Framing Femicide on E.TV News: Implications for Public Sensitization

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Abstract

This study investigates how e.TV news in South Africa frames femicide cases, with the aim of understanding stakeholder perceptions regarding the potential impact of these framing strategies on public awareness and sensitization. Guided by cultivation theory, the study investigates how repeated exposure to violent news content cultivates public perceptions and contributes to public sensitization regarding femicide. The study employed a qualitative research design that combined multimodal discourse analysis of ten e.TV primetime news broadcasts, aired between May and December 2025, with key informant interviews conducted with five stakeholders from women's and human rights organizations across South Africa. Purposive sampling was used to select news stories and participants considered relevant to the study objectives. Data from the selected news broadcasts and interviews were analyzed using deductive thematic analysis. The analysis process involved data familiarization, systematic coding, and thematic categorization, resulting in four main themes: narrative structure; representation of actors; framing of the act of violence; and approaches to addressing violence. The findings reveal that e.TV news plays a significant role in shaping public understanding and sensitization to femicide through emotionally compelling, yet predominantly episodic reporting practices. While such coverage contributes to public awareness, empathy, and outrage against violence toward women, it also risks reinforcing fear, desensitization, and the normalization of gender-based violence, while offering limited structural understanding of this problem. Therefore, the study emphasizes the need for more ethically grounded and structurally informed media framing that interrogates the broader social, cultural, and institutional conditions that perpetuate gender-based violence in South Africa.

Keywords: *Femicide, media framing, e.TV news, Cultivation Theory, public sensitization.*

1.0 Introduction

South Africa is grappling with a severe crisis of gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF), with femicide rates five times the global average [1]. In 2025, the country witnessed alarming rates of violence, with 15 women killed daily [2]. The gravity of the situation prompted the South African government to declare GBVF a national disaster in November of the same year. This decision followed widespread protests led by activists and organizations such as Women for Change. Despite policy interventions, including the National Strategic Plan on GBVF (2020-2030), the Domestic Violence Act (No. 116 of 1998), and specialized gender-based violence courts, the prevalence of GBVF remains high. This highlights a gap between policy and practice. While state bodies such as the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and the South African Police Service (SAPS) offer guidance on reporting and prosecution, laws alone seem insufficient to stop violence against women and girls. Culture, norms, and public engagement, on the other hand, embody crucial entry points for addressing this issue. Against this backdrop, this study aims to investigate how *e.TV* news in South Africa frames femicide cases. The focus is on understanding stakeholder perceptions regarding the potential impact of these framing strategies on public awareness and sensitization to the issue. The *e.TV* channel is the first and only privately owned free-to-air television station

in South Africa. This makes it a significant focus for this study, given its broad accessibility and wide audience reach across the country and beyond.

The framing of femicide cases in media outlets such as the *e.TV* channel plays a crucial role in shaping public sensitization or desensitization towards gender-based violence. According to D'Angelo [3], framing involves selecting certain aspects of a story and making them more salient, thereby influencing how audiences interpret and respond to issues. In the context of GBVF, media framing can either perpetuate harmful stereotypes and normalize violence or contribute to a cultural shift by highlighting the severity and systemic nature of the problem. Research suggests that episodic framing, which focuses on individual cases, can lead to victim-blaming, while thematic framing, emphasizing societal factors, can foster empathy and collective responsibility [4, 5, 6]. Aldrete and Fernández-Ardèvol [5], for example, analyzed femicide news frames. These scholars found that thematic news pieces generally focused on non-intimate partner violence femicides, whereas episodic pieces were more diverse, often individualizing the issue and attributing blame to the victims. As South Africa grapples with GBVF, understanding how media frames femicide cases is crucial. This knowledge can help inform strategies to promote public engagement and cultural transformation, as opposed to perpetuating stereotypes and normalizing brutal acts of violence.

This study posits that the repeated exposure to femicide stories, on almost a daily basis in the news, may normalize violence in the media. This is especially relevant on a widely accessible channel such as *e.TV*, likely contributing to a culture of acceptance or desensitization. Debates over the role of media in Africa, in either sensitizing populations against gender-based violence or inadvertently desensitizing viewers is ongoing. Scholars, for example, Ihejirika & Ìsman [7], Iqbal, Kamran & Javaid [8] and Green, Wilke & Cooper [9], note that media can play a crucial role in raising awareness, promoting empathy and advocating for change. However, there is a risk that graphic portrayals of violence could desensitize viewers or perpetuate harmful stereotypes. This dichotomy highlights the complex responsibility of media practitioners in balancing the need to inform the public with the potential impact of their reporting on societal attitudes and behaviours [8]. Furthermore, as Ihejirika & Ìsman [7] note, the frequency and manner in which violence is depicted can contribute to normalization, potentially diminishing public outrage and reducing the perceived severity of such acts. Conversely, thoughtful and responsible media coverage can mobilize public opinion, drive policy discussions, and support initiatives aimed at preventing violence. This highlights the need for careful consideration of reporting strategies and ethical guidelines in media representation of violence [10].

