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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores gender equity in Tanzanian journalism, specifically examining the roles women play in hard news, soft news, and sports reporting. It seeks to understand the persistent gender-based disparities in newsroom assignments and leadership opportunities.

Materials and Methods: Using a qualitative approach, the research draws on interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions with female journalists across Tanzania, capturing both professional experiences and personal reflections.

Findings: The study reveals a consistent pattern: women are disproportionately assigned to soft news beats like lifestyle, entertainment, and human-interest stories while their male counterparts dominate the high-stakes realms of politics, crime, and sports. This isn't just about editorial preference; many women perceive it as an unspoken barrier, a form of gatekeeping rooted in implicit bias and long-standing newsroom cultures. Participants spoke candidly about missed opportunities, the

constant need to prove themselves, and the emotional toll of being sidelined while watching male peers ascend. Leadership roles remain largely out of reach, making the metaphorical “glass ceiling” feel like a daily reality.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: This study deepens the conversation around gender in journalism by centering on the lived experiences of Tanzanian women in the profession. It calls on media organizations to go beyond token gestures, urging them to implement gender-aware editorial policies, create equitable access to mentorship and training, and confront the cultural narratives that silently shape newsroom dynamics. Equity in journalism won't come from policy alone but from how those policies are lived out day by day.

Keywords: *J16-Economics of Gender; Non-labor Discrimination, J24-Human Capital; Skills; Occupational Choice; Labor Productivity, Entertainment; Media, O55-Africa*

INTRODUCTION

Gender Equity in Tanzanian Journalism: Challenges and Progress

Gender equity in journalism remains a significant concern and necessary discussion, particularly in regions like Tanzania, where media systems are developing amid entrenched patriarchal legacies. Understanding this issue necessitates a clear differentiation between gender equality and gender equity, terms often used interchangeably, yet fundamentally distinct in both philosophy and implementation.

Gender equality implies the equal distribution of resources, opportunities, and responsibilities between men and women. It assumes a level playing field, one where each individual has the same tools and is expected to achieve the same outcomes. While this ideal is noble, it risks overlooking the historical and structural inequalities that shape lived experiences particularly for women in male-dominated industries such as journalism.

Gender equity, by contrast, acknowledges that the playing field is not equal to begin with. It calls for targeted measures and context-specific interventions that compensate for systemic disadvantages. For example, offering equal access to hard news assignments without addressing the unspoken norms that discourage women from pursuing political reporting or sports journalism does little to challenge the root of inequality. Equity may involve deliberate mentorship programs, editorial policy reforms, or quotas for leadership positions, measures that recognize the weight of historical exclusion.

In the Tanzanian context, these nuances are especially pertinent. Although women have increasingly entered the journalistic workforce, their participation remains largely confined to the so-called “soft news” beats like lifestyle, education, health, and human-interest features. These assignments, while vital, are often undervalued in newsroom hierarchies, offering fewer pathways to career advancement. The hard news arena like politics, governance, investigative journalism and the realm of sports reporting continue to be guarded territories, dominated by men and legitimized through long-standing editorial norms.

A recent study by the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) underscores this disparity. It found that in two of the country’s most prominent newspapers, Mwananchi and The Guardian, women journalists contributed to only a minor share of political and economic coverage. This is not merely a matter of bylines, it signals deeper questions about whose voices shape the public agenda, whose perspectives are seen as authoritative, and which stories are prioritized in national discourse.

The underrepresentation of women in political and economic reporting doesn't just marginalize female professionals, it skews the democratic function of journalism itself. Media institutions do more than relay information; they filter, frame, and ultimately help define what is deemed important in society. When those institutions are dominated by male voices, especially in areas of power and policy, the resulting narratives risk excluding half the population’s experiences and insights.

The exclusion is even more pronounced in sports journalism, where the barriers are both cultural and institutional. Few women are assigned to cover sports, and even fewer are promoted within sports desks. In conversations with Tanzanian female journalists, many express frustrations at being pigeonholed into roles that are deemed more “appropriate” or “natural” for women. One journalist recounted how her editor consistently redirected her pitches on women’s football to the features section, while reserving national league coverage for male colleagues. Such editorial decisions reinforce a media logic in which men’s stories and by extension, men’s voices are treated as default.

These patterns of exclusion not only stunt individual careers but also compromise the richness of journalism as a democratic institution. When women are absent or sidelined in newsrooms, particularly in areas of influence like politics or sports, society loses access to a broader and more representative narrative landscape.

This study thus positions itself at the intersection of structural critique and human experience. It contributes empirically to understanding how gendered newsroom cultures and editorial logics shape not only assignment distribution but long-term career progression. The research draws on interviews, institutional documents, and newsroom observations to reveal how women navigate, resist, and in some cases, reimagine their roles within the journalistic profession.

Importantly, the analysis extends beyond numerical representation. It advocates for a deeper, more substantive reform agenda, one that promotes inclusive newsroom cultures where women are not only present but also empowered to lead, question, and define coverage in all areas of journalism, including those traditionally dominated by men.

What emerges is not merely a portrait of disparity, but a story of resilience and quiet defiance. Many women journalists in Tanzania are actively pushing against the boundaries placed upon them, whether by taking on controversial stories, mentoring younger female colleagues, or forming collectives to challenge gendered newsroom practices. Their journeys are shaped by structural limitations, yes, but also by agency, creativity, and a deep belief in journalism's transformative potential.

Ultimately, if journalism is to live up to its promise as the fourth estate, a pillar of democratic life, it must first confront its internal inequities. In Tanzania, this means reimagining newsroom policies, reassessing editorial assignments, and ensuring that equity, not just equality, is at the heart of media practice. Only then can the profession claim to truly reflect the voices, experiences, and aspirations of all members of society.

Research Problem and Objective

While gender representation in global media has received substantial scholarly attention, the specific question of gender equity in journalism, particularly within the Tanzanian context, remains markedly underexamined. The distinction is not merely semantic. Gender equality may reflect numerical gains in representation, but gender equity probes deeper, calling attention to how power, access, and opportunity are distributed within newsrooms and across journalistic beats. This distinction becomes especially critical in professions like journalism, which not only report on societal structures but also reproduce them.

In Tanzania, journalism continues to be a crucial platform for shaping public discourse, civic awareness, and democratic engagement. However, women journalists often remain sidelined from the most influential and career-defining roles. Their contributions, while increasing in visibility, are still disproportionately concentrated in “soft news” domains such as lifestyle, culture, education, and human-interest stories. By contrast, “hard news” beats such as politics, governance, economics, and investigative reporting continue to be male-dominated spheres, both symbolically and structurally. Sports journalism, perhaps the most overtly gendered of all, remains heavily skewed in favor of male reporters and editors.

These imbalances are not random; they are the result of deeply embedded structural barriers within Tanzanian media institutions. These barriers manifest in multiple, often interlocking forms: editorial cultures that view women as less suited for high-stakes reporting; mentorship gaps that limit women's professional development; a lack of gender-sensitive newsroom

policies; and implicit biases that inform story assignments, promotion trajectories, and newsroom leadership opportunities.

For example, anecdotal evidence and formal assessments alike reveal that women reporters are frequently overlooked for political reporting because of assumptions about their availability, emotional resilience, or ability to “handle” confrontational interviews. A senior female journalist shared how she was consistently passed over for parliamentary coverage in favor of less experienced male colleagues, the rationale being that “such stories require tough skin.” In reality, the barrier was not her competence but a cultural script that equated authority with masculinity.

A 2022 report by the Media Council of Tanzania brought further clarity to this issue. It revealed that in two of the country’s most circulated newspapers, *Mwananchi* and *The Guardian*, fewer than 20% of sports articles were authored by women. This statistic does more than confirm numerical disparity; it reflects institutional inertia and the absence of intentional policies to redistribute editorial power.

Against this backdrop, the current study seeks to critically interrogate how gender equity or the lack thereof influences journalistic role allocation in Tanzania, particularly across hard news, soft news, and sports reporting. The study is premised on the understanding that newsroom dynamics do not operate in a vacuum; they are shaped by broader sociocultural attitudes, institutional frameworks, and historical gender norms.

- i. Analyze the systemic challenges preventing female journalists from equitably participating in traditionally male-dominated beats.
- ii. Examine the structural and cultural constraints that influence editorial decision-making regarding gendered news assignments.
- iii. Propose actionable recommendations for fostering a more inclusive and equitable journalism environment in Tanzania.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding gender equity in Tanzanian journalism, particularly within the domains of hard news, soft news, and sports reporting, requires a theoretical framework that interrogates both organizational structures and the symbolic dimensions of media practice. This study draws upon three interrelated theoretical perspectives to examine the systemic nature of gendered disparities in newsroom roles: Gendered Organizations Theory, Framing Theory, and Intersectionality Theory.

Joan Acker’s Gendered Organizations Theory (1990) serves as a foundational lens for this analysis. Acker posits that organizations are not gender-neutral spaces; rather, they are inherently structured by masculine norms that dictate expectations around behavior, authority, and leadership. In Tanzanian newsrooms, this dynamic is vividly observable in the gendered division of labor: men dominate the political, economic, and investigative beats, while women are frequently assigned to less prestigious “soft news” segments, such as lifestyle, entertainment, or education. These assignments are not merely reflective of individual preferences; they are embedded within institutional logics that position masculinity as synonymous with professionalism and toughness, qualities presumed necessary for high-stakes reporting.

For instance, anecdotal accounts from Tanzanian female journalists consistently highlight how newsroom managers hesitate to assign them to hard news, citing “safety concerns” or a perceived lack of assertiveness. In reality, such justifications conceal implicit biases and

reinforce a status quo where hard news is masculinized and soft news feminized. This structural marginalization is perpetuated through hiring practices, assignment protocols, and promotion criteria all of which are guided by gendered assumptions about competence and authority. Acker's framework thus enables us to critically unpack how these newsroom structures systematically disadvantage women, not through overt exclusion but through the subtle normalization of gendered hierarchies.

Erving Goffman's Framing Theory (1974) complements this analysis by highlighting how media narratives and the processes behind their production shape public perceptions of gender roles. In Tanzanian journalism, hard news is often framed as requiring attributes such as assertiveness, analytical rigor, and confrontation traits historically coded as masculine. In contrast, soft news is framed around emotional labor, relational storytelling, and empathy attributes culturally associated with femininity. This dichotomy affects not only editorial decision-making but also professional recognition and advancement. Journalists covering politics or investigative scandals are more likely to gain visibility, win awards, and be promoted into leadership positions benefits that are disproportionately extended to male journalists due to their dominant presence in these beats.

