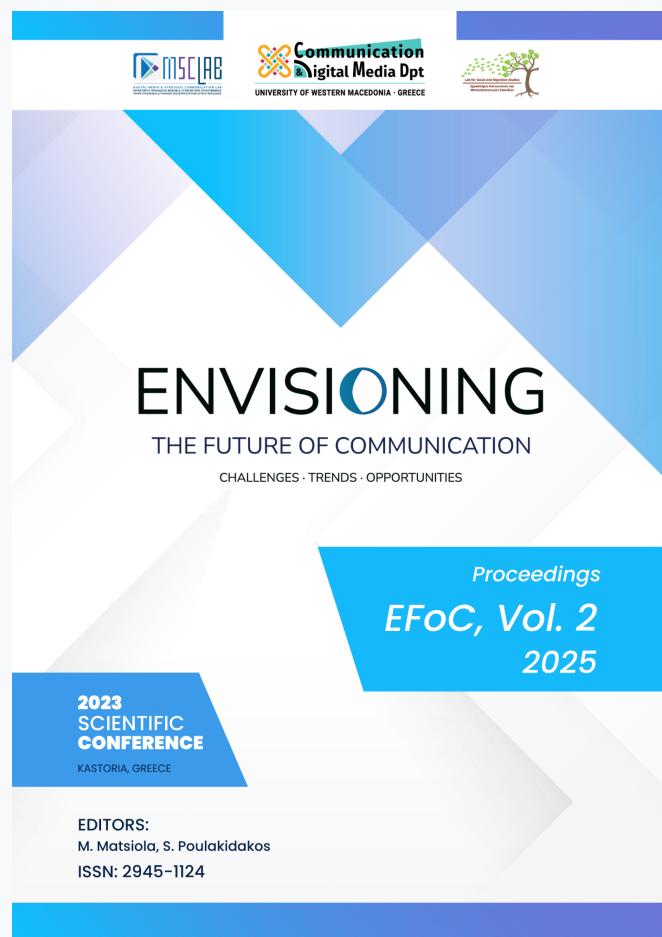


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The effects of the Greek 'Metoo' movement on representations of femicide in the news media and social media

Angeliki Kogiou*

Abstract

The 'Metoo' movement constituted a worldwide commencement for the disclosure of sexual harassment and sexual abuse scandals, placing the gender issue in the foreground. The subject of the present effort is to examine the effect of the 'Metoo' movement in Greece in reference to the way femicides are covered by the print and television news media, as well as the impact of the movement on users of social media and especially on Facebook. The research method used in order to provide answers to the main research questions is qualitative content analysis. According to this analysis, despite having made some progress, Mass Media have a wiry attitude towards the use of the term femicide and they cover the news of femicide in an incorrect and misleading manner. On the other hand, the effect of the 'MetooGR' movement is clearly visible mainly among the users of social media and especially among women.

Keywords: 'Metoo' movement, Gender based violence, Femicide, News Media, Social Media.

Introduction

Gender-based violence is a global, timeless, social phenomenon, which in recent years, especially after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, has reached alarming proportions both in Europe and Greece. The most extreme form of gender-based violence is femicide, which means the murder of women because of their gender (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], n.d.). More specifically, in Greece, eight femicides were committed in 2020, 23 femicides were committed the next year and 24 in 2023 (General Secretariat for Equality and Human Rights, 2023). The term femicide is not a universally accepted term in the legal, political, social and media world.