In order to explore how *e.TV* news frames femicide cases, this study is guided by the following specific research objectives: to analyze the framing strategies employed by *e.TV* news bulletins when reporting femicide cases; to examine how these frames influence public perception of femicide; and to identify stakeholder perceptions regarding the potential impact of femicide framing on raising awareness and sensitization to the issue. The central research question is: How do *e.TV* news' framing strategies and representations of femicide cases relate to stakeholder perceptions of increased awareness and sensitization to the issue?

Despite the growing body of research on gender-based violence in South Africa, including several recent studies on: (1) the prevalence of intimate partner violence [11, 12, 13]; (2) the impact of gender-based violence on women's mental health [14, 15, 16] and (3) policy responses to gender-based violence [17, 18, 19], there remains a notable scarcity of research examining the media framing of femicide in South Africa. This gap is significant, given the media's influential role in shaping public understanding and stakeholder perceptions. This study seeks to address this gap by analyzing how femicide is represented in news reports, with particular attention to the ways in which language and discourse construct meaning around the phenomenon. To guide this analysis, the study adopts the Cultivation Theory, whose relevance to media framing is discussed in the following subsection.

2.0 Cultivation Theory to Femicide Framing

This study is anchored in Cultivation Theory which posits that consistent exposure to media content influences individuals' perceptions of social reality [20]. The central tenets of the theory are centered around

three concepts; mainstreaming, resonance, and mean-world syndrome [21]. The first notion of 'mainstreaming' underlines that viewers who are heavily exposed to similar media content develop homogenized perceptions of reality, suggesting a convergence of viewpoints among heavy media consumers. The second aspect of 'resonance' postulates that when media portrayals mirror lived experiences, their influence is amplified, making the media messages more impactful and personally relevant. The third concept of 'mean world syndrome' emphasizes that prolonged exposure to violent imagery leads individuals to perceive the world as more threatening than it actually is, cultivating a sense of fear and vulnerability among viewers [21].

In this study, Cultivation Theory illuminates how the frequent portrayals of femicide in primetime news cultivate societal perceptions about women's and girls' safety, justice, and gender-based vulnerability. The theory suggests that repeated exposure to such news coverage may heighten the viewers' sense of risk and concern regarding women's protection issues. While the theory highlights the risks of fear, desensitization, and aggression associated with media consumption, it also provides a lens to explore how repeated news coverage can sensitize populations to the urgent need for women's protection, potentially mobilizing awareness and action on gender-based violence and femicide.

Cultivation theory is associated with providing a framework for understanding long-term media effects on perceptions of social reality and highlighting the cumulative impact of media messages [22]. According to Ivanova [23], the theory's focus on mainstreaming and resonance offers insights into how media shapes and reflects societal norms and individual experiences. However, its weaknesses include criticisms of oversimplification, challenges in establishing direct causal links between media exposure and real-world beliefs, and variability in how individuals interpret and process media content [24, 25, 26]. Additionally, the theory's emphasis on television, in its original formulation, may require adaptation to account for today's diverse digital media landscape [25]. Researchers have addressed these limitations by expanding the theory's application to various media forms and contexts, incorporating deeper understandings of audience engagement, and exploring cultivation effects across different demographic groups and media platforms [27, 24]. This study addresses these limitations through engaging key informant interviewees to provide rich, contextual insights on the reality of the impact of media violence on individuals and the society, thereby enriching understanding of cultivation processes.

3.0 Methodology

The methodological framework and procedures employed in this study are detailed in this section. These include; the research design, data collection methods, analytical approaches, and ethical considerations that underpin this investigation.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a qualitative, interpretive research design, employing multimodal discourse analysis of televised news stories on *e.TV*, complemented by semi-structured key informant interviews with stakeholders involved in gender equity and human rights advocacy. The combined approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of media framing and stakeholder perspectives on femicide in South Africa.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

3.2.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis Procedure

The multimodal discourse analysis involved the systematic monitoring of the 8:00 p.m., 30-minute weekday news broadcast on e.TV from May to December 2025. The temporal scope was selected based on the assumption that this period captures recent reporting patterns and discursive shifts related to femicide, though future studies could explore seasonal variations or longer timeframes for broader representativeness. During this period, 125 individual bulletins were viewed live, with each bulletin regarded as a discrete news

item. Multiple bulletins may focus on the same case or event; hence, a 'story' was defined as a coherent news report covering a single incident, including follow-ups if they were part of the same narrative chain, and lasted between 1 to 5 minutes.

From these, 88 relevant broadcasts were identified as containing reports on violence against women and girls, based on initial relevance screening. Relevance was determined by explicit mention of femicide, gender-based violence, or related issues, beyond mere mention of violence or crime, to focus on stories aligned with the study's focus. Relevance screening involved two independent researchers coding for relevance, with discrepancies discussed to enhance reliability.