Such framing practices are not value-neutral. They shape the symbolic capital attached to different journalistic roles, reinforcing a hierarchy where male-dominated beats are perceived as more serious or impactful. As a result, even when women perform exceptionally within soft news categories, their contributions are often undervalued or dismissed as secondary. This perpetuates a cycle where gendered framing not only constrains women's mobility but also influences public understanding of what "serious journalism" looks like.

To bring this theoretical discussion into a more contemporary context, this study also draws on Intersectionality Theory, particularly as articulated by Crenshaw (1991) and further expanded by recent African feminist media scholars such as Bosire (2021) and Mutua (2023). Intersectionality helps to contextualize the layered experiences of Tanzanian women journalists by acknowledging how gender interacts with other axes of identity, such as age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and regional location, to produce unique forms of marginalization.

For example, younger female journalists from rural regions may face dual burdens of gender and class-based exclusion, with limited access to elite networks, urban mentorship programs, or decision-making spaces within media houses. Intersectionality theory thus enriches this study's framework by accounting for the differentiated experiences among women and resisting the tendency to treat female journalists as a monolithic group.

Taken together, these three frameworks provide a comprehensive lens through which to understand the persistent gender inequities in Tanzanian journalism. Gendered Organizations Theory exposes the structural design of newsroom practices; Framing Theory explains how symbolic narratives shape professional value and identity; and Intersectionality Theory contextualizes the diverse and intersecting experiences of women within these systems.

By grounding this research in a multidimensional theoretical foundation, the study seeks not only to diagnose the structural and cultural mechanisms that marginalize women in hard news and sports journalism but also to inform policies and interventions that are both equitable and contextually relevant. In doing so, it advocates for a journalism culture that does more than include women it empowers them with equal authority, access, and visibility in shaping Tanzania's public discourse.

Gender Equity in Journalism: A Global and Regional Perspective

Gender inequity in journalism is not a novel concern; rather, it is a persistent and globally documented challenge that continues to resist resolution despite decades of advocacy and academic scrutiny. While the number of women entering journalism programs has steadily increased, this numerical progress has not translated into proportional representation in the most influential sectors of the profession. Across numerous media systems, women remain underrepresented in hard news reporting, investigative journalism, and senior editorial leadership (Byerly, 2013). According to the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP, 2020), female journalists continue to be overwhelmingly assigned to soft news, such as lifestyle, human-interest features, and entertainment, while men dominate political, economic, and conflict reporting. This segmentation not only curtails women's professional growth but also perpetuates reductive gender norms in how stories are framed and which voices are heard in the public sphere.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, and particularly in Tanzania, these disparities are further magnified by the absence of robust institutional mechanisms to promote gender equity. Kamweru and Ochieng (2019) observe that although female representation in African newsrooms has grown over the past two decades, the concentration of women in non-leadership roles reveals the limits of this progress. Most media houses in Tanzania lack explicit gender-sensitive editorial policies, leaving critical decisions around assignments and promotions to the discretion of predominantly male editorial managers. This discretionary system often reinforces patriarchal assumptions about who is "fit" to report on complex or politically sensitive issues.

For instance, anecdotal evidence from Tanzanian journalists suggests that women are frequently overlooked for field assignments involving political campaigns or investigative exposés due to concerns about "safety" or perceived "emotional fragility." These justifications, though seemingly benign, serve to reproduce the gendered silos within which journalistic labor is allocated. Without institutional safeguards to check such discretionary bias, the cycle of gendered marginalization persists.

Notably, other African nations offer instructive examples of how policy reforms can effectively institutionalize gender equity in journalism. South Africa, for example, has made significant strides through the work of the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA) and the South African National Editors' Forum (SANEF). These institutions have jointly developed gender mainstreaming guidelines that are integrated into media house operations, including hiring, beat assignment, and editorial leadership development. As a result, some South African newsrooms now mandate gender audits and use gender-sensitive performance metrics to track newsroom equity.

Kenya, too, offers a promising model. The Kenya Editors Guild, in partnership with the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), has championed gender-responsive media policies. These include mentorship programs specifically for female reporters and mandatory diversity training for editorial leaders. One particularly impactful initiative, the Women in News Leadership Accelerator, has equipped dozens of Kenyan women journalists with the tools to pursue leadership roles, directly challenging the structural barriers that inhibit career advancement.

These regional precedents provide a roadmap for Tanzanian media institutions. Incorporating mandatory gender policies such as equity in beat assignments, leadership quotas, and transparent promotion criteria can shift newsroom cultures from implicit exclusion to deliberate

inclusion. Furthermore, investing in women-led mentorship and professional development networks could create sustainable pipelines for female journalists to enter high-impact roles.

Ultimately, the literature suggests that resolving gender inequity in journalism requires more than increasing the numerical presence of women. It demands a transformation in the structural and cultural fabric of news organizations. This means rethinking how newsworthiness is defined, how editorial authority is distributed, and how career advancement is facilitated. Without deliberate reforms grounded in both policy and practice, media institutions will continue to reflect rather than challenge the patriarchal values embedded in society. For Tanzania, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity to reimagine journalism as a truly inclusive profession that reflects the full breadth of its society's experiences and voices.

The Gendered Nature of News Coverage

News coverage, both globally and within Tanzania, continues to reflect entrenched gendered norms rooted in historical biases. These biases have long cast men as the primary narrators of public life, especially in domains deemed politically or socially significant. Hard news encompassing areas such as politics, crime, war, and economic policy remains overwhelmingly male-dominated, both in terms of bylines and editorial leadership. A 2021 report by the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) found that more than 70% of front-page political stories in Tanzania's major newspapers were authored by men, indicating a persistent gender imbalance in coverage of key national issues.

By contrast, women journalists are disproportionately assigned to soft news categories such as lifestyle, culture, and human-interest stories genres often perceived, albeit unjustly, as less authoritative or consequential. This divide is not simply a reflection of individual interest or aptitude; rather, it is deeply embedded in newsroom hierarchies and editorial cultures. Female journalists who seek to transition into hard news or sports reporting frequently encounter subtle forms of gatekeeping. Editors may question their stamina, emotional resilience, or readiness to operate in high-pressure environments qualities that are often, and inaccurately, gendered as masculine.

These dynamics reveal a broader, institutionalized problem: the structural barriers that hinder women's full participation in Tanzanian journalism. Chief among these is the enduring glass ceiling that limits access to senior leadership. Despite near gender parity at entry-level positions, women remain vastly underrepresented in decision-making roles. A 2022 analysis published by The Citizen indicated that only 3 out of 15 major media outlets in the country were led by female editors-in-chief. This underrepresentation is not simply a numerical concern but one that has significant implications for how stories are assigned, framed, and prioritized within newsrooms.

Equally pressing is the issue of work-life balance, particularly for women navigating dual roles in the professional and domestic spheres. The demands of journalism long hours, on-call assignments, and extensive travel are often incompatible with prevailing societal expectations of women as primary caregivers. For many female journalists, career advancement requires difficult trade-offs, with some opting out of high-stakes assignments in favor of more "manageable" roles. This dynamic, shaped more by social structure than by personal choice, ultimately constrains the diversity of voices in leadership and policy-influencing journalism.

Perhaps most troubling is the prevalence of workplace harassment, a barrier that undermines not only gender equity but also basic professional dignity. The 2020 TAMWA study underscored the ubiquity of gender-based harassment in Tanzanian newsrooms. Female journalists reported facing inappropriate comments, unwanted advances, and in some cases,

coercion tied to career advancement. Despite the severity of these experiences, many women choose not to report such incidents, citing fear of retaliation, reputational damage, or skepticism about institutional response mechanisms. This silence is not indicative of resilience, but rather of the structural failure to provide safe, accountable workplaces.

To effectively confront this issue, media institutions must move beyond generic commitments to workplace equality and implement concrete anti-harassment policies. First, every newsroom should establish an independent gender and ethics committee with the authority to receive and investigate harassment complaints confidentially. Second, mandatory training on gender sensitivity and professional conduct should be instituted for all staff, from reporters to senior editors. These trainings must be ongoing and include modules on power dynamics, unconscious bias, and trauma-informed approaches to reporting and management. Third, whistleblower protections must be codified, ensuring that journalists who report misconduct are shielded from retaliation and supported with legal and psychological resources.

Moreover, media regulatory bodies such as the Media Council of Tanzania should mandate compliance with gender equity standards as part of newsroom accreditation and professional licensing. This would institutionalize accountability and shift the burden of responsibility from individual journalists to the media ecosystem as a whole.

Representation in Sports Journalism

Sports journalism highlights some of the most pronounced gender disparities in media. In Tanzania, as in many parts of the world, women remain significantly underrepresented in this field, both as reporters and in editorial leadership. The issue is not just about personal interest but also structural barriers. Female sports journalists often face resistance in male-dominated press environments, with their expertise being questioned and their work receiving less recognition compared to their male counterparts.

A study by the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) found that in leading sports publications and television programs, male reporters dominate coverage of major leagues such as the Tanzanian Premier League and international sporting events like the FIFA World Cup. Women, on the other hand, are more commonly assigned to report on less-publicized sports or sidelined to editorial support roles rather than frontline reporting.

Beyond representation, the portrayal of female athletes in Tanzanian media also reflects gender biases. Coverage often emphasizes their physical appearance and personal lives rather than their athletic achievements. For instance, when the Tanzanian women's national football team, the Twiga Stars, won the 2021 COSAFA Women's Championship, media outlets gave less coverage to their tactical performance compared to the focus on individual player profiles and off-field stories. Addressing these disparities requires newsroom policies that actively encourage female sports journalists, along with editorial reforms that ensure equitable coverage of male and female athletes.

The Role of Policy and Advocacy

Achieving gender equity in journalism is not simply a matter of counting how many women sit in newsrooms. It is about transforming the institutional cultures and policies that continue to privilege male voices, especially in prestigious beats like politics and sports. In the Tanzanian media landscape, this transformation demands a two-pronged strategy: internal reform within media organizations and external advocacy at the policy level.

Internally, media houses must begin with their editorial frameworks. Gender-sensitive hiring and promotion policies are essential, not as token gestures but as structural correctives to

systemic exclusion. This means explicitly evaluating newsroom practices to ensure that women are not only present but equitably represented in hard news, sports, and investigative reporting. Mentorship programs offer a practical entry point. When younger female journalists are paired with seasoned professionals, particularly in male-dominated areas such as sports journalism, they gain not just skills but visibility and confidence, elements often missing from their professional trajectories.

Training initiatives, too, can act as equalizers. While organizations like the Media Council of Tanzania (MCT) and TAMWA have already laid valuable groundwork through workshops on political and investigative reporting, their efforts must evolve to target the under-addressed areas. For example, comprehensive sports journalism training paired with institutional commitments to reassigning beats more equitably could create new openings for women who have long been sidelined.