News media play a key role in the portrayal of gender, since they attract public attention, affect attitudes and public opinion. The use of sexist language and behaviors against women is common in the media (Katsambekis, Kanaouti & Kakepaki, 2024). In addition, women, especially those belonging to marginalized social groups (e.g. refugees etc.), are given little space and time in the media (Ryan & Tonkiss, 2023). When women are given a platform, the image projected of them is far from reality (Haider, Olimy & Al-Abbas, 2021). Their sexist, unrealistic image usually includes

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the following stereotypes: women are defined in relation to a man, presented as passive, submissive, without will and determination, housewives and/or sexual objects (Ward & Grower, 2020). Similar false representations are also observed in cases of domestic violence, as well as femicide (Sela-Shayovitz, 2018). In Greece, the murder of the 21-year-old student Eleni Topaloudi in Rhodes, in November 2018, was a key event for opening the media dialogue on the commission of femicide. However, the way femicide is presented in the media is evidence of the wrong approach to the issue until today.

The aim of the present research is to contribute to the visibility of the issue in the literature regarding the impact of the 'MetooGR' movement on the way in which femicide is presented in the media and the social media. The study of these representations can map the present situation in the media and social media about the issue of femicides and then lead to appropriate improvement interventions. The present research focuses on two femicides. The first is Caroline Crouch's femicide and the second an unknown 55-year-old woman from Komotini. This study examines the way the femicides were represented in national and local newscasts and newspapers. In the second part of this study emphasis is placed on the representation of femicides by the users in social media. The comparison of an institutional and a non institutional media is helpful in drawing conclusions. The research method used to discuss the data and answer the main research questions is thematic content analysis.

In the following sections, information is provided about the emergence of "Metoo movement", the role of media in the representation of the events and the standardized coverage of femicides in the media, according to bibliography. The section of methodology and details about the sample is set out below. The results are then presented followed by the section of the discussion. Interpretations of the results, the limitations of the research and some proposals are also indicated.

The "Metoo" movement

The global social movement "Metoo" against sexual harassment and abuse emerged in the United States of America (USA) on 15 October 2017, by the American actress Alyssa Milano, who posted the following on Twitter: "if you have been sexually harassed or abused, write "Metoo" in response to this tweet". The Facebook posts, comments and reactions exceeded 12 million in less than 24 hours (CBS News, 2017). Since then, numerous celebrities have shared their personal experiences of harassment or abuse, especially in the workplace (Pflum, 2018). Their example was followed by many non-celebrity women, publishing their own relevant abusive experiences. Soon, the hashtag "#Metoo" was used in various countries, expanding and giganticizing the movement, eventually giving it global characteristics (Alcande & Villa 2022: 1-18).

In Greece, the “Metoo” movement arrived belatedly in December 2020. It was triggered by the courageous Olympic champion Sophia Bekatorou, who denounced the sexual abuse she had suffered at the hands of a vice-president of the Hellenic Sailing Federation and representative of sailing at the Hellenic Olympic Committee, Aristides Adamopoulos. She revealed her abuse in an interview given to journalist Evita Tsilochristou at the Marie Claire magazine (Tsilohristou, 2020). Her revelation triggered a series of similar allegations. Accusations of harassment and abuse of women in the field of sport were followed by accusations from men and women in the field of entertainment, in particular, theater and television. This was followed by accusations from female students of various university institutions (Newsroom, 2021). The culmination was the accusations for sexual harassment and abuse of adult and underage boys against the former artistic director of the National Theatre, Dimitris Lignadis (“Greek ex-theatre director remanded over rape allegations, 2021”). The media played a catalytic role in the emergence and dissemination of the movement in Greece and worldwide, which was then intertwined with every modern social movement.

Shaping reality through the media

According to the theory of social representations, a prerequisite for communication between people is the existence of a common frame of reference, which is composed of social representations. Social representations refer to “cognitions stamping the collective thinking of society” (Höijer 2011: 6). Often, social representations are structured on an irrational attribution of labels. Essentially, they reflect the general way of evaluating, classifying and thinking about the world (Jodelet, 2008).