Of the 88 relevant broadcasts, 10 stories were selected for in-depth multimodal discourse analysis. The selection criteria included: reports on recent incidents; presentation of conclusive evidence (reports with definitive and sufficient proof of murder, such as the actual identification of suspects, forensic findings, or direct eyewitness testimonies); and cases involving the murder of women and girls. The justification for selecting exactly 10 stories was based on achieving an in-depth, manageable analysis of multimodal features, balancing comprehensive coverage with depth, and ensuring analytical rigour. This approach aligns with qualitative sampling practices that emphasize information richness rather than saturation in a traditional quantitative sense [28]. The process from 125 bulletins to 88 relevant broadcasts and then to 10 selected cases involved:

- Excluding repeat reports on the same incident unless presenting new evidence or follow-up information;
- Discarding broadcasts lacking sufficient detail to meet the 'conclusive evidence' criterion;
- Prioritizing recent, detailed, and conclusive reports to ensure relevance and analytical depth.

The analysis of each selected story entailed a detailed examination of verbal (spoken language), visual (images, camera angles, footage), and textual (graphics, captions) semiotic modes, guided by Taylor [29]. Particular attention was paid to narrative structure, actor representation, violence framing, imagery, tone, and lexical choices. Each story was recorded for repeated viewing, enabling systematic coding and in-depth analysis of multimodal features.

3.2.2 Key Informant Interview Procedure

Participants were purposively sampled to ensure a diverse range of insights from various South African provinces. The sample size of five was justified by the depth of information obtained from experienced stakeholders. This approach followed the principle of information saturation, which was confirmed by the consistency of responses across participants with different roles. Additionally, participants' perspectives on the relevance of the topics and thematic saturation of the data were further validated through follow-up emails and an iterative review process of their responses.

The sample of participants included a representative for child protection services, a human rights lawyer and social justice advocate, a community development leader, an advocate for women's rights and empowerment, and a gender equality and inclusion activist. These were selected based on:

- Active engagement in gender-based violence initiatives;
- A minimum of three years' advocacy or community work; and
- Confirmation of regular viewing of e.TV news, ensuring familiarity with the media content analyzed.

Participants were recruited via organizational websites and social media, contacted through email, with details of the study and participation requests. The semi-structured interview instrument (see Appendix 1) was distributed by email, allowing participants to respond at their convenience. The questions were open-ended, designed to explore perceptions of media framing, gender-based violence, and femicide, with possibility for follow-up probing via email if clarifications were needed. The demographic and professional profile of the selected sample is presented in Table 1, which outlines the participants' roles, gender, province and city, and years of professional experience.

TABLE 1
Profile of Key Informant Interviewees

Number	Position/Role	Gender	Province and City	Experience
1	Representative for Child Protection Services	Male	Gauteng Province (Johannesburg)	6 years
2	Human Rights Lawyer and Social Justice Advocate	Male	Mpumalanga Province (Mbombela)	9 years
3	Community Development Leader	Male	KwaZulu-Natal Province (Pietermaritzburg)	16 years
4	Advocate for Women's Rights and Empowerment	Female	Western Cape Province (Cape Town)	7 years
5	Gender Equality and Inclusion Activist	Female	Free State Province (Bloemfontein)	11 years

3.3 Data Analysis

The interview transcripts underwent thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke [30]. A deductive approach guided by the predefined themes from the multimodal discourse analysis (narrative structure, actor representation, violence framing, and response approaches) was employed. The coding was performed by the primary researcher, with a second coder independently coding a subset of transcripts (20%) to assess inter-coder reliability. Discrepancies were discussed to reach consensus, and a Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.85 indicated high agreement. The coding process involved:

- Operational definition of femicide as 'the murder of a woman or girl because of her gender, often characterized by intent, brutality, or specific victim-perpetrator dynamics' (aligned with World Health Organization [31] and South African legal definitions). Each case analyzed met this definition based on explicit references or forensic evidence presented in the news stories.
- Coding units included sentences, visual frames, and graphic elements, with examples illustrating multimodal features (for example, a caption describing forensic evidence, a camera angle emphasizing victim vulnerability).
- Reflexivity and interpretive handling involved researcher notes on potential biases, contextual factors, and interpretive uncertainty, documented in an audit trail.
- The audit trail included records of coding decisions, thematic memos, and iterative coding adjustments.

The integration of media and interview data involved comparative analysis to identify convergences, divergences, and complementarities, enabling triangulation and multidimensional insights into media framing and stakeholder perceptions.

3.4 Trustworthiness and Rigour

To ensure validity, the study employed data source triangulation (visual/textual media data and stakeholder perspectives), inter-coder reliability checks, and audit trails documenting coding and analysis decisions. The reflexivity process involved ongoing researcher reflection to minimize bias. The detailed description of sampling, selection criteria, and regional distribution supports transferability. Dependability was maintained through transparent documentation of all phases, from media monitoring to coding and analysis, ensuring auditability. Confirmability was reinforced by anchoring themes in empirical data, with systematic cross-verification between media content and stakeholder responses.

