted a study a year later focused on television media and concluded that, like in suicide cases, the imitation effect would be greater when the news contributed to the identification between the murderer and a potential aggressor, either by presenting it as partly inexplicable or by introducing justifications such as mental disorders.

Regarding the opinion of the media professionals, the survey conducted by Reina Sofia Centre and the Spanish Ministry of Health, Social Policy and Equality among 945 journalists (via online) and 1200 citizens (via telephone interview) ([http://igualdade.xunta.gal/sites/default/files/files/documentos/como\\_informar\\_violencia\\_parella.pdf](http://igualdade.xunta.gal/sites/default/files/files/documentos/como_informar_violencia_parella.pdf)) shows that 55.5 percent of journalists believe that the media framing of violence against women can lead to similar cases, whereas 61.5 percent of citizens are convinced that sometimes the media framing of these issues may lead to similar cases mainly because they consider that new ideas are given to potential aggressors.

According to Eduardo Castro (2016), member of the Audiovisual Council of Andalusia (Consejo Audiovisual de Andalucía, CAA), the journalists and the media have a certain responsibility when it comes to fight against gender-based violence, as they are the primary source of information on this social issue for 95% of population. However, although journalism has been placing this issue on the public agenda for many years now, the Council's report finds that such news are often tinged with sensationalism or decontextualized <http://fape.es/el-consejo-audiovisual-de-andalucia-presenta-en-almeria-su-guia-para-informar-sobre-la-violencia-de-genero/?platform=hootsuite>

Comas (2015) also suggests that, according to research conducted in different countries, the media frames violence against women as an individual matter, rather than as a social issue. That is not the case in Spain. According to this author, violence against women has acquired its own identity as a social issue and it is presented linked to political, police, judicial and social contexts, as well as to the actions taking place in order to solve the problem.

## 2. Methodology

Having already described some of the characteristics of the perpetrators of gender-based violence, the overall objective of this study is to identify the patterns of behavior of the media, specifically television, when reporting this type of violence. This specific objective is, first, to know how the five national television channels inform about these events and, secondly, to analyze the role of the aggressor in the story that reaches the audience. The hypothesis therefore tries to emphasize that despite the importance of the aggressor's role in the violent act against the woman; the media would relegate him to a secondary role, and occasionally justify his aggression through stereotypes (psychological disorders, jealousy ...).

As for the research techniques used, we have used methodological triangulation, i.e. the combination of qualitative and quantitative research techniques that allows us to fully understand the object of study and strengthen the validity of the results (García and Berganza, 2005). Thus, in order to obtain valid and reliable data on the object of this study, we used qualitative techniques for the in-depth interview and quantitative techniques for the content analysis.

Regarding the interview, we would like to clarify that it was conducted among experts as we needed the vision of either those who have the required global view of the entire process involving violence against women, or those who play an important role deciding what television broadcasts. Therefore, the sample of experts included the three top managers responsible for the news services of the five channels analyzed (as some of them belong to the same media group); three civil servants (policeman, judge and prosecutor) specialized in gender-based violence and its prosecution; and an expert on violence against women, head of one of the most recognized state agencies in this field, the State Observatory on Violence Against Women (Observatorio contra la Violencia Doméstica y de Género).

Content analysis is the most appropriate quantitative methodology in this context, as it allows us to find the answer to how television newscasts frame news on gender-based violence and to determine what role the aggressors play. The universe analyzed were the newscast of the Spanish national channels, that is: TVE1, Antena 3, Cuatro, Tele 5 and La Sexta. The sample collects the newscasts from Monday to Sunday and in editions of morning and evening from the year 2012. We selected this year because since 2003 (year when the Spanish Ministry of Health began the official record) it is the year that registered the lowest number of deaths resulting from violence against women. That is, we analyzed the entire universe of cases.

This constitutes the analysis of 3,660 newscasts, which broadcasted a total of 283 reports on gender-based violence, of which 198 informed about the isolated incident of the death of one of the 52 women who was murdered by their partners or former partners the year under study. Thus, the *main news* analyzed were cases of violence resulting in death. We will call the remaining 85 news reports *complementary news* because they do not report cases of violence resulting in death but new government campaigns, effects of cuts in prevention measures, International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, arrests of suspected aggressors or trials, among others.

