



## **An Exploratory Study on Gender Disparity in Media and its Impact on Society: The Case of T/A Kapeni, Blantyre, Malawi**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Gender disparity in media representation is a pervasive global issue that influences societal perceptions, norms, and opportunities for individuals. Extensive research has identified significant gender disparities across various media forms, including television, films, social media, and advertising. Women are notably underrepresented in leading roles in film and television, often depicted in stereotypical roles that reinforce traditional gender norms. While there has been some progress in addressing these disparities, they persist, particularly in local contexts where cultural norms and socio-economic factors intersect, such as in T/A Kapeni, Blantyre, Malawi. This region provides a unique perspective on the ongoing challenges and efforts to address gender inequality in media representation.

Opinions on gender disparity reflect diverse perspectives regarding its root causes and strategies for resolution. Some believe progress has been made, while others stress the necessity for continued action. Feminist scholars, for example, highlight the pervasive impact of gender disparity on women's lives, emphasizing issues like the gender wage gap and the lack of representation in leadership positions. Media representation often reinforces harmful stereotypes, contributing to societal marginalization. Conversely, some argue that media reflects rather than perpetuates societal norms. Addressing gender disparity is viewed not only as a social justice issue but also as essential for economic growth. Despite differing views, there is a consensus on the need for innovative approaches to achieve gender equality in media. This study aims to explore these dynamics in T/A Kapeni, Blantyre, providing insights into local challenges and efforts towards more equitable media representation.

**KEY WORDS:** Gender, Gender Expression, Gender Fluidity, Gender non conformity

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Gender disparity in media representation is a global issue that shapes societal perceptions, norms, and opportunities for individuals. Research has shown that gender disparities exist across various forms of media, including television, films, social media, and advertising. Women are significantly underrepresented in leading roles in film and television, often portrayed in stereotypical roles that reinforce traditional gender norms. While some progress has been made, disparities persist, especially in local contexts where cultural norms and socio-economic factors intersect, such as in T/A Kapeni, Blantyre, Malawi. This region offers a unique lens to explore these dynamics, highlighting the ongoing challenges and efforts to address gender inequality in media.

Opinions on gender disparity vary, reflecting diverse perspectives on the root causes and strategies for addressing it. Some argue that progress has been made, while others emphasize the need for continued action. Feminist scholars, for example, highlight the pervasive impact of gender disparity on women's lives, stressing the need to address issues like the gender wage gap and lack of representation in leadership positions. Media representation of women often reinforces harmful stereotypes, contributing to societal marginalization. Conversely, some argue that media reflects existing societal norms rather than perpetuating stereotypes. Addressing gender disparity is seen by many not only as a matter of social justice but also crucial for economic growth. Despite these differing views, the need for innovative approaches to achieve gender equality in media remains critical.

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### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

A great amount of information is available regarding the representation of genders disparity on media and its impact to the society. Therefore, Integrative review method will be applied under literature review in order to understand the niche' of the information reviewed under a research topic. i.e. what do I know about this topic, what research has been done so far? What has the already research shown us and the gaps.

The reviewed literature spans from 2015 to 2024 and includes a brief definition of media and its importance, gender disparity, gender stereotype, impact of gender disparity on LGBTQ+ and its importance and impact to the society, relationship between media and gender, effects and controversies surrounding gender disparity, current issues, local context, theoretical.

### Empirical Review

Gender is a complex and the study titled "The Influence of Gender Disparity in Media on Perceptions and Attitudes" conducted by Smith et al. (2019) aimed to investigate the effects of gender representation in media on individuals' perceptions and attitudes towards gender roles. The researchers conducted a survey of 500 participants, both male and female, to assess their exposure to gender disparities in media and their subsequent attitudes towards gender equality. According to Smith et al, Gender has long been a topic of interest and debate in sociology and other fields of study. While sex refers to the biological characteristics that distinguish male and female individuals, gender is a social construct that encompasses the roles, behaviours, and expectations associated with being male or female in a particular society (Smith, 2015). These societal expectations often influence how individuals perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others. Gender norms can vary significantly across cultures and can change over time, leading some scholars to argue that gender is fluid and not fixed (Lee, 2019).

### Thematic Review

Gender stereotypes have been prevalent in media for decades, shaping perceptions and expectations of individuals based on their gender. This thematic review will explore the representation of gender stereotypes in various forms of media, including television, film, advertisements, and social media. By examining the portrayal of gender roles, traits, and characteristics in these different platforms, we can gain a better understanding of how these stereotypes contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality and discrimination in society. Gender stereotypes are widely held beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and roles that are typically associated with men and women. These stereotypes can have a powerful influence on our thoughts, behaviours, and interactions with others. A study conducted by Smith (2018), who examined the impact of gender stereotypes on career advancement. The study revealed that pervasive gender stereotypes often limit women's career opportunities and advancement, leading to a lack of representation of women in leadership positions. This research underscores the importance of challenging and dismantling gender stereotypes in order to promote gender equality in the workplace and beyond.