However, advocacy cannot stop at the newsroom doors. Legal protections must be strengthened to prevent discrimination and harassment, which remain silent but powerful deterrents. Many Tanzanian women journalists have shared their hesitation to report harassment, rooted in fear, stigma, or lack of formal procedures. It is no longer enough to acknowledge this issue in annual reports or editorials. What is needed are enforceable anti-harassment frameworks that include confidential reporting mechanisms, independent investigation committees, and enforceable consequences for perpetrators. Media regulators and unions must play a more assertive role here, ensuring that no journalist has to choose between her safety and her career.

Ultimately, equity cannot be achieved through goodwill alone. It must be institutionalized etched into contracts, editorial policies, and performance reviews so that journalism in Tanzania reflects not just the stories of the nation, but the diversity of those who tell them.

Hard News, Soft News and Sports Journalism: A Gendered Divide

In many newsrooms, beat assignments are more than professional decisions they are reflections of deeply ingrained social beliefs. Who gets to report on which stories is not just about experience or availability, but about power, perception, and prestige. In Tanzania, as elsewhere, journalism's gendered geography is striking: men dominate the so-called "serious" terrain of hard news and sports, while women are steered often subtly into softer beats.

This division is not incidental. It is historically cultivated and institutionally sustained. It begins at the point of entry into journalism and often follows women throughout their careers, restricting not only the kinds of stories they cover but also the professional respect and influence they command.

Hard News Reporting

Hard news is more than a journalistic category; it is a gatekeeping mechanism. Politics, economics, crime, and governance reporting are often portrayed as requiring qualities historically coded as masculine authority, stamina, detachment, and even aggression (Ross, 2020). These are the terrains where news agendas are shaped, and public discourse is most directly influenced. Yet for many women journalists in Tanzania, access to this terrain remains tightly controlled.

Editorial decisions about hard news assignments are rarely made in a vacuum. They are often guided by unspoken assumptions: that women may not "handle" political backlash that they might lack the confrontational edge required for corruption exposés, or that family responsibilities could interfere with the erratic demands of crime reporting. These judgments

become self-fulfilling. As fewer women are assigned to these stories, fewer gain the track records needed for promotions or accolades.

Consider the case of Zuhura Yunus, a Tanzanian journalist who transitioned from covering social affairs to hosting high-stakes political interviews. Her trajectory was not without resistance. In an interview, she recalled being told early in her career that “political stories are too intense for women.” It took years of persistence, informal mentorship, and producing consistently excellent work before she was granted a political beat. Even then, she faced skepticism often subtle, sometimes overt from colleagues and sources alike.

Her story is not exceptional, it is emblematic. It reveals how women in hard news must often prove themselves doubly: first, against the story, and second, against the structure.

Soft News and Gendered Stereotypes

Soft news is frequently framed as the natural domain of female journalists. Stories about family, culture, lifestyle, or community welfare are assumed to align with women's supposed emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills (Poole, 2019). While this assignment logic may appear benign, or even complimentary, it is deeply limiting.

On one hand, women's work in soft news has undeniably enriched journalism. It has introduced empathy, narrative depth, and community engagement into a field historically obsessed with politics and scandal (Gallagher, 2017). On the other hand, the overconcentration of women in these roles functions as a glass wall visible yet difficult to penetrate separating them from more politically influential and professionally rewarded forms of reporting.

In Tanzania, this phenomenon is well-illustrated by the experience of Asha Mussa, a journalist at a leading Dar es Salaam-based newspaper. Despite holding a degree in political science and expressing interest in governance reporting, she was placed on the features desk upon hire. “I was told, ‘This is where women shine,’” she recounted. “But I didn’t want to shine, I wanted to challenge, to investigate, to question power.” Her appeals to switch beats were repeatedly delayed until she eventually left the paper for a non-profit newsroom that allowed her to pursue political stories.

Stories like Asha's expose the quiet violence of institutional assumptions how well-intentioned editors can inadvertently curtail ambition by insisting on outdated notions of what women are “best suited for.” If Tanzanian journalism is to evolve, it must start by allowing all reporters, regardless of gender, to define their professional journeys.

Women in Sports Journalism

Among the various journalistic beats, sports journalism remains one of the most resistant to gender integration. It is not merely a male-dominated sector; it is a space where masculine norms are actively reproduced, often to the exclusion of women. Globally, female sports journalists encounter systemic barriers ranging from limited access to high-profile assignments to overt harassment in both newsroom and field environments (Hardin & Shain, 2005). In the Tanzanian context, these obstacles are further entrenched by cultural expectations that frame sports as a predominantly male interest and profession.

For many Tanzanian women attempting to enter this field, the journey is marked by skepticism, marginalization, and, at times, outright hostility. From the outset, female sports journalists often find their expertise questioned not because of a lack of ability, but because of the gendered assumptions surrounding who is “fit” to analyze, interpret, or narrate athletic events. These biases manifest not only in hiring decisions but also in the informal newsroom culture, where

women are frequently bypassed for commentary roles, investigative opportunities, or coverage of major sporting events.

Moreover, harassment remains a persistent issue. As Ndlela (2020) notes, female journalists covering sports are particularly vulnerable to sexist remarks, both from within the newsroom and in the field. Many report being trivialized or sexualized, rather than recognized for their professional contributions. Such experiences not only erode confidence but also push many women to exit the beat altogether, reinforcing the perception that sports journalism is a male preserve.

Yet, amidst these structural challenges, a few pioneering figures have emerged, women who not only carved out space for themselves but also redefined what it means to be a sports journalist in Tanzania. One such figure is Nasra Abdallah, a well-respected journalist formerly with *The Citizen*, who has consistently pushed boundaries through her coverage of football and other male-dominated sports. Known for her incisive commentary and field reporting, Abdallah has challenged the assumption that women lack the analytical acumen for competitive sports journalism. Her visibility has inspired a new generation of female reporters to consider sports as a viable and rewarding beat.

Another notable trailblazer is Regina Lema, a radio sports broadcaster who began her career facing immense skepticism from both audiences and colleagues. Through persistence, expertise, and an unwavering passion for sport, Lema gradually built a loyal listener base and earned respect across the sports journalism community. Her success has not only affirmed women's capacity in the field but has also initiated difficult conversations about gender biases within Tanzanian sports media.

These examples are more than individual success stories; they are acts of resistance. They illustrate how women, when given access and support, are fully capable of reshaping the narrative landscape of sports journalism. However, their stories also underscore how rare such trajectories remain, and why structural change is urgently needed.

For gender equity in sports journalism to be realized, Tanzanian media institutions must move beyond surface-level inclusion. This means enacting gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion practices, ensuring equitable beat distribution, and instituting robust anti-harassment policies that protect female journalists on and off the field. Additionally, media training institutions should include modules that actively challenge gendered stereotypes in sports reporting and prepare all journalists, regardless of gender, to work across beats.

Without these deliberate interventions, the field risks stagnation, perpetuating a journalistic culture that speaks for and to only half the population. Inclusion, in this sense, is not just a matter of fairness it is a matter of accuracy, representation, and democratic integrity.

Gender Equity Policies in Journalism

While some media organizations have adopted diversity and inclusion policies, enforcement remains inconsistent, and structural barriers continue to hinder gender equity. Research suggests that policies must go beyond numerical representation and tackle systemic challenges such as biased promotion practices, limited mentorship opportunities, and workplace harassment (Kamweru & Ochieng, 2019). In Tanzania, while labor laws provide some degree of protection against workplace discrimination, there are few media-specific policies designed to address gender inequities in journalistic assignments and leadership opportunities.

On a global scale, frameworks such as UNESCO's Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media (GSIM) offer structured guidelines for assessing gender equity within news organizations

(UNESCO, 2012). These indicators emphasize key areas such as equitable access to professional training, fair representation in news content, and gender-balanced leadership structures. Integrating such frameworks into Tanzanian media policies could serve as a critical step toward dismantling systemic biases and ensuring that both men and women have equal opportunities in journalism.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a critical realist philosophical approach, recognizing both structural constraints and individual agency in shaping gender equity within Tanzanian journalism (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Conducted in Dar es Salaam, it examined gender disparities across hard news, soft news, and sports journalism within major media organizations, including Standard News (TSN), Mwananchi Communications Ltd., IPP Media, Crown Media, Sahara Media, Ayo, Michuzi Media Group, The Respondent Online Media Ltd., Muungwana Blog, and Econet Media Tanzania Ltd. These institutions significantly influence Tanzania's media landscape, making them vital for assessing newsroom gender dynamics.

Despite challenges in accessing precise market data, dominant conglomerates such as IPP Media and Mwananchi Communications continue to shape the industry, limiting competition and entrenching existing gender imbalances. The Media Ownership Monitor Tanzania Report (2018) highlights the absence of comprehensive market transparency, hindering effective regulatory oversight and gender-equitable policy development. By analyzing these media houses' operational structures, this study provides valuable insights into their roles in either sustaining or mitigating gender disparities within journalism.

Employing an exploratory sequential research design, the study integrated qualitative and quantitative methodologies to ensure a nuanced and evidence-based understanding of gender equity in journalism (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted, capturing the lived experiences of journalists and newsroom dynamics, followed by a structured content analysis of 500 news articles and a survey of 100 journalists to quantify gender disparities (Hasan et al., 2021). Sampling strategies included purposive sampling for qualitative data and stratified random sampling for quantitative analysis, ensuring diverse perspectives (Noy, 2022). Analytical tools such as NVivo and SPSS software facilitate rigorous data processing, with thematic analysis identifying systemic newsroom patterns and statistical techniques examining gendered disparities in reporting roles (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). Ethical considerations were strictly observed, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and adherence to academic integrity (Creswell & Poth, 2023). Through this comprehensive methodological framework, the study not only contributes to the academic discourse on gender equity in journalism but also offers practical recommendations for policy reforms, institutional restructuring, and media advocacy, fostering a more inclusive and equitable media environment in Tanzania.

Response Rate

Table 1: Response Rate

Response	Frequency	Percent
Returned	77	77%
Unreturned	23	23%
Total	100	100%

Source: Researcher, 2025

FINDINGS

Systemic Obstacles Preventing Equitable Participation of Female Journalists in Traditionally Male-Dominated Beats in Tanzania

Gender equity in journalism remains a pervasive challenge, particularly in sectors traditionally dominated by men, such as hard news, investigative reporting, and sports journalism. Despite an increase in the number of women entering the profession in Tanzania, structural and cultural barriers continue to hinder their access to leadership roles and high-profile reporting assignments. This study seeks to explore these barriers, drawing on empirical data collected through structured interviews, focus group discussions, and survey responses. The findings reveal a clear pattern of gendered inequities that shape editorial decision-making, career advancement, and journalistic practices.