3.5 Linking Methodology and Conceptual Framework

The methodology used in this study aligns with the Cultivation Theory, operationalized through multimodal discourse analysis and stakeholder interviews, to explore how media representations shape

social perceptions of femicide. The visual summary (Figure 1) illustrates the flow from objectives to data collection, analysis, and integration, emphasizing the systematic approach underpinning the study's theoretical and empirical rigour.

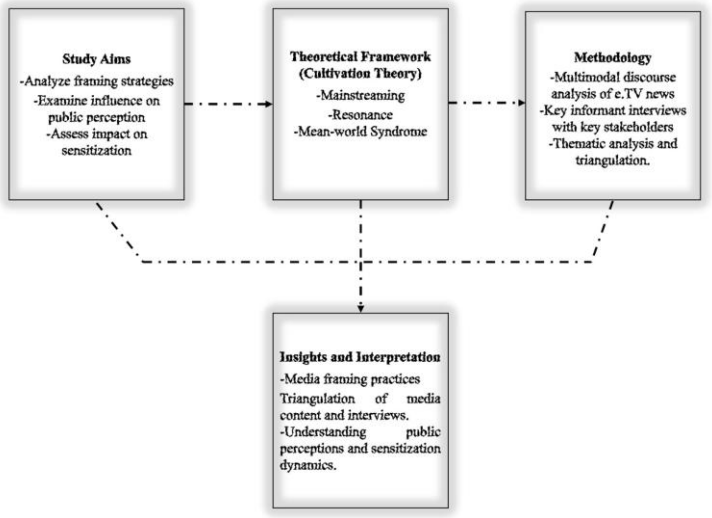


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Aims, Theory, Methodology and Interpretation

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from the University of Zimbabwe Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number: UZREC/2025/045). Ethical protocols included obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, and providing comprehensive information about the study's purpose and data use. Participants' confidentiality was protected through anonymization of identities and secure data storage. Data protection arrangements adhered to institutional guidelines, with all digital data stored on password-protected devices and access limited to the researcher. To mitigate deductive identification, pseudonyms were used for all participant information, and any potentially identifiable contextual details were carefully managed to prevent indirect identification.

3.7 Limitations

This study encountered methodological limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the media analysis was confined to a single broadcaster (e.TV), which may limit the generalizability of findings across different media outlets with varying framing practices. To address this, the study explicitly states the scope and frames findings within this context, emphasizing the need for future research across multiple broadcasters. Second, the corpus of ten selected stories was purposively sampled from 88 relevant broadcasts, which limits the breadth of media coverage analyzed. The selection aimed for depth over breadth, focusing on recent, conclusive cases, but future studies could expand the corpus for broader representativeness. Third, the stakeholder sample comprised five specialist participants, deliberately chosen for their expertise; this limits insights into public perceptions but provides depth from informed perspectives. Lastly, the email-based interview guide did not allow for real-time probing or follow-up questions, which limits the depth of stakeholder responses and is acknowledged as a methodological limitation. To mitigate this, responses were carefully reviewed, and follow-up clarifications were sought via email, although the format constrained dynamic probing.

4.0 Results

This section presents the key findings of the study, derived from a multimodal discourse analysis of selected news reports on femicide, complemented by insights gathered from key informant interviews with relevant stakeholders. The analysis aims to uncover how femicide is constructed and communicated through media narratives on *e.TV* news, examining linguistic, visual, and contextual elements that shape public perceptions of these violent acts. Through an exploration of patterns across multiple cases and thematic areas, the findings offer useful insights into how the media frames femicide within the South African context.

4.1 Multimodal Discourse Analysis Findings

The multimodal discourse analysis examined ten femicide cases reported as individual news bulletin items between May and December 2025. Each case was presented as a standalone report, rather than a series of follow-up stories. Six of these involved the murder of adult women (aged 19–64 years), while four involved children aged 4 to 16 years. Some cases involved multiple victims, including women and girls, and in several instances, the perpetrators remained unidentified. Collectively, these cases highlight the heightened vulnerability of women and girls to gender-based violence. A summary of the analyzed stories is provided in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Summary of the Reviewed Femicide News Stories

CASES	STORY DESCRIPTION	DATE
Story 1	A 30-year-old woman was shot on her first romantic date with a man who intended to rob her.	27 May 2025
Story 2	A 25-year-old man murdered his 48-year-old mother using a shovel and recorded the crime.	6 October 2025
Story 3	Two cousins, aged 22 and 21, were shot dead by a 38-year-old man who confessed to the crime, claiming that the motive was their rejection of his advances after he had spent money on them at the club.	27 October 2025
Story 4	A 22-year-old university student was killed after a date with her boyfriend, with her body found buried in a suitcase in a shallow grave a month later.	23 December 2025
Story 5	A 64-year-old aunt and her 20-year-old niece were tied, strangled, and killed in their own home, with no suspect arrested.	16 December 2025
Story 6	Two 15-year-old high school girls were raped and burnt beyond recognition, with four men (16-27 years old) arrested as suspects.	20 June 2025
Story 7	A 16-year-old school girl was severely beaten and stabbed by a 21-year-old man and dumped in an open field.	25 December 2025
Story 8	An 18-year-old ex-boyfriend and his friend attacked and killed a 19-year-old girl in her home, by stabbing her multiple times.	3 November 2025
Story 9	A 4-year-old girl was raped and murdered, with her mother's boyfriend implicated and arrested.	11 December 2025
Story 10	A 6-year-old girl was kidnapped, raped, and murdered by a 25-year-old man, secretly burying her body, leading to his arrest and a life imprisonment sentence.	1 September 2025