### 3. Results

One of the most intense debates in the newsrooms of national television channels centers on the figure of the aggressor and the broadcast of his image. On the one hand, there are experts who claim to establish a boundary between criminalization and public exposure of someone who, *a priori*, enjoys the presumption of innocence, in order not to suffer the so-called "newscast penalty" (he is judged by public opinion without having even held the trial). In this context, the Organic Law 1/1982, of May 5, article first, three, recognizes that the right to honor, to personal and family privacy and to the self-image is inalienable and indefeasible.

However, a growing number of experts, journalists and social groups believe that aggressors need to be named and their pictures need to be shown to change once and for all the message they intend to convey to society and that claims that there is a person who has committed a serious crime and must pay for it. For example, regarding the identification of perpetrators of criminal acts, the stylebook of RTVE explicitly states: "it is our responsibility to sufficiently identify the alleged offender because those data are an essential part of the act on which we are reporting" (<http://manualdeestilo.rtve.es/cuestiones-sensibles/5-10-delincuencia/5-10-3-identificacion-de-los-autores/> Accessed: April 4, 2016).

To Bandrés (2011), if there is no visual identification of the aggressor, the rational concept of guilt seems to dilute itself and it seems that the news is described as fiction. On television, the name and surname of the alleged aggressor rarely appears, but they do broadcast pictures of the victims and even her name, age or place of residence are revealed, which, according to Bandrés, is an informative abuse to the dignity of the victim.



The survey among journalists and citizens conducted by the Reina Sofia Centre and the Ministry of Health, Social Policy and Equality reflects conflicting views between journalists and citizens, since 88.7% of communication professionals believes that, in the first place, what happens to the alleged aggressor after committing the aggression should be reported; in second place, if he has any psychopathology (71.2%), and age (55.8%). In addition, 62.3% consider it very important to report if the alleged aggressor has committed suicide or at least attempted suicide, because they believe that this circumstance reveals his current mental state. In spite of this data, 81.8% of citizens do not consider relevant reporting if the alleged perpetrator has committed suicide or has tried to after the aggression; because they feel that the victim should be the center of the news.

### 3.1. Image of the aggressor

Regarding the image analysis, the main newscasts did not show images of the aggressors because they do not have access to them, apart from those the police could provide, which, today, does not occur. Thus, Telecinco and Cuatro were the ones that most often used these images but still with very low percentages (15.2% and 12.3%, respectively) followed by La Sexta (10.3%) and Televisión Española (7.5 %), while Antena 3 did not broadcast a single image of the aggressor in any of their newscasts throughout the year (Table 2):

**Table 2.** Use of images of the aggressor

AggressorIMG	TOTAL (%)	CHANNELS				
		TV1	A3	Cuatro	T5	La Sexta
Appeared	9,9	7,53		12,31	15,15	10,34
Did not appear	90,1	92,47	100,00	87,69	84,85	89,66

Results matrix from the analysis of the newscasts

Source: Own compilation

The few scenes of the aggressor to which the media have access, usually show him with his face hidden at the time of detention or during the trial; or in distant shots and with hidden hands cuffed. These images are usually taken several days or weeks after reporting on the isolated fact of death (main news); therefore they are broadcasted in the so-called *complementary news*, as shown in Table 3:

**Table 3.** Use of images of the aggressor sorted by type of news

	TOTAL (%)	TYPE OF NEWS	
		COMPLEMENTARY	MAIN
Aggressor IMG	9,9	27,7	4,6

Results matrix from the analysis of the newscasts

Source: Own compilation

As stated above, the publication of images of the alleged aggressor -whether in main or complementary news- is subject to intense discussion among society, the media and numerous experts. Civil servants interviewed believe that the presumption of innocence must be protected but they believe that the aggressor should be made viewable at least from the back. "I think this kind of images would help to present the message in another way (...) it would portray a person who is on a police car because he has to face his acts. The presumption of innocence should always be respected though, because the media often looks for a shot of the aggressor's face "(Civil servant 1); "They should say his name, despite of it following the word "alleged". I think we must insist on this topic (...) and they could even show a picture of him if he has been already convicted. (...).Everyone should get the message that if you do the same this person did, you are going to stay 30 years in prison without any permission "(Civil servant 2); "A murderer should be arrested, judged and sent to jail, but not publicly exposed. I think images of the aggressor should not be made public because I do not know what we want to achieve with that. Do we want people to point at him saying he is a murderer? (...). Even if that person is a murderer, he has the right to honor and privacy"(Civil servant 3)

The expert on gender-based violence considers that the broadcast of the abuser's image would only give him more publicity and he would publish the images only after obtaining the abuser's consent: "I think publishing his image will not make people condemn violence against women in a harder way. I would do it only if it does not affect his personal integrity, and always with his consent, but I think it is more important to inform about court convictions, (...) in order to spread the idea that there is no impunity for such crimes "(Gender-based violence expert).