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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study explored Gender Disparity in Media and Its Impact on Society. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to describe the methodology for various components of the study such as the selection of the subjects (participants), research design, sampling procedure, instrumentation, data-collection procedure, data analysis procedure, limitations and ethical considerations.

The study was conducted in the Traditional authority (T/A) Kapeni, a rural area which is located in Blantyre district. The area is approximately 17 kilometers north east from Blantyre city and urban areas. The district is the commercial and industrial capital of Malawi located in the southern region of Malawi. It covers largely the rural that surrounds the commercial city and has a population of 800,264 (NSO, PHC 2018) with a population density of 189 per square kilometre. Blantyre rural has the high poverty level with 65.3% (NSO, HIS, 2011) of the people living below the poverty line.

### Research Design

This study used case study and narrative design. **Case study research design** was used due to its ability to provide detailed, in-depth information about a specific phenomenon. This research design allowed the study to focus on a single case or a small number of cases, enabling them to thoroughly investigate the complexities of the situation. This level of depth and detail is crucial in qualitative research, as it allows researchers to gain a rich understanding of the impact of media gender disparity to the community. By delving deep into the case, this study uncovered unique insights and nuances that may not be captured through other research designs.

### Sampling Procedure

Sampling is a crucial aspect of qualitative research as it determines the representativeness and credibility of the data collected. The sampling procedure however is a methodological framework employed to select a subset of participants from the larger population under study. In this study the sampling procedure that was used to investigate the impact of media gender disparity on community was stratified random sampling. This method involves dividing the population into subgroups based on certain characteristics, such as age, gender, or socioeconomic status, and then randomly selecting individuals from each subgroup to participate in the study. By ensuring that each subgroup is adequately represented in the sample, researchers can more accurately analyze the effects of media on different genders. This study was also use snowball sampling because it included the LGBTQ community.

### Sample Size

A sample size refers to the number of participants selected to represent the larger population, and choosing the right size is crucial in ensuring that the findings are not due to chance. According to this study a sample of 30 people was selected and assessed which represented the large population. When select choosing this sample size, different factors were considered which include the following; availability of resources, the level of precision desired, and the effect size the study is aiming to detect.

The participants included District Gender Officer from social welfare offices which is under ministry of Gender responsible for coordinating gender activities in the district, Media representatives from community radios, Community leader, community members from youth to elderly and the LGBTQ community All participants except the gender officer and media representatives are residents of Kapeni area.

The translations were from Chichewa to English. In general, the transcripts of all interviews were done in the language used by the participants and later transcribed. Although it is possible that a change in idiom may have taken place, the researcher is satisfied that the translations are true to the course of the conversation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

LGBTQ is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning individuals who identify with non-heteronormative sexual orientations or gender identities. This acronym is an umbrella term that consists of a diverse range of identities and experiences within the LGBTQ community. At its heart, LGBTQ embraces the existence and validity of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities beyond the binary of male and female. Lesbian mean women who are attracted to other women, gay refers to men who are attracted to other men, bisexual refers to individuals who are attracted to more than one gender, transgender refers to individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth, and queer/questioning refers to individuals who are exploring their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**The table below gives a full description of individual characters;**

Table 1: General characteristics of LGBTQ

	LGBTQ 1	LGBTQ 2	LGBTQ 3	LGBTQ 4	LGBTQ 5	LGBTQ 6
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	Female
Age	22	33	25	35	40	28
Marital status	Single	Married	Single	Single	Married	Single
Children at CBCC	0	1	0	1	2	0
Employment status	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Business	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Highest level of education	MSCE	Degree	JSCE	MSCE	Degree	Diploma
Religion	Christian	none	Christian	Christian	Christian	Muslim

6 LGBTQ community members were identified using snowball sampling and interviewed. Out of 6, 3 were lesbians and 2 gay and 1 bisexual. Out of these 6 only 2 are married of these 2 ones is lesbian who is married to other woman and the other one is bisexual man who is married to a woman and they have 2 kids together. Out of the 6 participants, 3 have kids of these 3, 2 have biological children while 1 adopted a child and the remaining 3 does not have kids. Of these participants only 2 are not employed and for are employed. 3 have businesses and 3 do not. These participants were of the age range from 22-40. 4 participants are Christians, 1 Muslim and 1 does not believe in religion. Out of these participants 3 reached tertiary level of these 3, 2 are graduated and 1 has a diploma. 3 reached secondary schools and of these 3, 2 have MSCE and one Has Junior Secondary Certificate of Education

Table 2: General characteristics of youth

	Youth 1	Youth 2	Youth 3	Youth 4	Youth 5	Youth 6	Youth 7	Youth8	Youth 9	Youth 10
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female	Female
Age	19	24	20	18	22	27	30	29	27	35
Marital status	Married	Married	Single	Single	Single	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married
Children at CBCC	1	1	1	0	0	2	2	3	2	3
Employment status	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Business	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No