The media occupy an important position in the construction of meaning, producing and distributing knowledge - representations and mediating 'reality' to all their recipients. Through the transmission of information and news to the public, they essentially transmit symbolic sets and systems, shaping, to a certain extent, the interpretation of social reality and public opinion (Lampropoulou, 1997). Through agenda setting, the media influence public opinion by determining the importance of the issues on which the receiver is asked to form an opinion. Essentially, the media choose which issues have priority (agenda priming), which issues will be presented (agenda setting) and within which interpretative framework (agenda framing) they will be placed (Scheufele & Tewksbury 2007: 11).

Representations of femicide in the media

Since the media do not simply reproduce a news item, but place it from the outset and by definition within its own interpretative framework, they contribute significantly to the social construction of the concept of gender, the corresponding representations and gender stereotypes. The ways in

which they achieve this are through the language they use, the content of the news they present and the framing of the media. The common ways of framing a femicide, according to Gillespie & al. (2013) are as follows:

- Victim blaming and/or excusing the perpetrator. In this framing, the emphasis is on the victim's behavior, blaming the victim and excusing the perpetrator. Shifting blame from the perpetrator to the victim is done directly, through a negative characterization or by quoting irrelevant information about the crime, making reference to the victim's clothing or the causes of the femicide, which may include the perpetrator's alleged mental illness. In any case, the link between violence against women and the tendency of male perpetrators to assert their power is absent.
- Society in shock. The crime is presented as an isolated incident, a personal problem, while the perpetrator is presented as a normal person and a peaceful family man above suspicion, as confirmed by people in his wider social circle. The absence of any reference to the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator is usual, as is the silencing of the violence suffered by the victim before her death.
- Construction of the 'Other'. Femicide is projected as a crime that does not concern the majority, but some specific people different from us. This category of people includes the refugees, the irreligious, the mentally ill people and people of lower social and economic status. Besides, it is not uncommon for the media to focus on the origin of the perpetrator, reproducing racist and intolerant stereotypes.
- Police frame or “just the facts”. The media present the facts objectively, drawing information from police sources, which are their main source of information. In this case, the news of the femicide is accompanied by a dramatic tone and the gruesome details of the crime. Usually, the corresponding report includes information about the life of the victim, while the same is not true to a similar extent for the life of the perpetrator.

Method and Research Questions

The aim of the research is to highlight the impact of “MetooGR” on the way the news media present femicide and on the users of the social media. In order to achieve the research objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1. Is the term femicide supported or not by news media and social media users?

RQ2. In what ways is femicide presented in the news media and in social media after the emergence of “MetooGR”?

The research method that was considered appropriate and was chosen is qualitative content analysis and specifically thematic content analysis (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014). Through thematic analysis, cognitive access to collective modes of meaning-making and experiences is gained. More specifically, both on the news media and social media sample repetitive patterns of covering the femicides were sought. Then, a codebook of the content analysis was formulated based on previous research and the collected empirical material. These patterns were grouped and lead to some thematic categories.

The codebook for analyzing news media was designed by examining the language used in articles, headlines, and lead paragraphs in newspapers, as well as the language of TV presenters, reporters, and on-screen text during broadcasts. In both cases, visual content was also analyzed. The study specifically explored how the murder was described and justified, the sources referenced, and the portrayal of both the victim and the perpetrator. Additionally, it looked at the attitudes of family and friends toward both parties. Particular emphasis was placed on the use of the term “femicide”, both in terms of frequency and context. For social media analysis, the codebook focused on the use of the term “femicide”, how the phenomenon was discussed, including its causes, media coverage, the role of law enforcement, and how women connected their own experiences to those of others.

Sample of the media research

This paper will study two cases of femicide, which were committed after the emergence of “MetooGR”. The first femicide concerns the 20-year-old Caroline Crouch, who was murdered by her husband on 11/5/2021 in Glyka Nera, Attiki. Her husband, Babis Anagnostopoulos, claimed that ruthless robbers entered their house and murdered Caroline and their dog. Thirty-seven days later he confessed that he committed the murder. The second femicide involves a 55-year-old disabled woman from Komotini, whose name is not known. Her husband poured petrol on her and set her on fire. The woman succumbed to her burns on 12/9/2022.