For the television media managers, broadcasting shots of the aggressor is complicated because they are not available at the time of reporting, and because even if they had access to that image, the detainee still bears the label of "alleged ":" the media tries to ignore him (...) because sometimes the abuser may even feel important because he is on TV (...) but it is true that this would require extended debate. Society must understand that the person who has committed the crime will serve his sentence in prison (...) that his life is destroyed. We should probably put more emphasis on that kind of information, but it is complicated because what we normally report are facts "(Journalist 2); "I'm of the opinion that we should not

ignore these images but we should emphasize that we are talking about an alleged (...) I also believe that there is a great lack of images of the detention moment of the alleged perpetrators and of trials, as well as of information on the track of cases " (Journalist 3).

### 3.2. Statements made by the aggressor

Table 4 below shows channels that broadcasted aggressor's statements. Televisión Española and Antena 3 were the ones which less frequently collected such statements, against La Sexta, which did it in 10.3% of the news, Telecinco by 4.5% and Cuatro by 4.6%. It seems then that, as happens with the images, there are no public statements made by the aggressor. On the rare occasions we can hear them; defendants try to argue justifications instead of remorse for their criminal action.

On the other hand, the observation of newscasts as part of the methodological dynamics of the study has allowed us to deduce that, in most cases, the statements made by the aggressors have reached channels' newsrooms through news agencies, since the same statements have been repeated by different newscasts, the same days. Only in the case of La Sexta have we observed that they broadcasted different statements made by the aggressor in three different occasions, using its own resources to obtain them.

However, in all cases and in all channels analyzed, these statements always appeared in the so-called complementary news. We registered only one statement made by the aggressor, as these are usually extracted from the response to the judge during the recording of the trial, and they are not statements made to camera. Even during the few recordings of trials, the presumption of innocence was always respected and the aggressor was recorded from the back.

**Table 4.** Use of the aggressor's statements

	TOTAL (%)	CHANNELS				
		TV1	A3	Cuatro	T5	La Sexta
One	3,2			4,6	4,5	10,3
None	96,8	100,0	100,0	95,4	95,5	89,7

Results matrix from the analysis of the newscasts

Source: Own compilation

### 3.3. Criminal consequences for the aggressor

The criminal consequences of violence against women are also absent from the news. They were mentioned only in the 30% of cases, as shown in Table 5, where we can see that Cuatro channel reported the punishment for the murderers most often (46.2%), compared to Antena 3 which did not do so in any case.

**Table 5.** Criminal consequences of violence against women

	TOTAL (%)	CHANNELS				
		TV1	A3	Cuatro	T5	La Sexta
Yes	30,8	28,6		46,2	25,0	33,3
No	69,2	71,4	100,0	53,8	75,0	66,7

Results matrix from the analysis of the newscasts

Source: Own compilation

Thus, it appears that in the narrative of the moment of the detention, the journalist usually does not publish any statistics on the number of detained or imprisoned men because of violence against women, nor on the number of sentences in the past year, or the average number of years in prison resulting from a sentence for gender-based violence. Although the aggressor is the protagonist with his detention, channels usually do not include a single picture of him but they use audiovisual means to victimize women again, rather than blaming the aggressor. In this regard, we would also like to add that no channel under study included in their reports any information on counts of convicting sentences.

These data show that trying to figure out the legal consequences for the aggressors is not a normal routine procedure among newscasts, but they reduce the report on this kind of violence to an exceptional event where there is a perpetrator, a victim and a fatal end without more social explanation. When there is an opportunity to talk about the real cause of violence, it is almost always done in complementary news (shorter than the main one and in a less prominent part of the newscast) and without mentioning what the punishment and punished are for causing such terrible deaths.