Data is organized into four key thematic areas, each illuminating different aspects of how violence against women and girls is portrayed in the news: (1) narrative structure, (2) representation of actors, (3) framing of the act of violence, and (4) approaches to addressing gender-based violence. The subsequent sub-sections elaborate on each theme, illustrating how femicide is constructed in the news.

4.1.1 Theme 1: Narrative Structure

The narrative structure of *e.TV* news coverage of femicide in South Africa follows a clear three-stage progression, designed to guide viewers through the unfolding story from initial incident to legal resolution. This process begins with a breaking news announcement, transitions into detailed investigative reporting, and concludes with updates on the case's judicial outcome (see Table 3).

TABLE 3
Narrative Structure of the News

STAGE	GOAL	DETAILS	FOCUS
1.The Announcement (Breaking News)	Inform the public that a crime has occurred.	Reporters provide the five Ws (who, what, when, where why), based on initial police reports or witness alerts;	Immediate safety alerts; Location and nature of the crime.
2.Discovery and the Investigative Details	Provide context and build a narrative of how the crime unfolded.	News shift to crime scene investigation; Collection of evidence; Witness testimonies, Forensic leads, Surveillance of footage; Identification/apprehension of suspects.	Identifying how of the crime.
3.The way Forward (Legal Resolution	Track progress towards justice and case closure.	Coverage moves to courtrooms or communities; tracking progress towards justice.	Courtroom procedures; Suspect charging; Trial; Sentencing; Appeals.

The first stage, the announcement, aims to quickly inform the public about the incident, emphasizing the 'what', 'who', 'when', 'where', and 'why', often based on police reports or eyewitness accounts. This stage primarily highlights immediate safety concerns, location, and the nature of the crime. The second stage, discovery and investigation, provides a more detailed context, depicting crime scene analysis, evidence collection, witness testimonies, forensic findings, surveillance footage, and suspect identification. This phase emphasizes explaining how the crime was committed, constructing a coherent narrative of the event. The final stage, the way forward, focuses on the judicial process, covering court proceedings, suspect charges, trials, sentencing, and appeals, highlighting the pursuit of justice and case closure.

The narrative structure is predominantly characterized by a somber tone, carefully designed to evoke strong emotional responses from viewers. Stories are delivered in English, the channel's official language, and frequently incorporate emotive expressions such as "*women's lives matter*!", "*a community torn apart*", "*gone too soon*", and "*dreams shattered*" to underscore the gravity of the incidents. The linguistic elements of the narratives, combined with visual components, often work in tandem to create a sense of urgency and moral imperative, encouraging viewers to reflect on pressing societal issues related to gender-based violence. This deliberate combination aims to foster empathy and inspire action among the audience.

The visual aspects of the news narrative are presented through a variety of imagery that convey different emotional and factual dimensions of femicide stories. Crime scene footage is shown in a manner that emphasizes the gravity and brutality of the events, often displaying physical evidence and scenes that evoke shock and immediacy. Images of grieving families are included to highlight personal loss, typically capturing emotional moments of mourning, tears, and solidarity at vigils. Candlelight vigils are depicted as gatherings where communities come together, with visuals focusing on participants holding candles to convey a sense of collective mourning and hope. Graphic reconstructions are used to visually depict the sequence of violence, often illustrated with detailed visuals that reconstruct key moments of the incident, sometimes employing images of the deceased and social spaces where they lived and where the femicide occurred to clarify and emphasize the circumstances surrounding the case. These visual elements are integrated into the news coverage in a way that complements the narration, creating an impactful and layered presentation designed to engage viewers emotionally and informatively. Overall, the combination of these visual strategies aims to deepen viewers' understanding of the incidents while fostering empathy and awareness about gender-based violence.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Representation of Actors

The analysis of the ten reviewed femicide news stories reveals patterns in how key actors are portrayed. Table 4 summarizes these actors, their portrayals, and their connection to the specific cases.