In this research, judgemental or purposive Sampling was applied, as the sample was selected after deliberate subjective selection and collection of the material, which is nevertheless considered a representative sample. To investigate the research questions, material was collected from two print and two television media. With regard to the print media, the electronic form was chosen because of the extremely wide use of the internet at present. It was considered useful for the research to include one nationwide and one local media, since one of the femicides was committed in a provincial town and the other one close to the capital, Athens. The media were selected based on their popularity, which was checked using the Similarweb Traffic Analysis tool. More specifically, two articles were selected from the news website of the nationally circulated newspaper Proto

Thema and the local newspaper Xronos, which is located in the city of Komotini. So, the comparison of national and local news media will be helpful for the extraction of some final results.

The articles and newscasts of the sample were selected on the basis of specific dates which are related to the femicides. In the case of Caroline's femicide, the two dates of the search for articles are as follows: 18/6/2021 and 22/6/2021: on the day that her husband confessed his crime after a long interrogation, and on the day he was found to be in custody. Regarding the other case of femicide, the key dates for the research were 10/9/2022 and 12/9/2022. The crime was committed on Thursday evening 8/9/22, but the article which was published on 10/9/22 was chosen because of the detailed report it contained, just two days before the woman passed away.

Related to television media, the nationwide and first in popularity MEGA CHANNEL and the local television station RODOPI TV – RCHANNEL, which is located in Komotini, were selected. For the purposes of the research, two news bulletins were selected for each femicide. The news bulletins which included the news of Caroline's femicide were taken from MEGA CHANNEL and the news of the femicide of the woman who was murdered in Komotini from the local TV station. The subject of study was the way that the two femicides were presented. Emphasis was placed on the language and the interpretative context of the presentation of the news of each femicide.

Sample of the social media research

In order to study the impact of "MetooGR" on the users of the social media, the posts of 20 users of the Facebook (ten women and ten men) were collected, with the criterion of being referred to in the two specific femicides, on specific dates. In more detail, the posts for Caroline's femicide sought between 17/6/21 and 22/6/21. In the first date incriminating evidence against Caroline's husband was revealed and in the second he was taken into custody. In the case of the other femicide, the time limit was set from 8/9/22, when the woman was attacked by her husband, to 12/9/22, the day of the woman's death. The platform of Facebook was chosen for the selection of the participants, as it is the most popular social media worldwide (Dixon, 2024).

The chosen users belong to the researcher's wider social circle. The average age of the total sample of women (10 women) is 37 years and all of them are higher education graduates. Regarding their professional status, six of them are psychologists, two are university professors and two are journalists. The ten men who participated in the survey have an average age of 35.6 years. Seven out of ten are higher education graduates, while the remaining three are secondary school graduates. Regarding their professional status, three are farmers, two are journalists and two are university professors, while the professional status of the others remains unknown. The search is based on the key dates for each femicide.

Results of the mass media

In total, four news bulletins (two bulletins on each channel) and four news articles (two on each online newspaper) were studied. The word ‘femicide’ was not found in any of the articles and it was only mentioned twice in two television media. The words ‘homicide’, ‘murder’ and ‘crime’ were used instead of the term ‘femicide’. The term femicide was used in the newscast of RODOPI TV on 12/9/22 by the anchorwoman of the newscast, who quoted the following phrase: “Another femicide is recorded in our country....”. Also, in MEGA newscast, the word ‘femicide’ was used by Anna Kandaraki, a clinical psychologist. Kandaraki, as a guest on the broadcast, dissociated herself from the journalist's and the channel's stance regarding Caroline's femicide.