Faced with this situation, the language of respondents varies. For the media, this unequal consideration is justified by the lack of data and images focused on the aggressor and by facing penal consequences because of their actions: "I think easing the access to that data or images is essential" (Journalist 2). Judicial authorities encourage the media to emphasize punitive measures for the aggressor, either through images or words: "The image of the defendant entering the police car would be very effective. But still, I would like to point out that the media does not track cases completely: they only come the first day of trial and sometimes not at all. We never have cameras when we present the verdict" (Civil servant 1); "Yes. I think we must tell the consequences of the criminal act" (Civil servant 3);

### 3.4. Justification of the aggressor's actions

In the absence of images and data focused on the aggressor and his punishment, we did find some justification for their actions, as reflected in Table 6:

**Tabla 6.** Justification for the aggressor's actions

	TOTAL %	CHANNELS				
		TV1	A3	Cuatro	T5	La Sexta
Yes	4,6		<b>33,3</b>	7,7		4,6
No	95,4	<b>100,0</b>	66,7	92,3	<b>100,0</b>	95,4

Results matrix from the analysis of the newscasts

Source: Own compilation

The general trend of newscasts (95.4%) is not to serve as speaker for the aggressor's excuses, although Antena 3 mentioned them 33.3% of the time, Cuatro by 7.7% and La Sexta by 4.6%. We list below the information broadcasted on October 29 by Cuatro, reporting on the trial of a man who killed his partner a year ago: "The prosecution requested 33 years in prison for a man who set fire to his home with his wife inside. He stabbed her to death after hitting her in the head and then he burned the house to conceal the crime. At trial he admitted his guilt. He argued that it was an outburst at the moment she informed him that she wanted to divorce, but according to the prosecution, he planned everything in detail: bought gasoline for the house and chose a day when the children were out"

We found another example in a newscast from March 26 from Antena 3, reporting on the trial for the killing of a woman by her partner: "And in Malaga the trial of an 84-year-old man who killed his octogenarian wife has begun. The woman suffered from Parkinson and was stabbed to death one week before they both were transferred to a nursing home. The husband argued that he did it out of compassion. He has since changed his story and before the jury he declared that they both had agreed to commit suicide together and it was she who did it."

In both cases, the aggressors' arguments are reported, but they do not include the possible penalty for this type of crime. According to experts interviewed in this research, among those aggressors that either surrendered to the police after committing the crime or were arrested shortly after, the pattern is repeated in a great number of cases, with the aggressor justifying his actions and trying to excuse himself with mitigating circumstances such as alcohol or drug intake or sudden mental disorder. "They are not disturbed men; they are normal people unable to accept certain principles such as your ex may have another partner or if your wife works outside home that does not mean she is flirting with co-workers. These are not psychopaths but educational issues" (Civil servant 2); "There are always two components in the perpetrator's statement to the police: the 'I do not recall' and 'I have drunk too much or I have used drugs'. But they do not provide any justification

"(Civil servant 1); "They usually try to find justifications such as the victim did not fulfill the role expected (...) because she did not make him lunch, she used to leave with no time to return, she did not inform him about the money she spent, etc." (Gender-based violence expert).

The report from the first example (the one about the man who set fire to his home with his wife inside) also showed pictures of the apartment where the victim died and of her body. A practice which most experts consider to be damaging, sensationalist and redundant in the victimization of women: "Criminalization should not be at odds with rights that must be safeguarded. We must determine the boundaries between criminalization and public exposure and the limit where the right to honor and privacy of individuals ends" (Civil servant 3).

Channel management claim for institutional support to make the aggressor more visible: "We should check the circumstances under these images are taken, but we would probably use them. I imagine the police would have to discuss the issue of the presumption of innocence and data dissemination, but I believe we would be entitled to do it" (Journalist 2).

### *3.5 The influence of images on the potential aggressor*

The newscasts' managers interviewed agree that television generates patterns of behavior and ways of life that people tend to imitate, but they also manifest their doubts about the possibility that news on violence against women encourage a potential aggressor to 'take action', although they are not totally sure they can deny such relation.