Highest level of education	Form 4	Primary school leaving certificate	Standard 7	Form 4	Form 2	Form 4	JSCE	Form 3	Standard 4	Form 1
Religious	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian

From the focus group discussions conducted with 10 youth in TA Kapeni, Blantyre out of the 10 participants 5 were men and 5 women within the age range of 18 to 35. Out of the 10 participants 7 were married and 3 are not married. Out of the three that are not married 2 were men and 1 female. From the 10 participants interviewed 8 have children and only 2. From these 10 participants only 3 are working and 7 are not working and 3 people are doing business and 7 doesn't have any business. The participants were also asked a question on their highest level of education, 7 people reached secondary school and 3 only did primary school education. All the 10 participants were Christians.

Table 3: General characteristics of middle aged and elderly

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participant 9	Participant 10
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
Age	48	51	44	66	41	58	38	41	53	67
Marital status	Married	Married	Married	Window	Separated	Married	Married	Married	Married	Married
Children at CBCC	2	4	1	1	3	5	3	3	4	8
Employment status	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Business	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Highest level of education	Form 4	Standard 7	Standard 7	Standard 6	Standard 3	Standard 6	Form 3	Form 4	Standard 7	Form 1
Religion	Muslim	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Muslim	Christian

From the focus group discussions conducted with 10 youth in TA Kapeni, Blantyre out of the 10 participants 5 were men and 5 women within the age range of 38 to 67. Out of the 10 participants 8 were married, 1 separated and 1 window. Out of the 8 that are married 5 were men and 3 female and from those that are not married all 2 are female. From the 10 participants interviewed all 10 have children. From these 10 participants only 4 are working and 6 are not working and 3 people are doing business and 7 are not doing any business. The participants were also asked a question on their highest level of education, 7 people reached secondary school and 3 only did primary school education. Out of the 10 participants 8 were Christians and 2 Muslim.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

Women have historically been underrepresented in movies, with significant improvement only occurring recently. Traditionally, films often depicted women in stereotypical roles, such as damsels in distress or femme fatales, reinforcing traditional gender roles. For example, in "Gone with the Wind" (1939), Scarlett O'Hara is portrayed as a strong-willed yet ultimately submissive woman reliant on men. Research indicates that media has the power to shape perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, as evidenced by Jamison et al. (2018), who found that media content significantly influences individual beliefs and attitudes. The lack of women in leadership positions in media, highlighted by Lauzen (2018), limits diverse perspectives and reinforces the notion that leadership roles are predominantly male, discouraging women from pursuing careers in such fields and perpetuating workplace gender inequality.

In recent years, there has been a push for greater diversity and representation of women in movies, with films like "Wonder Woman" (2017) and "Hidden Figures" (2016) showcasing strong, complex female characters. Despite progress, challenges remain, as highlighted by the #MeToo movement, which exposed sexual harassment and discrimination against women in Hollywood and underscored the need for safer, more inclusive work environments. Intersectionality is crucial in analyzing female representation in cinema, as women from marginalized communities are often misrepresented or

underrepresented. Films such as "Moonlight" (2016) and "Lady Bird" (2017) have been praised for their authentic portrayals of diverse women. Additionally, sexual objectification in media is a pervasive issue, with research indicating that women, particularly African American women, are often more sexualized than their Caucasian counterparts.

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## SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To address gender disparities in the film industry, it is crucial to increase female representation in leadership roles by encouraging studios and production companies to hire more women as directors, producers, and writers through targeted recruitment, mentorship programs, and diversity-promoting policies. Films should feature strong, multifaceted female characters who defy traditional stereotypes, reflecting a wide range of experiences. Screenwriters and directors should be encouraged to create roles that showcase women's strengths and abilities beyond traditional gender roles. Policies to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination in the industry must be strengthened and enforced, with support for movements like #MeToo to advocate for safer and more inclusive work environments. Additionally, it is important to address intersectionality by highlighting and authentically representing the stories of women from marginalized communities, ensuring their experiences are accurately portrayed in films. Filmmakers should critically assess the portrayal of women to avoid sexual objectification, promoting research and awareness campaigns to advocate for respectful and empowering representations. Educating audiences on the impact of media representation through workshops, school programs, and public awareness campaigns can foster media literacy and critical viewing skills. By implementing these recommendations, the film industry can continue to make strides toward gender equality, ensuring that women are fairly and accurately represented both on and off the screen.

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## CONCLUSION

This research underscores the significant impact of media portrayals of gender-based violence on community perceptions and behaviours. To mitigate these effects, it is imperative to promote more balanced and responsible media representations. This includes not only avoiding harmful stereotypes but also highlighting stories of resilience and recovery. Additionally, enhancing media literacy, particularly among the youth, can empower individuals to critically engage with media content and resist its negative influences. Through these efforts, we can work towards a media landscape that contributes to a more just and equitable society.

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