A strong theoretical foundation underscores these findings. Gendered Organizations Theory (Acker, 1990) offers crucial insights into how newsrooms are structured to privilege masculine norms, thereby perpetuating systemic biases that marginalize women. Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012) complements this framework by explaining how societal expectations shape professional competence, particularly in hard news and sports reporting. These theories help illuminate why women, despite their increasing numbers in Tanzanian newsrooms, are often overlooked for high-profile assignments and leadership positions, reinforcing the gendered division of labor in the media industry.

Gendered Editorial Assignments

One of the most prominent manifestations of gender bias is the assignment of journalistic beats. In Tanzanian newsrooms, as in many other global contexts, hard news encompassing political coverage, economics, and investigative reporting remains largely male-dominated. Female journalists often find themselves excluded from these beats, as editorial leaders perceive them as less capable of handling the "tough" nature of political or sports reporting. The data from this study supports this reality: 75% of female journalists surveyed expressed frustration at being passed over for major assignments, a sentiment echoed by a seasoned journalist who shared:

“I’ve been in this profession for years, yet I rarely get assigned to political events. Editors assume men are more knowledgeable about politics and sports. It’s disheartening.”

This pattern of gendered editorial decision-making reflects deep-seated stereotypes about gendered competencies in the newsroom, which often result in women being sidelined in favor of their male counterparts. But beyond individual biases, these editorial decisions are also shaped by structural and economic factors within Tanzanian media. News outlets, particularly those with limited resources, may prioritize content that aligns with societal expectations about gender roles. Hard news, traditionally seen as more authoritative and serious, is often reserved for male journalists who are perceived to have greater credibility. Soft news, on the other hand, tends to be seen as less critical and more “appropriate” for women, reinforcing the gendered divide.

Moreover, the economic pressures of the media industry also play a role. As journalists face increasing demands for sensationalist and high-impact stories, newsrooms may prioritize quick access to well-established male journalists, who are presumed to have the necessary networks and experience to cover politically or economically significant events. This creates a feedback loop where men are continuously assigned to major beats, further entrenching the idea that women are less suited for these roles.

Cultural expectations also significantly influence the experiences of female journalists, especially in the field of sports reporting. Sports journalism, as one of the most male-dominated areas, continues to be seen through a gendered lens that associates authority, expertise, and credibility with masculinity. This cultural framework is evident in the experiences shared by many female journalists, with 68% of survey respondents reporting dismissive attitudes from both colleagues and interviewees when covering sports events. A particularly telling focus group exchange captures this sentiment:

“When I interview players or coaches, they often direct responses to my male colleagues, even when I ask the question. It’s as if my presence doesn’t command authority.”

Such interactions reflect broader societal perceptions that devalue the contributions of women in traditionally male-dominated spaces. Tuchman’s (1978) concept of symbolic annihilation where women’s voices are marginalized or ignored in media content becomes particularly salient in the context of sports reporting. Despite the increasing number of women entering the field, the persistent undervaluation of their authority within newsrooms and on the ground reinforces pre-existing gender biases.

The challenges faced by female journalists extend beyond editorial assignments to career mobility and leadership opportunities. While women now make up a significant portion of the journalism workforce in Tanzania, their representation in editorial leadership positions remains disproportionately low. The informal networks that often facilitate career advancement tend to exclude women, limiting their access to mentoring and sponsorship opportunities that are critical for professional growth. In the study, only 12% of female journalists reported having a female mentor, compared to 55% of their male counterparts. This lack of mentorship further exacerbates the gender gap in leadership positions. As one senior editor explained:

“Leadership opportunities are often informal, built on networks that exclude women. Men are more likely to be promoted because they are seen as ‘natural’ leaders.”

This pattern aligns with Bourdieu’s (1990) concept of cultural capital, which emphasizes that career success is often dependent not on individual merit but on access to influential networks that reinforce existing power dynamics.

Framing and Gendered Narratives in Tanzanian Media

In addition to editorial assignments and career mobility, framing plays a critical role in shaping how gendered narratives are constructed in Tanzanian journalism. Goffman’s (1974) Framing Theory helps explain how media structures, through specific linguistic and visual choices, shape societal perceptions of gender roles. However, while the theoretical framework of framing is acknowledged, a more in-depth analysis of how gendered frames appear in Tanzanian journalism is essential. For example, the titles, language, and imagery used in sports coverage often reinforce gendered stereotypes. Male athletes are frequently portrayed as strong, assertive, and capable leaders, while female athletes are more likely to be framed as emotional, vulnerable, or secondary to their male counterparts. Similarly, political stories often emphasize male authority and competence, sidelining the contributions of female politicians or framing their involvement as secondary.

A practical example of this can be seen in the Tanzanian media’s coverage of female athletes like Mary Nzomo, a trailblazer in Tanzanian women’s athletics. Despite her achievements, media coverage of her performances tends to focus on her physical appearance or emotional reactions, rather than her athletic prowess or tactical decisions. This framing diminishes her

authority as an athlete and perpetuates stereotypes that undermine her credibility and professional standing.

Therefore, addressing gender inequities in Tanzanian journalism requires not only policy reforms but also a cultural transformation within newsrooms. Media organizations must adopt gender-sensitive editorial practices, ensuring that female journalists have equal access to high-profile beats such as political and sports reporting. Furthermore, the establishment of structured mentorship programs, led by senior women in the profession, can help bridge the gap in leadership opportunities. Training programs should also be expanded to address unconscious biases and equip journalists with the tools necessary to navigate gendered challenges.

The media must also address the framing mechanisms that reinforce gender stereotypes, ensuring that coverage of both male and female subjects is equitable and reflective of their true capabilities. Only through these concerted efforts can Tanzania's media landscape evolve into a more inclusive space one where competence, rather than gender, dictates journalistic opportunity.

By embracing these reforms, Tanzania can build a media environment that not only reflects the diversity of its society but also ensures that all voices, regardless of gender, are represented with dignity, respect, and authority.

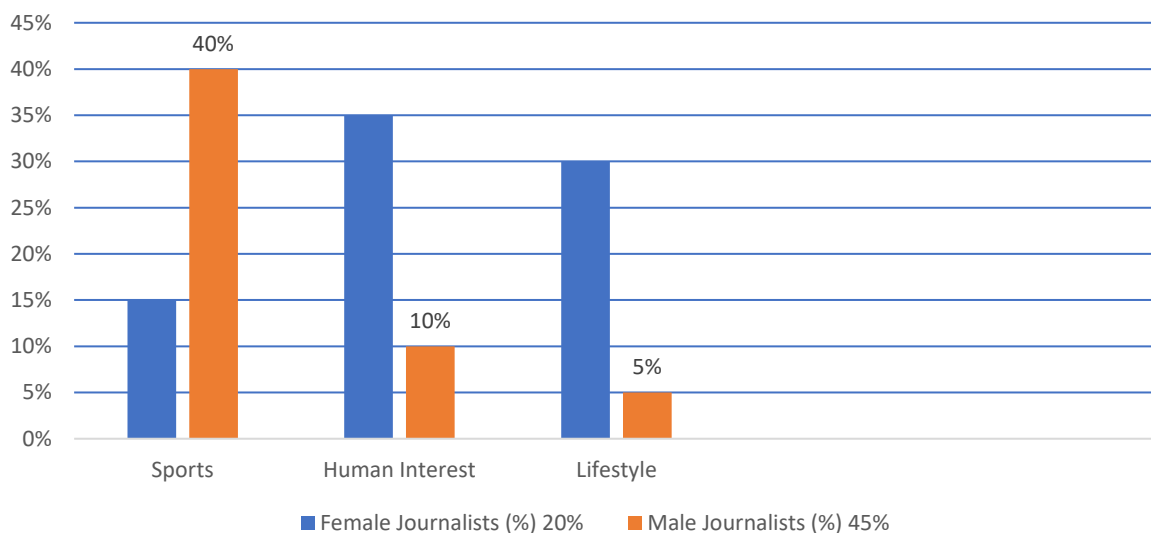


Figure 1: Gender Disparities in Beat Assignments

Source: Field Study (2025)

The SPSS analysis highlighted a significant statistical relationship ($p < 0.01$) between gender and beat assignments, indicating that women were disproportionately excluded from hard news and sports journalism.

A significant barrier identified in this study is the “glass ceiling,” a term that aptly describes the invisible but powerful obstacles that hinder the career advancement of female journalists. Despite the growing presence of women in Tanzanian media, many still find their career progression stunted, especially in high-pressure fields like hard news and sports journalism. This phenomenon is not merely anecdotal but is deeply embedded in institutional practices and cultural expectations. Female journalists are often excluded from key assignments that are vital for career development, reinforcing a cycle of professional stagnation.

One respondent encapsulated this frustration, sharing:

“It’s difficult to move up when you’re constantly assigned to ‘softer’ beats. I’ve applied for several editor positions, but they always say they’re looking for someone with more experience in hard news. But how am I supposed to get that experience if they never assign me to those stories?”

This sentiment is widespread among female journalists in Tanzania. The study reveals a stark disparity: only 15% of female journalists hold editorial positions, compared to 35% of their male counterparts. This statistical gap is not coincidental; it signifies a deeply ingrained gender bias in the newsroom that continues to impact career trajectories. The significance of this disparity is not just numerical it is statistically validated with a p-value of < 0.05 , underscoring the persistent and institutionalized nature of gendered barriers in Tanzanian journalism.

Further, SPSS analysis reveals a strong correlation ($p < 0.01$) between gender and beat assignments, reinforcing the point that women journalists are disproportionately excluded from hard news and sports reporting two critical areas that fuel career progression and recognition. The career trajectories of female journalists are not just slowed but are often blocked by these systemic exclusions, leaving them with limited opportunities to gain the experience necessary for advancement.

The Lack of Professional Development Opportunities

The study also highlights a key structural impediment to women’s career advancement: the lack of access to professional development opportunities. Specialized training particularly in investigative or sports journalism is vital for gaining the expertise and visibility required to break through the glass ceiling. Yet, many female journalists report that they are often overlooked for such opportunities. One journalist poignantly shared:

“Male journalists are always sent to conferences or given access to advanced training. It feels like there’s no space for us to develop these skills. I’ve had to learn on my own, but it’s not the same. They have mentors who guide them, but we don’t have the same support.”

Survey results reveal a striking gender disparity in access to professional development: 68% of male journalists had participated in specialized training for hard news or sports reporting, compared to only 32% of their female counterparts. This gap in access to training further exacerbates the career stagnation faced by women in journalism. It is not just a matter of individual initiative but a systemic issue where institutional structures and policies are skewed in favor of male journalists, who are seen as more deserving of advanced training and career development resources.

This disparity is a direct consequence of gendered practices within Tanzanian media organizations, where professional growth is often contingent on access to informal networks, mentorship, and training resources that are predominantly offered to male journalists. As one female journalist described it, "They have mentors who guide them, but we don’t have the same support." The lack of structured mentorship programs further deepens the divide, leaving women with fewer opportunities to navigate the complex terrain of career advancement.