TABLE 4
Key Actors in Femicide News Reports

Actor	Portrayal	Description	Associated Stories
Victims	Helpless, powerless	Portrayed as vulnerable, often shown in community or family photographs, emphasizing societal roles lost.	All cases (stories 1-10) depict victims as vulnerable and in social settings (for example, young girls in stories 6, 7, 9, 10)
Perpetrators	Deviant, estranged, remorseless	Often depicted as unknown or suspected offenders; when identified, stereotyped as violent or criminal (e.g., serial offenders, gang links).	Six stories (2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10) involve identified or suspected offenders with deviant profiles
Eyewitnesses	Observers, narrators	Provide first-hand accounts; their testimonies are featured to reconstruct events.	Four stories (3, 4, 5, 8) include eyewitness accounts or witness testimonies
Community	Outraged, empathetic, advocates	Portrayed as protesting or expressing empathy; their reactions symbolize societal outrage.	Five stories (1, 5, 6, 9, 10) depict community outrage or advocacy efforts
Authorities	Powerful, interventionists	Police and government officials portrayed as capable of intervening; often promise justice.	Six stories (1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 10) show police and government officials responding or promising action
Reporters	Narrators, sensitization agents	Use emotive language and visuals; serve as neutral narrators raising awareness	All ten stories feature reporters framing narratives and emphasizing emotional engagement

4.1.3 Theme 3: Framing of the Act of Violence

The ten cases demonstrate that news narratives frame violence primarily as a continuum of crimes (abduction, rape, assault, murder), with a focus on the immediate act and its aftermath. The framing emphasizes moral judgment and societal negligence but often lacks depth in addressing systemic causes. Table 5 highlights the structural framing of violence in the news stories, including types of violence, focus, causes, manner of execution, context, perpetrators and reporting tone.

TABLE 5
Framing of Violence in News Stories

ASPECT OF FRAMING	DESCRIPTION OF VIOLENCE	NUMBER OF STORIES	ASSOCIATED STORIES
Types of violence	Abductions leading to murder, Rape and Murder, Physical assault leading to murder, Premeditated murder	10	Stories 6, 9, 10 involve rape and murder; Stories 7 and 8 involve physical assault and murder; Story 10 includes kidnapping, rape and murder.
Focus	Immediate violent act and aftermath	10	All cases detail the act and immediate aftermath. For example, Story 4 details the burial, Story 3 the confession.
Causes identified	Victim negligence, Victim gullibility, Perpetrator pathology	7	Cases mention victim negligence and (Story 1), victim gullibility (Story 4) and suspect pathology (Stories 2, 3, 6, 8, 10)
Execution of Violence	Gunshots, strangulation, stabbing/forceful impact, burning, suffocation, assault.	8	Stories 1 and 3 (gunshot), 2 (bludgeoning), 4 (buried alive), 5 (strangulation), 6 (body burning) 7 and 8 (stabbing), 9 (assault), 10 (multiple weapons)
Context of Violence	Domestic, community, or social spaces.	9	Cases 4 (home), 5 (home), 6 (school), 7 (open field), 8 (home), 10 (public space)

Perpetrators	Intimate partners, Family members, Acquaintances	7	Intimate partners (Stories 8, 9, 10), family (Stories 2, 5), acquaintances (Stories 6, 7)
Tone	Moral judgement, Grief, Criticism.	10	All stories evoke moral outrage. For example, stories 6 and 10 highlight societal failures

4.1.4 Theme 4: Approaches to Addressing Gender-Based Violence and Femicide

The review indicates varied responses and resolutions in relation to GBVF across the ten stories, with some cases leading to arrests and convictions, while others remain unresolved. Table 6 summarizes these findings.

TABLE 6
Overview of Approaches to Addressing GBVF in the Studied News Stories

INVESTIGATION STATUS	RESOLUTIONS	COMMUNITY RESPONSE	AUTHORITY RESPONSE	NUMBER OF STORIES	ASSOCIATED STORIES
Further investigation	Ongoing	Demands justice, petitions government	Police vow to apprehend suspect	4	Stories 1, 3, 6, 10 murders under investigation or pending resolution
Investigation completed	Arrests, convictions	Outrage, satisfaction, celebration	Police make arrests, promise action	3	Stories 2 (suspect arrested), 7, 8 (suspects identified and arrested)
No resolution / Pending arrest	No definitive outcome	Discontent, demands for action	Limited or no official response	3	Stories 4, 5, 9 involve no arrest.

4.2 Stakeholder Perspectives and Interpretations of Media Framing

Building on the multimodal discourse analysis of news reports, this subsection presents insights gathered from key informant interviews to explore how various stakeholders perceive and interpret the media's portrayal of femicide. These perspectives provide valuable context for understanding the implications of media framing and highlight the complexities involved in reporting sensitive issues such as gender-based violence. The following outline delineates stakeholders' views on narrative construction, actor representation, framing of violence, and responses to femicide, enhancing understanding of the media's role in shaping public discourse.

4.2.1 Perspectives on Narrative Construction and Emotional Framing

The analysis of stakeholder interviews reveals varied perspectives on the storytelling techniques employed by *e.TV* in reporting femicide cases. A community leader (Interviewee 3) remarked that the stories are deliberately constructed to evoke empathy, stating, "*the stories were constructed to make you feel the pain of the bereaved families and make you cry with them*." This highlights the emotional framing intended to mobilize viewers' feelings. Conversely, a women's rights advocate (Interviewee 4) expressed concern that such emotive storytelling, especially when graphic, might desensitize audiences or lead to voyeurism, thereby potentially undermining efforts to create meaningful change. An additional critique from a gender activist (Interviewee 5) highlighted the risk that sensationalized content can overshadow the systemic issues that underpin femicide, emphasizing the need for responsible reporting that balances emotional engagement with critical analysis.