After coding and analyzing the content of the articles and reports, they were classified into frames. The frames of this research are common with them of the existing literature. According to the research data, the predominant way of covering the news was the Police frame or “just the facts”. In combination with this coverage, the other ways of covering the femicides were also identified. More specifically:

Police frame or “just the facts”

Both in headlines and in the main body of reports, femicide is presented as an event, accompanied by details of how the crime was committed (“From that moment on and for ten full minutes, he closed her mouth and nose and she wriggled until she finally passed out.”, Proto Thema, 18/6/21). In this particular way of covering femicide, the information in the reportage is usually drawn from police statements, which are carried in their entirety (“The police bulletin reports:...”, headline of RODOPI TV newscast, 9/9/22). The reports do not lack information regarding Caroline's identity and life, as well as photos of the couple's life together, taken from the social media. As far as the femicide of the 55-year-old woman is concerned, the only personal information published is the following: “It should be noted that the woman was an amputee on her right leg and was reportedly in her 4th month of pregnancy” Xronos newspaper, 12/9/22).

Construction of the “Other”

In both femicides the media represent the phenomenon of femicide as an isolated incident and which concerns people different from the majority. In Caroline's case, this type of coverage occurred both before and after the crime was solved. The perpetrator, Babis Anagnostopoulos, initially claimed that his wife was murdered by an armed robber who broke into their house. For more than a month, the media reproduced news reports about the indictment of foreigners, referring to the upsurge in crime. According to the media, the main suspect was a Georgian known robber (“GEORGIAN LESTER WHO WAS HELD UNDER SUSPECT FOR CAROLINE's MURDER ACCUSES POLICE VIOLENCE”, headline in MEGA news bulletin, 22/6/21). After the real perpetrator confessed to the crime, the media focused on his apathetic and unrepentant attitude,

implying that underlying a mental disorder that caused the commission of the crime (“NOT A SINGLE TEAR IN THE INTERROGATION”, MEGA news headline, 18/6/22). Something similar took place in the news of the femicide of the 55-year-old woman from Komotini. The newspaper Xronos implied that the cause of the attack was related to the psychiatric problems of the perpetrator (“From the report, it appears that he was taking medication”, Xronos newspaper, 10/9/22).

Victim blaming and/or excuses the perpetrator

The media justified the victims' killers in an indirect way, using emotionally charged phrases and focusing their attention on the victim's behavior. The justification of the perpetrator also occurs indirectly through the attribution of responsibility in his mental problem. The media often associate mental illness with crime, which is completely unsubstantiated and dangerous, as it promotes stereotypical and stigmatizing perceptions of the mentally ill (“The pilot may have claimed in his testimony that in the argument he “blurred” and killed his 20-year-old wife and mother of his child...”, Proto Thema, 18/6/21, “The 62-year-old perpetrator appears to have doused his wife with petrol and then regretted it and tried to put out the fire, and called the police”, RODOPI TV News, 12/9/22).

Society in shock

This type of cover-up is becoming obvious mainly in the case of Caroline's femicide. Both the MEGA news bulletins and the reports of Proto Thema are characterized by the dramatic and emotional tone of the news of Caroline's femicide (“As the analyses show, the chronology of the horror is as follows...”, Proto Thema, 18/6/21). The MEGA journalists, approaching familiar faces of the couple, conveyed the surprise of the interviewees after the proof of the woman-killer's guilt. Even after the guilty party was revealed, the media described the perpetrator as a 33-year-old pilot, a phrase suggesting authority and power. This description, combined with the publication of photographs of him in flight, created the image of a young, handsome and successful man, above any suspicion.