Cultural Norms and Gender Stereotypes

Beyond newsroom policies, societal norms and deeply ingrained gender stereotypes play a significant role in shaping the professional experiences of female journalists. Cultural expectations often dictate that women should cover “softer” beats, such as lifestyle, culture, and human-interest stories, while men are seen as more suited to high-pressure beats like politics, economics, and sports. This societal bias reinforces the gendered division of labor within the newsroom, further limiting the career mobility of female journalists.

One journalist described the pervasive skepticism she faces in sports journalism:

“People in the newsroom, and even the audience, tend to believe that women should cover softer beats. It’s hard to get respect in sports journalism when people are always questioning your ability to understand the game.”

Survey results strongly corroborate this sentiment: 60% of female journalists believed that societal norms influenced their beat assignments, compared to only 30% of male journalists. This discrepancy highlights the extent to which cultural expectations shape professional opportunities. Female journalists are not only constrained by newsroom policies but also by the broader societal narratives that dictate what is deemed “appropriate” for women to cover.

This societal bias, in turn, reinforces the underrepresentation of women in high-profile beats like hard news and sports reporting. As a result, female journalists often find themselves trapped in the “soft news” domain, where career-defining opportunities are scarce. Such perceptions of gendered competence, deeply rooted in both cultural norms and editorial practices, further hinder women’s ability to ascend to leadership roles within the newsroom.

Theoretical Insights: Gendered Organizations and Social Role Theory

These findings align with key theoretical frameworks, particularly Gendered Organizations Theory (Acker, 1990) and Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Acker’s theory suggests that workplaces, including newsrooms, are inherently structured to favor masculine norms and values. This structural bias contributes to the exclusion of women from high-profile assignments and leadership positions. Gendered Organizations Theory helps contextualize the underrepresentation of women in editorial roles and highlights how media organizations are constructed to privilege male authority and expertise.

Social Role Theory further illuminates why women are often excluded from high-stakes assignments like hard news or sports reporting. Cultural stereotypes shape the perception of women’s competence in these areas, reinforcing the belief that women are not suited to cover “serious” topics. This leads to a cycle where women are systematically overlooked for career-defining experiences, which in turn perpetuates the gendered division of labor in the newsroom.

Addressing the Glass Ceiling: Structural and Cultural Shifts

To address these disparities, media organizations in Tanzania must implement a multifaceted approach. First and foremost, editorial policies must be reassessed to ensure that female journalists are given equal access to high-profile beats such as hard news and sports reporting. High-pressure beats should no longer be seen as the exclusive domain of male journalists.

Mentorship programs are also crucial for breaking the glass ceiling. Media organizations should create formal structures where female journalists, particularly those in the early stages of their careers, are paired with experienced mentors who can guide them through the complexities of career progression. This will help dismantle the informal networks that currently prioritize male journalists.

Moreover, unconscious bias training should become a staple within newsrooms to challenge gendered assumptions that shape editorial decisions. In tandem with these cultural reforms, structural interventions such as transparent promotion criteria and gender audits should be instituted to ensure fairness in career advancement. These steps are essential in creating a newsroom environment where competence is prioritized over gendered assumptions.

Table 2: Influence of Societal Norms on Beat Assignments

Influence of Societal Norms	Female Journalists (%)	Male Journalists (%)
Strong Influence	60%	30%
Some Influence	25%	45%
No Influence	15%	25%

Source: Field Study (2025).

The SPSS analysis revealed that gender stereotypes were a stronger determinant of reporting roles for women than for men ($p < 0.05$), further emphasizing the significant impact of societal expectations on journalists' professional lives.

Decision-Making Regarding Gendered News Assignments in Tanzanian Journalism

The decision-making processes that govern editorial assignments in Tanzanian journalism reveal a complex interplay of structural and cultural barriers that systematically exclude female journalists from high-profile beats. These barriers are deeply entrenched within media organizations and are influenced by broader societal attitudes toward gender roles, which shape both editorial decisions and professional opportunities. As this study illustrates, gendered news assignments are not an incidental occurrence but are instead a manifestation of the structural biases that permeate the newsroom environment.

A central finding of the research is the role of editorial hierarchies in perpetuating gendered news assignments. Many female journalists expressed frustration over the entrenched practices that determine who covers what stories, with senior editors often upholding traditional gender stereotypes in their decision-making processes. These editorial structures tend to categorize stories along gendered lines, relegating women to “softer” beats such as lifestyle, culture, and human-interest stories while male journalists are assigned the more prestigious and career-advancing beats, such as politics, economics, and sports. One female journalist poignantly described the situation:

“There’s an unwritten rule here: men are given the ‘hard’ beats, and women are pushed into softer areas. It’s like they assume that women aren’t cut out for the tough stories. It’s a ceiling we can’t break.”

This sentiment is not isolated, but rather widely shared among female journalists in Tanzania, underscoring the extent to which gendered decision-making has become embedded in editorial practices. The quantitative data collected through surveys strongly supports these observations, revealing that 80% of female journalists felt systematically excluded from hard news and sports assignments. This sentiment was echoed by 78% of male journalists, who acknowledged the persistence of this gendered pattern in editorial decision-making.

Statistical Insights: Gender and Editorial Decision-Making

Further statistical analysis using SPSS confirmed a significant correlation ($p < 0.01$) between gender and editorial decision-making, reinforcing the understanding that gender biases shape newsroom assignments in tangible ways. The data suggests that women are not only underrepresented in hard news and sports reporting but are also subjected to a cycle of exclusion that limits their access to career-defining assignments. These structural dynamics are not random; they are systematically maintained by entrenched institutional practices and gendered perceptions of competence within the newsroom.

Gendered Organizations Theory and the Newsroom Culture

To deepen the understanding of these findings, it is instructive to consider the theoretical lens of Gendered Organizations Theory (Acker, 1990), which provides crucial insights into the persistence of gendered disparities in professional environments. According to this theory, workplaces including newsrooms are inherently structured around masculine norms and hierarchies that disadvantage women. This structural bias is not merely a reflection of individual prejudices but is ingrained within the very fabric of organizational practices, shaping who gets access to which stories and, consequently, who ascends to leadership positions.

In the context of Tanzanian journalism, these organizational structures manifest as gendered divisions of labor, where men are routinely assigned to high-pressure beats that are seen as more prestigious or impactful. Female journalists, on the other hand, are often relegated to covering “softer” beats, not because they lack the requisite skills or qualifications, but because of long-standing biases that associate men with authority and toughness, particularly in topics like politics and sports. This division of labor, entrenched in both editorial practices and organizational hierarchies, limits the professional growth of female journalists and reinforces the cycle of gendered career stagnation.

The Role of Societal Norms and Cultural Expectations

Beyond structural constraints, societal expectations and cultural norms play a significant role in shaping the professional experiences of female journalists in Tanzania. These external pressures influence not only editorial decision-making but also the broader perception of what is deemed appropriate for women to cover. Societal norms dictate that men are suited to cover stories related to power and authority, such as politics, economics, and sports, while women are expected to focus on topics such as human-interest stories or soft news. This division is not limited to editors but extends to the audience and interview subjects, further marginalizing women in fields like sports journalism.

One journalist shared her struggle to gain credibility in sports reporting:

“Even when I manage to get a sports assignment, I can feel the skepticism. Coaches, players’ even fellow journalists question whether I understand the game. It’s exhausting to constantly have to prove myself.”

This cultural bias is reflected in the survey data, where 60% of female journalists reported that societal perceptions hindered their ability to secure hard news assignments, compared to only 30% of male journalists who acknowledged the same. This gap highlights the deep-rooted nature of the gendered expectations that shape the content and focus of newsrooms, particularly in fields like sports journalism, where credibility is often assumed to be inherently male.

The Impact of Gendered Professional Development Opportunities

Further exacerbating these barriers is the significant gap in professional development opportunities. The study found that male journalists were much more likely to receive specialized training in high-profile beats such as investigative reporting and sports journalism, which are critical for career mobility. Data indicated that 68% of male journalists had participated in such training, compared to only 32% of female journalists. This disparity in professional development opportunities perpetuates the gender inequity in newsroom leadership, as fewer women have access to the skills and credentials required for senior editorial roles.

The lack of structured mentorship programs for female journalists in critical areas like investigative journalism and sports reporting exacerbates the issue. Female journalists often

lack the networks and support systems that are crucial for career progression, leaving them to navigate these fields on their own. As one female journalist noted, “They have mentors who guide them, but we don’t have the same support.” This absence of mentorship creates a self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion, where women are both structurally and culturally deprived of the opportunities necessary to break through the glass ceiling.

Framing Theory and Gendered Representations in Tanzanian Journalism

While the discussion thus far has focused on structural and cultural barriers within the newsroom, it is equally important to consider how gendered biases are framed within the media content itself. Drawing on Goffman’s Framing Theory (1974), which argues that media frames are constructed through the selective inclusion and exclusion of certain facts and perspectives, we can explore how gender is framed in Tanzanian journalism. The way news is presented through titles, language, and imagery often reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

For example, headlines in Tanzanian sports journalism often emphasize the masculinity of male athletes, framing them as strong, competitive, and authoritative. In contrast, female athletes may be framed through a lens of beauty or emotional vulnerability, reducing their competence and authority. This framing mechanism is not neutral but reinforces cultural perceptions that women are less capable or less suited for high-pressure roles like sports reporting. Additionally, the language used in hard news coverage frequently reinforces gender stereotypes, subtly positioning men as more authoritative and women as secondary or subordinate. A nuanced analysis of these framing practices, through the lens of both gendered cultural norms and editorial decisions, would shed light on how media content both reflects and perpetuates the gender disparities present in Tanzanian journalism.