4.2.2 Portrayal of Key Actors and Sensitization Roles

Stakeholders consistently observed that media portrayals tend to reinforce stereotypes: victims are depicted as helpless and vulnerable, often shown in social or family settings to emphasize societal loss, while perpetrators are characterized as deviant, often with criminal profiles or known histories of violence. A human rights lawyer (Interviewee 2) critiqued this approach, noting that "*the women are always shown as victims, the police as heroes, but there is very little interrogation of why such crimes are happening in the first place*." Furthermore, community and civil society responses, such as protests or advocacy efforts, are highlighted to symbolize societal outrage, yet critics argue these portrayals rarely delve into the structural causes, such as poverty or cultural norms, that perpetuate violence.

4.2.3 Framing of Violence and Systemic Contexts

Stakeholders also commented on how media narratives frame femicide primarily as individual acts of violence, often emphasizing immediate acts and their aftermath, with limited exploration of systemic or cultural contributors. A community leader (Interviewee 3) pointed out that while social environments such as homes, schools, and communities are acknowledged, the media seldom critically examine how patriarchy, economic hardship, or institutional failures facilitate violence. This aligns with the thematic analysis that suggests that media coverage tends to focus on immediate moral judgments and societal outrage, rather than addressing root causes or systemic reforms.

4.2.4 Responses and Resolutions: Media and Institutional Critiques

Ultimately, stakeholder insights reveal dissatisfaction with the current approaches to addressing femicide through media coverage and institutional responses. A gender activist (Interviewee 5) emphasized that "*these stories end with 'justice must be served,' but not with 'how do we change the system to stop this from happening again?*'" Similarly, a child protection services representative (Interviewee 1) expressed disappointment that media reports often overlook the need for systemic support for vulnerable families, noting, "*we often see cases where children are left vulnerable and without access to necessary resources, and the media is not doing enough to address this.*" A human rights lawyer (Interviewee 2) further highlighted that legal frameworks exist but often lack effective implementation, highlighting the importance of systemic reform alongside improved media practices. A women's rights advocate (Interviewee 4) concluded that tackling the root causes of violence, such as patriarchy and gender inequality, requires collaborative efforts among government agencies, civil society, and the media to foster meaningful change.

5.0 Discussion

An exploration of how *e.TV* news frames femicide cases in South Africa, and how this framing may influence public perception and awareness of violence against women, revealed interesting findings. Drawing on Cultivation Theory, multimodal discourse analysis, and stakeholder interviews, the findings reveal a consistent pattern of emotionally charged, episodic, and actor-centred reporting that foregrounds violent events while marginalising structural explanations. This discussion interprets these findings in relation to existing scholarship on media framing, violence representation, and the long-term cultivation effects of repeated exposure to mediated violence.

A central finding of this study is that *e.TV* news constructs femicide narratives through strongly emotional and visually intense storytelling techniques, characterised by a sombre tone, evocative lexical choices, and graphic imagery. Expressions such as '*dreams shattered*' and '*a community torn apart'*, alongside visuals of grieving families and crime scenes, indicate a deliberate affective framing strategy aimed at audience engagement. While such framing may enhance immediacy and emotional resonance, it also aligns with what Cultivation Theory conceptualises as the cumulative shaping of social reality through repeated media exposure [21]. From a cultivation perspective, the persistent exposure to violent and emotionally saturated representations of femicide may contribute to the normalization of violence as a

routine feature of social life. The concept of 'mainstreaming 'is particularly relevant here, as audiences repeatedly exposed to similar narratives may begin to perceive femicide as a pervasive and inevitable aspect of gender relations. This is further reinforced by 'resonance', where viewers who have experienced or are aware of gendered violence may perceive heightened personal vulnerability when exposed to such coverage [32]. Over time, Schoberleitner [33] notes that this may contribute to a heightened 'mean world syndrome', where women's safety is perceived as fundamentally precarious and societal spaces are viewed as inherently unsafe.

However, the findings also suggest a dual cultivation effect. While exposure to violence may evoke fear and perceptions of vulnerability among the public, as indicated by stakeholder responses, it also triggers moral outrage and calls for justice. This indicates that media framing not only cultivates fear but can also raise awareness and stimulate emotional mobilization. This duality supports more recent extensions of Cultivation Theory. These acknowledge that media effects are not uniformly desensitizing, but can also produce heightened sensitization depending on narrative framing and audience interpretation [34, 35].