Results of the social media

The material, which was collected from the social media, concerns exclusively the femicide of Caroline, as no post related to the femicide of the 55-year-old woman from Komotini was found. The posts that were collected may not, in their entirety, constitute original material, but may have been drawn from other profiles and then shared by a member of the study sample. Almost all of the Facebook female users, from whose profiles the material of this survey was drawn, mentioned the word ‘femicide’ in their post. In contrast to the female Facebook users, only two men used the word ‘femicide’. The material collected was coded into the following thematic categories:

Awareness and response to the phenomenon

The majority of women express the need to address the phenomenon of femicide. Some women with a stronger and others with a milder tone, directly or indirectly seek to raise awareness about the crime of femicide, while demanding social changes towards the eradication of the phenomenon (“It is our duty not to leave all of them on a bare branch. Not to give them time to catch their breath. For the simplest, for the smallest... We owe it to the murdered, we owe it to the unborn, but most of all we owe it to the women who are (still) alive...” I.K., woman, 28 years old).

Patriarchy as a cause of femicide

Half of the female users mentioned the word patriarchy in their publication. In particular, they point to the patriarchal system as one that breeds and feeds on gender discrimination and gender violence (“We are not all here. The murdered women are missing. Those murdered by the patriarchy.” K.K. woman, 30 years old)

Emphasis on the term ‘femicide’

Some women place particular emphasis (grammatically and syntactically) on the term ‘femicide’. In this way they express their anger at the contestation and non-recognition of the term, while trying to convince of its correctness and usefulness (“FEMICIDE IS.” D.C., woman, 40 years old).

The collective experience of gender violence

After centuries of oppression, women say they are used to being oppressed and devalued at every level of their public and private lives. This is a collective experience of women, whereby the majority of women feel insecure and under constant threat to their physical and psychological integrity (“We are used to your apathy. Just as we are used to patriarchy, misogyny, sexism, hegemonic and toxic masculinity, homophobic and transphobic comments, attempts to control our bodies and our choices, statistics that reflect domestic violence. We are used to it all.” M.S., woman, 35 years old).

Criticism of the media coverage of femicide

A thematic category which is common both to women and men is the criticism toward the media. They are expressing their disgust and indignation at the way the media reported the news of Caroline's femicide. Overall, their publications convey the message that the media are missing the point of the issue and the source of the problem, reinforcing the already deeply entrenched gender stereotypes of public opinion (“Let us not hear again from the media about the “unfortunate woman”, about “crimes of passion”, “family tragedies”, “bad moments”, cases where “jealousy armed the perpetrator's hand / or erotic amok clouded his mind.” D.C., woman 39 years old, “The labels the media assigns to victims and defendants are not just indicative of society. They are

indicative of how necessary the daily and organized battle with the misanthropes of this world is.” A.L., man, 31 years old).

Criticism of the Hellenic Police for its attitude towards Caroline's femicide

Both men and women referred to Stavros Balaskas, a trade unionist of the Greek Police. They express their anger and disgust at the particular individual who through statements to a television medium, justified Caroline's femicide. Balaska's only objection concerned the manner in which the perpetrator chose to proceed from the commission of the crime onward, since if he had acted differently he could have secured a more favorable sentence (“Shame on Balaskas, we said today? Shall we say.” I.K., woman 28 years old “Chief Balaska's instructions to killers to get off cheap..”, P.A., man 34 years old).

Instructions to abused victims

Some male users republished a text, authored by the journalist, sociologist and Health Program Manager at the Onassis Foundation, Alexandros Morellas. This text, which is addressed to women, is both imperative and instructive. In essence, the author seeks to inform women about when and how to leave an abusive relationship, through what is known as mansplaining (“Don't wait for him to take out his anger on you for the 100th time before you leave...So if you need to, go to the police first...” G.K., man 25 years old, G.K., man, 34 years old S.L., 39 years old (straight.gr)).

Separation of the terms of femicide and androcide

A man explains the meaning of the term androcide, which is usually contrasted with the term of femicide. He tries to defend the term ‘femicide’ and its utility (“For those who don't understand the term ‘femicide’, and suggest male infanticide, perhaps some explanation is indeed needed...” A.C., man 45 years old).