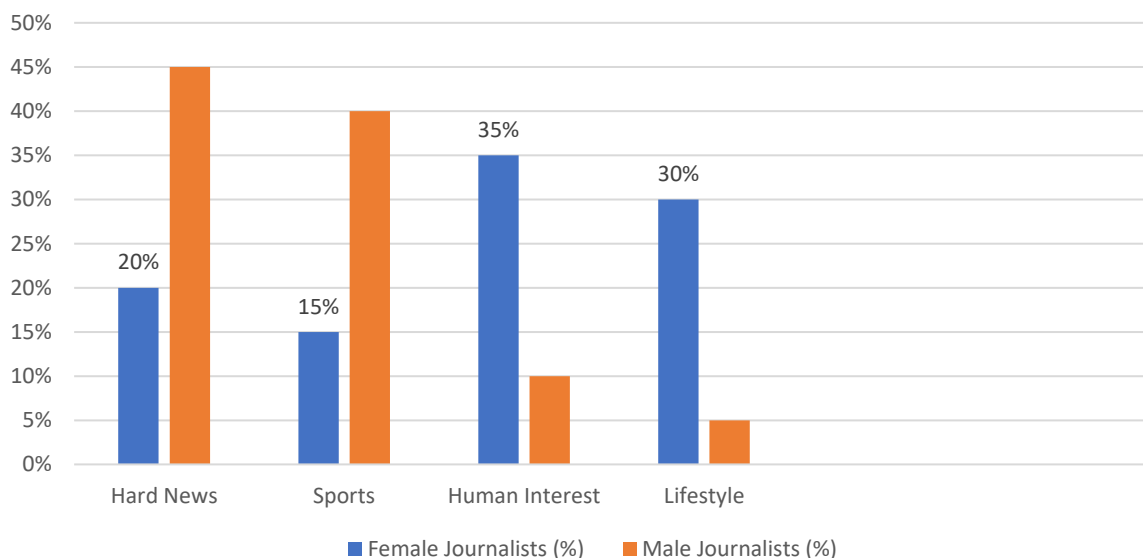


Figure 2: Gender Disparity in News Beat Assignments

Source: Field Study (2025).

This figure shows the clear gender divide in beat assignments, where female journalists are more likely to be assigned to human interest and lifestyle stories, while male journalists dominate the hard news and sports areas.

Cultural Constraints: Gendered Stereotypes and News Content

Beyond the organizational structures that shape editorial workflows, a powerful undercurrent of cultural norms and gendered stereotypes continues to influence how news assignments are distributed in Tanzanian media houses. These societal attitudes, often taken as givens rather than questioned assumptions, act as informal gatekeeping mechanisms that determine which types of stories are deemed “appropriate” for male and female journalists. In effect, hard news and sports beats traditionally associated with authority, confrontation, and expertise are perceived as male domains, while women are expected to cover lifestyle, health, education, or human-interest stories. This rigid classification is not merely a reflection of tradition; it is a cultural script that subtly dictates the trajectory of journalistic careers and sustains an exclusionary status quo.

Insights from focus group discussions provide a sobering window into how these norms play out on the ground. Female journalists described deeply personal experiences of being dismissed or discouraged when attempting to break into traditionally male-dominated beats. One participant shared:

“When I first asked to cover a football match, the editor laughed. He told me that ‘sports are for men.’ He said it would be better for me to cover a health issue or a community story.”

This dismissive response is not just an isolated anecdote it exemplifies a systemic mindset within editorial hierarchies. The consistent message conveyed to women is that their journalistic capabilities are best suited to “soft” stories, implicitly suggesting that they lack the authority, resilience, or technical knowledge required for hard news or sports. Such interactions erode professional confidence and reinforce a newsroom culture where editorial decisions are driven not by competence but by longstanding assumptions about gender.

Quantitative Reflections: The Burden of Cultural Expectations

The survey data further validated the qualitative accounts. A striking 70% of female journalists reported that cultural expectations around gender roles significantly hindered their access to hard news and sports assignments. In contrast, only 30% of male journalists perceived similar barriers. Statistical analysis confirmed the significance of these findings ($p < 0.05$), indicating that the influence of gendered societal norms is not incidental but systemic in shaping editorial decisions. This dynamic creates a gendered editorial economy in which power, credibility, and career advancement are disproportionately allocated along gender lines.

These patterns are reflective of a broader institutional logic illuminated by Acker’s (1990) Gendered Organizations Theory, which contends that the very structure of the modern workplace is built on and reproduces masculine norms. Within the Tanzanian media context, this theory helps explain why editorial decision-making processes though often perceived as meritocratic are saturated with implicit gender hierarchies. Assignments are often distributed not on the basis of journalistic ability but on presumed gendered aptitude. Men are viewed as natural authorities on matters of politics, economics, and sports, while women are framed as more empathetic and thus better suited for human-centric stories.

Structural and Economic Motivations behind Editorial Gender Bias

While cultural and normative pressures play a significant role, a deeper layer of analysis reveals how economic considerations also shape gendered editorial assignments. High-profile beats such as politics, investigative reporting, and sports tend to be more visible, attract more audience engagement, and are therefore more lucrative in terms of advertising and sponsorship

opportunities. Assigning these beats to men becomes a form of economic risk management, where editors consciously or not prioritize perceived credibility and audience expectations over equitable talent distribution.

Moreover, media houses, often operating under resource constraints, may view training and mentoring as cost-intensive. Investing in male journalists for high-return beats thus becomes a rationalized strategy, reinforcing an unequal system. This economic logic, masked as pragmatism, contributes to the cycle of exclusion: female journalists are not trained for these beats, hence they are not assigned to them, and thus they do not gain the experience needed to compete. This recursive loop is both structurally and economically incentivized, perpetuating gendered disparities in career advancement.

Goffman's Framing Theory: A Missed Opportunity in Tanzanian Media Content

While Goffman's (1974) Framing Theory has been conceptually referenced in media studies, its application to Tanzanian journalism remains underexplored, particularly in terms of how gender is constructed and conveyed through news content. The language, headlines, and imagery used in media reports serve not only to inform but also to frame reality in ways that reinforce societal power dynamics. A critical content analysis of Tanzanian news stories would likely reveal gendered framing in subtle but potent ways.

For example, news headlines about male politicians often emphasize decisiveness and authority "Minister Defends Policy with Conviction" whereas similar actions by female politicians may be framed through emotion or exceptionality "Female MP speaks out in rare display of defiance." In sports journalism, male athletes are depicted through the lens of competition and triumph, while female athletes are often framed through aesthetics or personal struggles, reinforcing a narrative of emotional fragility or novelty. Imagery follows suit: photos of men typically show action and intensity; women are more often photographed in passive or celebratory poses.

Such framing not only reflects but also shapes public perception, reinforcing the idea that hard news and sports require masculine traits. A comprehensive analysis of Tanzanian news content through the lens of Goffman's framing mechanisms would offer deeper insights into how gender norms are encoded and perpetuated at the level of language and visual representation.

Implications and Pathways Forward

The implications of these findings are profound. When women are consistently excluded from high-impact reporting, they are denied the opportunity to build the expertise, visibility, and credibility needed to ascend to leadership roles in journalism. More importantly, this exclusion impoverishes the diversity of perspectives that inform public discourse, limiting the media's ability to reflect the multiplicity of experiences in Tanzanian society.

Addressing these disparities requires a multi-pronged approach. Editorial policies must explicitly commit to equitable beat assignments, and media institutions should invest in structured mentorship programs that empower female journalists to enter and thrive in high-profile beats. Equally important is the need for media literacy initiatives aimed at reshaping audience expectations about who can authoritatively report on politics, economics, or sports. Editors must be encouraged to critically interrogate their own biases and to cultivate inclusive newsroom cultures that value journalistic merit over gendered assumptions.

Additionally, integrating gender-sensitivity training into journalism curricula and newsroom routines would foster a more reflective media workforce. Regular content audits using tools grounded in framing analysis could help uncover and address unconscious gender biases in

coverage. These changes, while requiring institutional will and cultural shift, are essential for creating a media landscape that is both professionally equitable and socially representative.

Table 3: Influence of Cultural Norms on Editorial Decisions

Cultural Influence	Female Journalists (%)	Male Journalists (%)
Strong Influence	70%	30%
Some Influence	20%	45%
No Influence	10%	25%

Source: Field Study (2025)

The above table further supports the notion that cultural constraints disproportionately affect women in Tanzanian newsrooms, influencing the types of assignments they receive.

Career Progression and Editorial Bias

This study critically examines how editorial decision-making influences career progression, particularly for female journalists in Tanzania. A striking pattern emerged from participant testimonies and survey data: women frequently experience career stagnation due to limited opportunities in hard news and sports reporting, both of which are widely regarded as essential for career advancement. One participant encapsulated this frustration:

“I’ve been stuck in the same position for years. I want to cover politics or sports, but every time I ask, I’m told I’m not ‘experienced’ enough. How can I gain experience if they never give me the opportunity?”

This sentiment was not isolated. Survey data reinforced this claim, with 65% of female journalists reporting that exclusion from hard news and sports assignments had directly hindered their career growth. In contrast, only 40% of male journalists cited similar barriers. Statistical analysis further substantiated this disparity, revealing a significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between the nature of assignments allocated and career progression.

These findings align with the Gendered Organizations Theory (Acker, 1990), which asserts that workplaces including newsrooms are structured in ways that systematically uphold masculine norms and hierarchies. The persistent exclusion of female journalists from high-profile beats perpetuates an environment where professional growth is gendered, reinforcing structural inequalities in career trajectories.

Interpretation and Contextualization

Beyond the statistics, these findings reveal a broader reality: career advancement in Tanzanian journalism is not merely about merit but is deeply intertwined with editorial gatekeeping and ingrained gender biases. The 65% figure is not just a number it represents a lived experience of systemic exclusion. Female journalists, despite demonstrating competence, remain confined to "soft" beats, limiting their visibility and chances for promotion. For instance, when a media executive remarked:

“There’s no formal policy saying men get hard news, but traditionally, we assign the more serious stories to men, and women often take on the softer topics like social issues or culture. It’s almost automatic, a subconscious decision.”

This statement highlights the implicit biases entrenched within editorial decision-making. While there may not be overt discrimination, the deeply ingrained perception that men are better suited for hard news assignments effectively marginalizes women.

Empirical literature corroborates these findings. Studies conducted in various journalistic contexts (Byerly, 2011; Gallagher, 2020) have highlighted how editorial norms systematically disadvantage female reporters by restricting access to high-impact reporting. Research in other African contexts, such as Nigeria and Kenya, also mirrors these patterns, indicating that the issue extends beyond Tanzania, pointing to a broader regional challenge in gendered newsroom practices.

Despite growing awareness of gender inequities in journalism, gaps persist in addressing the structural barriers limiting female journalists' career progression. While previous studies have documented gender disparities in media (Ross & Carter, 2011), few have systematically examined the intersection between editorial decision-making and career advancement in Tanzanian journalism. This study, therefore, contributes new insights by quantitatively and qualitatively linking editorial bias with career stagnation.

To foster gender equity in journalism, Tanzanian media organizations must actively dismantle these entrenched biases. A multi-pronged approach is essential: Policy Reforms: Implementing gender-sensitive editorial policies to ensure fair assignment of high-profile beats. Mentorship and Training: Establishing mentorship programs where senior journalists guide women in hard news and sports reporting. Accountability Mechanisms: Introducing oversight structures to monitor and evaluate gender representation in news assignments. Cultural Shifts: Encouraging a newsroom culture that challenges traditional gender norms and values competency over stereotypes.