"If we were sure that there is a relation indeed, we would quickly change this kind of news but (...) we have discussed this topic here and there is no unanimity in diagnosis. In the end, what pushes the aggressor is his environment, such as the woman suddenly decided not to return home" (Journalist 2); "I am not totally sure, it has no scientific base, that is what is interesting. A thorough study is required in this regard" (Journalist 1); "As regarding suicide, these are issues that are on the edge of feelings and human behavior, and somehow raises the question of possible contagion effect. I think that television does not make you become an aggressor although it may trigger an explosive situation" (Journalist 3).

Civil servants also expressed doubts about the influence of media on potential aggressors but are inclined to believe that this relation is not determinative. "I think that potential aggressors are not stupid and they must know the consequences of a criminal act like the one they are watching on television" (Civil servant 1); "It's a question I ask myself but I do not believe so. Something different is it being used as a threat to generate fear on the victim. The same way it is clear to me in cases of suicide, I do not believe that someone who has not considered becoming a murderer before, suddenly decides to do so because he has watched it on television" (Civil servant 2).

Meanwhile, the expert on gender-based violence was the most emphatic about it. He considers beauty and socialization standards to have a great impact on society and to be particularly negative for women, but he concludes that the data on

the frequency of death resulting from gender-based violence cannot lead to the conclusion that a contagion effect is happening. "We cannot talk about a repetitive effect. We can nonetheless admit that a man who has already reached the decision to end the life of his partner can mimic some methods he has heard of before (...) But the decision is his and he makes it whether another man has done it before or not " (Gender-based violence expert).

Finally, the Spanish newscasts managers also speak out against silencing news on violence against women and, much more, they speak out against it being imposed as a rule, as what happens with most cases of suicide. "If we silence this topic because of social reasons, we could end up silencing anything for social reasons (...) We cannot not talk about this because it is something that is happening and our job is to reflect what happens in reality (...) the risk is so high and the relation (with an alleged contagion effect) is so diffuse, that to me it seems riskier not to talk about it" (Journalist 2); "I was one of the most active professionals opposing the silence the administration was suggesting (...) Media freedom must be a priority and most of all (...) we cannot squander our denouncing role nor our power to shape opinions" (Journalist 1).

#### **4. Discussion**

The study and monitoring on the profile of aggressors is the main topic of a large number of publications in the field of psychology, psychiatry and criminology. Whatever the scientific approach to this reality, the only evidence behind every act of gender-based violence is that there is only one responsible for the crime: the aggressor.

Just ten months have passed since 2016 started and we have already counted 33 women murdered by their partners or former partners. According to the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, the first quarter of this year would be one of the bloodiest in the last ten years. ([http://www.violenciagenero.msssi.gob.es/violenciaEnCifras/victimasMortales/fichaMujeres/pdf/VMortales\\_2016\\_15\\_03.pdf](http://www.violenciagenero.msssi.gob.es/violenciaEnCifras/victimasMortales/fichaMujeres/pdf/VMortales_2016_15_03.pdf) . Accessed: April 4, 2016)

This reality is far from disappearing and it seems to keep leaving behind a growing number of badly wounded or dead women. Therefore, it requires media involvement and participation, especially from television, as it is the means by which most Spaniards inform themselves.

Among the vast number of events happening every day; the media select at each moment what is newsworthy and who will be the protagonist. In this way, they designate those issues that will be perceived as important by the population. The voices collected in this study illustrate that violence against women must be one of those issues, as a formula to help to prevent more deaths.

However, as explained in this article, it is important not only that media report on this issue but also that they strengthen the aggressor's guilt through informative language. In many cases, the aggressor's role, burning alive, stabbing, beating to death or running over the victim, is almost unnoticed in the informative language. Sometimes even arguments justifying

his acts are included; although we must clarify that the overall trend perceived under this study is not to serve as speaker for excuses of the perpetrator.

The experts interviewed encourage media to make public the punitive measures for the aggressor through their messages. The aggressor's image contributes to sending a cause and effect message necessary for the society to understand that these crimes do not remain unpunished and have a face, that they are not imaginary.

Nevertheless, the care of these images to preserve the presumption of innocence and the right to honor of the detainee is a legal obligation, but the informative language must clearly include the legal and penal consequences of the acts committed. While the aggressor should not be made public until there is a court conviction, there is a growing opinion among the professionals interviewed that the aggressor must be clearly identified, with the necessary precautions in order to always respect his presumption of innocence.

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