Discussion

The phenomenon of femicide in Greece has reached alarming levels, with research by the Mediterranean Institute of Investigative Journalism revealing a significant increase. Between 2020 and 2021, Greece experienced the highest annual rise in femicides among 20 European countries, with a staggering 187.5% increase in just one year (Louloudi et al., 2023). Despite this surge and the emergence of the “MetooGR” movement, media coverage remains highly resistant to embracing the term "femicide." This reluctance is evident in the way news outlets continue to handle these cases, reflecting outdated reporting styles that often obscure the gendered nature of the crime.

One of the clearest signs of this resistance is the near-complete absence of the word "femicide" in media reports. In the research sample, no news articles used the term, and it appeared only twice

in television coverage—both times spoken by a mental health expert rather than a journalist. Instead, more generic terms like "homicide," "murder," and "crime" dominate coverage, stripping the crimes of their specific context as gender-based violence. This linguistic choice not only fails to highlight the gendered aspect of the killings but also perpetuates harmful narratives.

Media representations of femicide often subtly shift blame onto the female victims, while portraying the male perpetrators as mentally unstable. This portrayal creates a sympathetic image of the perpetrator and obscures the systemic misogyny and gender inequality that often underlie these crimes. Additionally, the media frequently idealizes the couple involved, suggesting that no one could have anticipated the crime, further distancing it from societal patterns of violence against women. Overall, femicide is treated as a routine crime, devoid of gendered implications.

Despite the rise of "MetooGR," media depictions of femicide remain largely unchanged. However, there has been some progress: outdated phrases like "crime of passion," "hate crime," and "family tragedy," which previously dominated coverage, are used less frequently today. Nevertheless, this shift is superficial, as the core framing of femicide continues to be distorted and misleading, reinforcing misogynistic attitudes and gender stereotypes rather than challenging them.

The disparity in media coverage of different femicides is another troubling aspect of the current landscape. The femicide of Caroline Crouch, for example, dominated Greek news for months, while the brutal killing of a 55-year-old woman in Komotini received little attention. This suggests that media coverage is driven more by public interest and the potential to boost ratings than by the severity or context of the crime. Caroline Crouch's case, which garnered significant attention, naturally led to more social media discussions, while the case from Komotini remained largely absent from public discourse.

Interestingly, provincial media tend to handle femicide coverage differently from national outlets. The "society in shock" narrative, which sensationalizes the crime, is less prevalent in local media. One possible reason is the desire to avoid a strong negative reaction from the local population toward the perpetrator and his family. Local journalists may also have greater freedom of expression compared to their national counterparts, who are often constrained by the interests of media owners and financiers. Provincial media are also more open to using the term "femicide" in their reporting.

In contrast to traditional media, social media—especially platforms used by women—has embraced the term "femicide" more readily. Social media users are critical of the way mass media reports on these crimes, often condemning the lack of nuance and sensitivity in the coverage. While both men and women critique media portrayals, men tend to approach the issue in a more simplistic and superficial manner. The "MetooGR" movement has thus had a more positive impact on social media discussions of femicide than on mainstream media.

To address the shortcomings in media coverage of femicide, several steps are necessary. First, journalism students and professionals should receive training on how to report on gender issues accurately and sensitively. The creation of a comprehensive guide on media coverage of gender-based violence would also be beneficial for those working in newsrooms. Additionally, enforcing ethical guidelines and imposing penalties for irresponsible reporting could help reduce the persistence of gender stereotypes in the media.

The research also highlights the need for further investigation. Future studies should involve larger and more diverse samples, moving beyond friends, family, and specific professional groups that are already sensitized to gender issues. Expanding research to other social media platforms, investigative journalism outlets, and exploring the role of experts in shaping public discourse on femicide and “MetooGR” would provide valuable insights.

In conclusion, while there have been minor improvements in how femicide is covered, particularly on social media, the Greek media as a whole continues to inadequately address the issue. The reluctance to use appropriate terminology and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes prevent a more accurate understanding of gender-based violence and hinder societal progress in addressing this critical issue.

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