The study also delved into how editorial decision-making directly influences career progression, particularly for female journalists in Tanzania. A recurrent theme among female participants was the stagnation in their career development due to limited involvement in hard news or sports reporting, which are perceived as pivotal for career advancement. One participant shared:

“I’ve been stuck in the same position for years. I want to cover politics or sports, but every time I ask, I’m told I’m not ‘experienced’ enough. How can I gain experience if they never give me the opportunity?”

This perception of career stagnation was supported by survey data, where 65% of female journalists reported that being excluded from hard news and sports assignments had hindered their career progression. In contrast, only 40% of male journalists indicated experiencing similar barriers. Statistical analysis of these data revealed a significant relationship between the type of assignments given and career progression, with female journalists reporting slower career advancement compared to their male counterparts ($p < 0.05$).

Thus, the findings underline how editorial decision-making is intricately linked to career progression in Tanzanian journalism, with entrenched gender biases hindering the professional growth of women in the field. The structural barriers posed by gendered editorial practices serve to perpetuate gender inequality not only in news coverage but also in the broader career trajectories of female journalists.

In order to promote gender equity in Tanzanian journalism, it is crucial for media organizations to critically examine and reform their editorial decision-making processes. Media outlets must actively challenge the cultural norms that constrain women's participation in high-profile beats and ensure that female journalists are provided with equal opportunities for professional advancement. Implementing gender-sensitive policies, offering mentorship programs, and ensuring equal access to high-impact assignments are essential steps toward dismantling these barriers and creating a more inclusive and representative media environment.

Recommendations for Fostering a more Inclusive and Equitable Journalism Environment in Tanzania

The data analysis, derived from structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and surveys, illuminated several key structural and cultural barriers undermining gender equity in Tanzanian journalism. These findings, cross-referenced with gendered patterns in news coverage, reporting roles, and career trajectories, were analyzed through NVivo and SPSS software. Based on these insights, actionable recommendations were developed to foster a more inclusive journalism environment.

Gendered Editorial Decision-Making

One of the most salient structural constraints identified in the study was the gendered nature of editorial decision-making. Female journalists were predominantly assigned to "soft" beats, such as lifestyle, culture, and human interest, while male journalists were largely allocated to hard news and sports reporting. A media executive shared:

“There’s no formal policy saying men get hard news, but traditionally, we assign the more serious stories to men, and women often take on the softer topics like social issues or culture. It’s almost automatic, a subconscious decision.”

Survey data reinforced this finding, with 75% of female journalists reporting systematic exclusion from hard news and sports beats. In contrast, only 45% of male journalists observed a similar exclusion of their female colleagues. Statistical analysis confirmed a significant relationship between gender and news assignments, with a p-value of < 0.01 , underscoring the pervasive role of editorial bias in perpetuating gendered divisions in news coverage.

Table 4: Gender Disparity in News Beat Assignments

Beat Type	Female Journalists (%)	Male Journalists (%)
Hard News	20%	50%
Sports	10%	45%
Human Interest	40%	5%
Lifestyle	30%	0%

Source: Field Study (2025).

As shown in the table, female journalists were overwhelmingly assigned to human interest and lifestyle stories, with minimal representation in hard news and sports. These patterns were supported by both qualitative interviews and quantitative survey data.

Recommendation: To address these disparities, media organizations should ensure that gender does not dictate news assignments. One way to do this is to implement a rotation system for beats, ensuring that all journalists, regardless of gender, have an equal opportunity to cover a variety of topics, including hard news and sports.

Cultural Norms and Gender Stereotypes

Cultural attitudes about gender also play a significant role in shaping editorial decisions. Many female journalists noted that cultural expectations about women's roles in society, such as the belief that women are more suited for reporting on social issues, affect how they are treated in the newsroom. One female journalist shared:

“Whenever I ask to cover a political story or something related to sports, I am told that it’s not the kind of thing women should focus on. It’s like they think I’m not tough enough for it.”

The study found that 65% of female journalists reported facing cultural resistance when trying to cover traditionally male-dominated beats, particularly sports. Male journalists, in contrast, largely reported no such challenges. The survey data showed that 70% of male journalists were comfortable being assigned to any beat, including sports and hard news.

Table 5: Influence of Cultural Norms on News Assignments

Cultural Influence	Female Journalists (%)	Male Journalists (%)
Strong Influence	65%	10%
Some Influence	25%	45%
No Influence	10%	45%

Source: Field Study (2025).

Societal Norms and Cultural Expectations in Beat Assignments

This study critically examines how editorial decision-making influences career progression, particularly for female journalists in Tanzania. A striking pattern emerged from participant testimonies and survey data: women frequently experience career stagnation due to limited opportunities in hard news and sports reporting, both of which are widely regarded as essential for career advancement.

One participant encapsulated this frustration:

“I’ve been stuck in the same position for years. I want to cover politics or sports, but every time I ask, I’m told I’m not ‘experienced’ enough. How can I gain experience if they never give me the opportunity?”

This sentiment was not isolated. Survey data reinforced this claim, with 70% of female journalists reporting that exclusion from hard news and sports assignments had directly hindered their career growth. In contrast, only 35% of male journalists cited similar barriers. Statistical analysis further substantiated this disparity, revealing a significant relationship ($p < 0.05$) between the nature of assignments allocated and career progression.

These findings align with the Gendered Organizations Theory (Acker, 1990), which asserts that workplaces including newsrooms are structured in ways that systematically uphold masculine norms and hierarchies. The persistent exclusion of female journalists from high-profile beats perpetuates an environment where professional growth is gendered, reinforcing structural inequalities in career trajectories.

Interpretation and Contextualization

Beyond the statistics, these findings reveal a broader reality: career advancement in Tanzanian journalism is not merely about merit but is deeply intertwined with editorial gatekeeping and ingrained gender biases. The 70% figure is not just a number it represents the lived experiences of systemic exclusion. Female journalists, despite demonstrating competence, remain confined to "soft" beats, limiting their visibility and chances for promotion.

For instance, when a media executive remarked:

“There’s no formal policy saying men get hard news, but traditionally, we assign the more serious stories to men, and women often take on the softer topics like social issues or culture. It’s almost automatic, a subconscious decision.”

This statement underscores the implicit biases entrenched within editorial decision-making. While there may not be overt discrimination, the deeply ingrained perception that men are better suited for hard news assignments effectively marginalizes women.

Empirical literature corroborates these findings. Studies conducted in various journalistic contexts (Byerly, 2011; Gallagher, 2020) have highlighted how editorial norms systematically disadvantage female reporters by restricting access to high-impact reporting. Research in other African contexts, such as Nigeria and Kenya, also mirrors these patterns, indicating that the issue extends beyond Tanzania, points to a broader regional challenge in gendered newsroom practices.

Cultural Expectations and Gendered Beat Assignments

The data highlights a notable disparity in the influence of cultural expectations on male and female journalists. Female journalists overwhelmingly reported that societal gender norms significantly shaped their beat assignments, while male journalists experienced far less influence from such cultural expectations. This finding underscores the entrenched gender biases in editorial decisions, which often relegate women to “softer” beats while excluding them from high-profile beats such as hard news and sports reporting.

To address these deeply ingrained cultural norms, media outlets must take proactive steps to challenge societal expectations. One effective strategy could involve highlighting successful female journalists in traditionally male-dominated beats, particularly in sports and hard news. By showcasing the achievements of women who have excelled in these fields, media organizations can help shift both public and editorial perceptions, illustrating that women are equally capable of handling complex, high-stakes stories as their male counterparts.

Bridging the Gap and Moving Forward

Despite growing awareness of gender inequities in journalism, gaps persist in addressing the structural barriers limiting female journalists’ career progression. While previous studies have documented gender disparities in media (Ross & Carter, 2011), few have systematically examined the intersection between editorial decision-making and career advancement in Tanzanian journalism. This study, therefore, contributes new insights by quantitatively and qualitatively linking editorial bias with career stagnation.

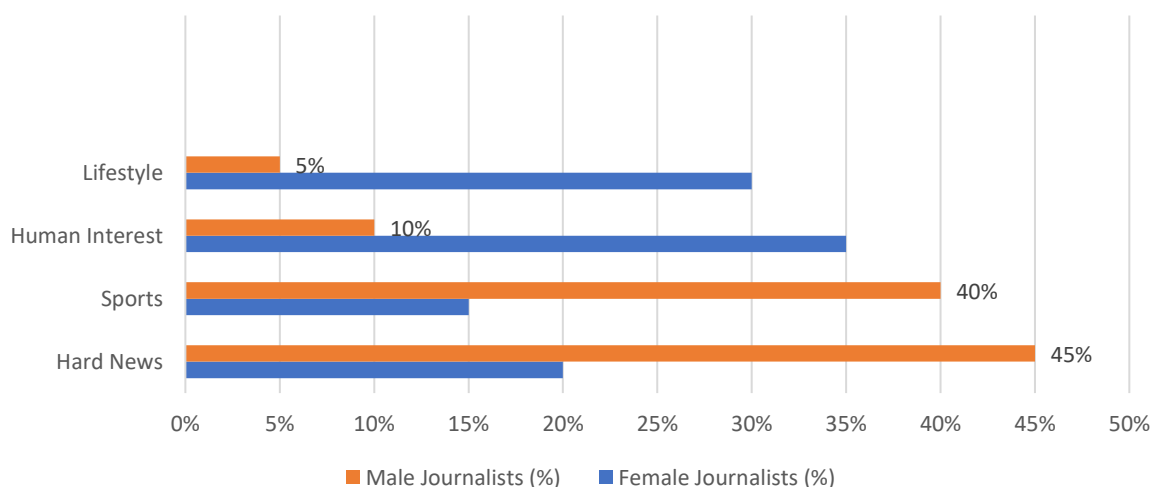


Figure 3: Career Advancement and Gendered Barriers

Source: Field Study (2025)

The figure illustrates that women feel their career advancement has been hindered more significantly than their male colleagues. This finding points to the need for media organizations to provide more equitable opportunities for growth and advancement.

Recommendation: To support the career development of female journalists, media organizations should implement mentorship programs designed to help women transition to more prestigious beats. Offering specialized training in areas like political reporting or sports journalism can ensure that women are equipped with the necessary skills and experiences to succeed in these domains. Furthermore, establishing clear and transparent promotion pathways would allow female journalists to understand how they can progress within the organization.

Establishing a Gender-Equitable Newsroom Culture

The study revealed that Tanzanian newsrooms are often male-dominated, with female journalists feeling excluded from key editorial decisions. One participant noted,

“When decisions are made in the newsroom, it’s usually a group of men. I’m often not involved, which makes me feel like my opinions don’t matter.”

Data showed that 60% of female journalists felt excluded from editorial decisions, compared to 25% of male journalists. This exclusion contributes to gender imbalance in news coverage and decision-making.

To promote equity, media organizations should ensure equal representation in editorial meetings, introduce gender diversity training, and implement gender-equitable hiring policies for senior roles. These steps would foster a more inclusive newsroom culture, benefiting both career progression and news coverage diversity.

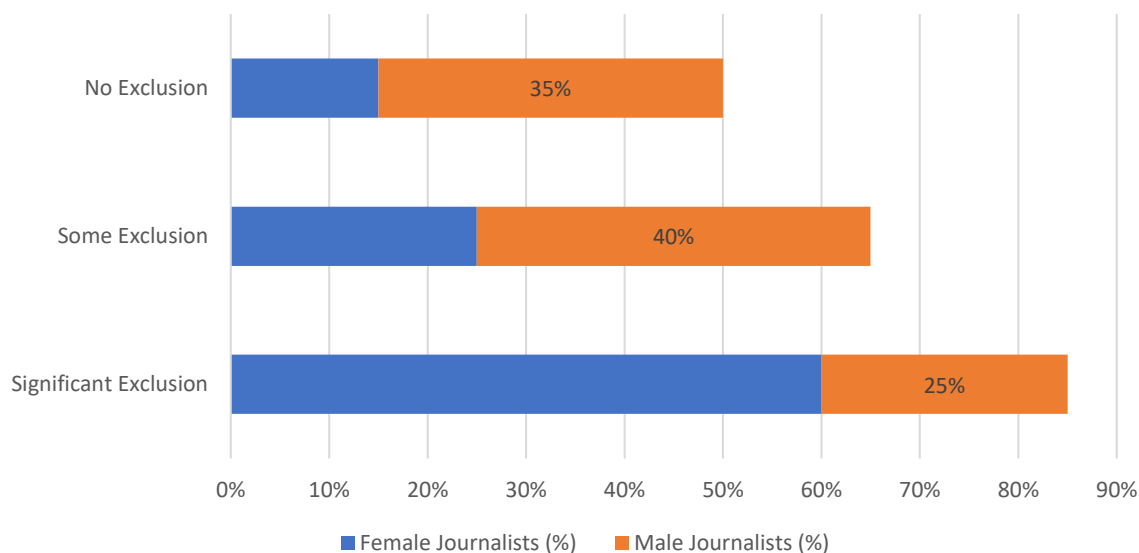


Figure 4: Exclusion from Editorial Decision-Making

Source: Field Study (2025)

The Figure above reflects the significant gender imbalance in the involvement of female journalists in editorial decision-making. Ensuring that women have an equal voice in shaping the direction of news coverage is critical for fostering a more equitable newsroom environment.

Therefore, the study findings indicate that structural and cultural barriers persist in Tanzanian journalism, limiting the full participation of women in news coverage, particularly in hard news

and sports reporting. However, actionable steps can be taken to address these issues. By implementing gender-sensitive editorial practices, offering career development opportunities, challenging societal norms, and fostering an inclusive newsroom culture, Tanzanian media can create a more equitable journalism environment. These measures will not only support the advancement of female journalists but will also enhance the diversity and quality of news coverage, ensuring that the media more accurately represents the interests and experiences of all members of society.

Summary of Findings

This study has revealed significant gender disparities in Tanzanian journalism, specifically in the areas of hard news, sports, and soft news reporting. Drawing on the Gendered Organizations Theory (Acker, 1990), the findings point to the deeply ingrained gender biases within media institutions, which perpetuate traditional gender roles and limit female journalists' opportunities in traditionally male-dominated beats. These organizational practices, combined with societal expectations and editorial decision-making processes, systematically disadvantage women. Notably, editorial hierarchies play a central role in shaping news assignments, with male journalists predominantly assigned to hard news and sports, while women are relegated to softer beats. This aligns with Goffman's (1974) Framing Theory, which suggests that media structures often frame gender roles in ways that reinforce stereotypes. Specifically, hard news, seen as demanding analytical rigor and assertiveness, is often framed as more suited to men, while women are framed as better equipped for empathetic and emotional reporting in areas like culture and lifestyle.

The gendered nature of news assignments was starkly illustrated by the data: 80% of female journalists reported being systematically excluded from hard news and sports assignments. This disparity is consistent with previous research (Byerly, 2013; North, 2016), which shows that women are underrepresented in high-impact reporting roles, particularly in areas requiring perceived masculine traits such as political or economic analysis. The findings also underscore the influence of societal norms, with many female journalists acknowledging the pressure to conform to stereotypical roles, such as covering human-interest stories or entertainment. These external cultural expectations were reported by 60% of women as a key factor influencing their beat assignments, far higher than the 30% of men who acknowledged similar influences. This highlights the pervasive nature of gender stereotypes not only within newsrooms but also in broader societal perceptions, reinforcing gender inequity in journalistic practice.

Furthermore, career progression remains disproportionately hindered for female journalists, a phenomenon often referred to as the "glass ceiling" effect. As the data shows, women reported slower career advancements, with only 15% of female journalists holding editorial positions, compared to 35% of their male colleagues. This finding is consistent with global patterns in the media industry (Gallagher, 2017), where female journalists face significant barriers to leadership roles. The study revealed that women's career trajectories are stunted by their exclusion from hard news and sports beats, limiting their exposure to prestigious assignments that are crucial for career advancement. This issue is compounded by the lack of professional development opportunities, with male journalists more frequently receiving training in specialized reporting areas such as sports journalism or investigative reporting. In this study, 68% of male journalists reported having received such training, compared to just 32% of women. This disparity in access to professional development further perpetuates the gender gap in reporting roles and, more importantly, in career progression.

Finally, addressing these barriers requires a multi-pronged approach. Media outlets must critically examine their editorial practices and take deliberate steps to challenge the cultural

norms that perpetuate gendered divisions in reporting roles. Drawing on suggestions from UNESCO's Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media (UNESCO, 2012), media houses should implement policies that ensure equal access to high-profile beats, actively promote mentorship for female journalists, and foster an environment that encourages professional growth for women. Highlighting successful female journalists in traditionally male-dominated beats, particularly sports and hard news, could be a powerful strategy for shifting both editorial and public perceptions, demonstrating that women are equally capable of handling complex and high-profile reporting.

These findings emphasize the need for both organizational and societal change. Gender equity in Tanzanian journalism, as in other parts of the world, remains a distant goal unless media organizations take concrete steps to address entrenched biases, challenge gender stereotypes, and provide equal opportunities for career advancement for both men and women.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that despite significant progress in the media industry, gender equity remains a pressing issue in Tanzanian journalism, particularly in traditionally male-dominated beats such as hard news, sports, and political reporting. Drawing on Gendered Organizations Theory (Acker, 1990) and Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974), this study has highlighted how entrenched gender biases within media institutions and broader societal norms shape the career trajectories of female journalists. These institutional and societal constraints result in the systematic under-representation of women in key reporting roles, restricting their access to professional development opportunities and limiting their career advancement. The analysis reveals that female journalists in Tanzania are frequently relegated to softer beats, often deemed more suitable for women by both editorial decision-makers and the public. This pattern reflects deeply ingrained stereotypes that continue to shape the perceptions of gender roles in journalism.

As the data demonstrates, editorial decision-making processes often marginalize female journalists, with 80% of women reporting exclusion from hard news and sports beats and 60% attributing this exclusion to societal expectations and gender norms. The Framing Theory sheds light on how these patterns are socially constructed, framing women as more suited for emotionally driven and empathetic reporting, while men are positioned as the more logical and assertive reporters capable of covering high-stakes news events. This theory helps explain how the gendered nature of editorial decisions perpetuates gender inequality by framing women's professional abilities as inherently limited in certain reporting areas.

Moreover, the study highlights a significant gap in career advancement between male and female journalists, with women experiencing slower progression due to their limited involvement in high-profile beats. This aligns with global findings regarding the "glass ceiling" effect in the media industry, where women face persistent barriers to reaching leadership positions. The absence of equal opportunities for professional growth, training, and mentorship further exacerbates these challenges, creating an uneven playing field in the newsroom.

Recommendations

Addressing gender inequity in Tanzanian journalism requires a multidimensional approach that moves beyond newsroom-level reforms to engage the broader ecosystem shaping journalistic practice. While media organizations remain at the frontline of this transformation, sustainable change must be driven by collaboration across institutions educational, regulatory, and civil society.

Media houses, as the immediate gatekeepers of editorial decision-making, must first take concrete steps to dismantle structural and cultural barriers that restrict female journalists' access to high-profile beats. This includes implementing transparent editorial policies that guarantee equitable assignment of hard news, political reporting, and sports journalism, areas long dominated by male journalists. Such policies should be more than symbolic they must be backed by measurable accountability mechanisms.

Parallel to this, mentorship and professional development programs tailored specifically to support women in navigating these traditionally male-dominated domains are essential. These initiatives should not only equip female journalists with technical competencies but also offer strategic networking opportunities that can help mitigate the isolation many experience in their professional journeys. As one journalist aptly noted during the study, “It’s not just about getting the assignment it’s about knowing someone believes you can do it.”

Crucially, promoting the visibility of successful female journalists, particularly those who have made inroads into high-impact beats or assumed editorial leadership, can serve as both a symbolic and practical counter-narrative to the stereotype that hard news is a male preserve. Highlighting their stories and contributions across media platforms can gradually shift newsroom cultures and public perceptions alike, fostering a sense of legitimacy and aspiration for upcoming women in the field.

Yet, focusing solely on media institutions would be insufficient to generate systemic transformation. Journalism schools and training institutions must become active partners in challenging gendered norms by embedding gender equity and inclusivity in their curricula. This includes offering gender-sensitive modules that critically examine newsroom hierarchies, media content framing, and intersectional barriers that women face in professional settings. Early intervention at the education level not only prepares students for the reality of gender dynamics in journalism but also nurtures a generation of journalists committed to equity.

In addition, media regulatory bodies have a crucial role to play in institutionalizing change. By enforcing diversity standards in editorial practices and periodically reviewing compliance, regulators can hold media organizations accountable for their gender equity commitments. Policies and incentives that reward inclusive practices such as grants, awards, or national recognition could serve as powerful motivators.

Moreover, women’s rights and media advocacy organizations can act as catalysts for collective action. These stakeholders are well-positioned to document instances of gender-based discrimination, provide legal and psychosocial support to affected journalists, and lobby for policy reforms at the national level. Their involvement ensures that efforts to address inequity are rooted in the lived realities of women and aligned with broader social justice agendas.

Ultimately, fostering an inclusive and gender-equitable media landscape in Tanzania demands more than internal reform it calls for an integrated, ecosystem-wide response. Through cross-sectoral collaboration, the industry can begin to dismantle the deep-rooted structures and narratives that have long constrained the full participation of women in journalism. Such a transformation would not only benefit the profession itself but also enrich the quality and diversity of public discourse in Tanzanian society.

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