The analysis also demonstrates a strong tendency towards episodic framing. In this framing, femicide is presented as isolated incidents, centred on individual victims and perpetrators, rather than as a systemic issue rooted in broader social, cultural, and structural inequalities. This aligns with Entman's [36] framing theory, which argues that media select certain aspects of reality while omitting broader contextual explanations. In this study, it is established that femicide is frequently framed as a sequence of violent acts culminating in murder. The emphasis is placed on immediate events rather than on structural conditions such as patriarchy, economic inequality, or institutional weaknesses. This individualization is further reinforced through the portrayal of perpetrators as deviant, psychopathic, or inherently criminal. Consequently, violence is situated within individual pathology rather than within systemic gender relations. Such framing risks what scholars describe as decontextualised violence narratives, where structural drivers of GBVF are obscured, limiting public understanding of its root causes [37]. Stakeholder responses strongly supported this interpretation, with participants noting the absence of sustained interrogation of poverty, unemployment, and institutional failure.

The findings further reveal highly structured representational patterns of key actors. Victims are consistently portrayed as vulnerable and innocent, often symbolically constructed through imagery of family life, education, and community participation. Perpetrators, in contrast, are framed as dangerous outsiders, reinforcing binaries of innocence and deviance. Authorities, including police and government officials, are generally depicted as reactive agents of justice, while civil society and community members occupy positions of emotional response and moral advocacy. This binary construction reflects what van Dijk [38] terms 'ideological polarization', where media narratives simplify complex social realities into morally legible categories of 'victims' and 'offenders'. While such framing enhances narrative clarity, it also limits analytical depth by obscuring relational and structural dynamics of violence. From a cultivation perspective, these representations may reinforce stable cognitive schemas about gendered violence. For instance, views that women are inherently vulnerable, men are potential threats, and institutions are reactive rather than preventive. Kung'u and Kamau [39] note that, with time, such schemas may become normalized as social reality, particularly when repeatedly reinforced through televised news exposure.

A key limitation identified in the study is the relative absence of structural and systemic analysis within news framing. Although violence is located within homes, schools, and communities, there is limited explicit critique of broader socio-economic and cultural systems that enable femicide. This 'structural silence' is particularly significant in a context such as South Africa, where GBVF is deeply embedded in historical inequalities, patriarchal norms, and institutional inefficiencies [40, 41]. Stakeholders consistently emphasised this gap, pointing to weak institutional responses as overlooked explanatory factors. This aligns with African feminist media scholarship, which argues that mainstream news often depoliticizes gender-based violence by failing to situate it within systems of power [42, 37, 43]. Within Cultivation Theory, this omission has important implications. If media consistently foregrounds individual cases without structural framing, audiences may cultivate an understanding of femicide as random, inevitable, or primarily interpersonal rather than systemic. This can limit public pressure for structural reform, even when emotional awareness is high.

The findings also raise important questions about the ethical responsibilities of media institutions in reporting GBVF. While emotive and graphic storytelling enhances visibility and emotional engagement, stakeholders warned that such approaches may risk desensitization or voyeurism. This reflects a broader tension in journalism between informing the public and avoiding sensationalism. Cultivation Theory helps illuminate this tension by suggesting that repeated exposure to graphic violence may produce both heightened emotional sensitivity and potential emotional fatigue [21]. The coexistence of observed community empathy, outrage, and numbness reflects this ambivalence. Consistent with Schmälzle & Huskey [44] and Kung'u & Kamau [39], this suggests that media effects are not linear but cumulative and context-dependent, shaped by narrative style, frequency of exposure, and audience positioning.

In essence, the findings demonstrate that *e.TV* news significantly influences public understanding of femicide by presenting emotionally charged, episodic, and morally framed narratives. While such framing enhances awareness and emotional engagement, it simultaneously risks reinforcing individualised interpretations of violence and underrepresenting structural causes. Through the lens of Cultivation Theory, these patterns suggest that repeated exposure to femicide news may contribute to the cultivation of both heightened fear and moral urgency, alongside potentially limited structural understanding. The study therefore highlights the dual role of media as both a sensitizing and potentially simplifying force in public discourse on gender-based violence. Ultimately, as also suggested by Deane [41], the findings point to the need for more balanced and structurally informed media framing that not only documents incidents of femicide but also critically engages with the systemic conditions that sustain it.

6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that *e.TV*'s coverage of femicide in South Africa predominantly employs emotionally charged and episodic framing, emphasizing grief, trauma, and violence in ways that may significantly influence public perceptions. While this approach aligns with and extends the Cultivation Theory by demonstrating how repeated media exposure cultivates heightened fear, moral outrage, and awareness among audiences, it also challenges the theory's assumption that media primarily reinforce dominant social realities. The findings reveal that such framing can reinforce stereotypes, normalize violence, and obscure the systemic and structural causes of gender-based violence. This limits deeper societal understanding and potential solutions to femicide.

These findings have profound implications for various stakeholders. Media practitioners should adopt trauma-informed and structurally aware reporting practices that go beyond sensationalism. They should integrate contextual and systemic analysis to foster more refined public discourse. Policymakers and relevant non-governmental organizations are encouraged to develop awareness campaigns that complement emotional stories with educational content. These campaigns should focus on the root causes of gender-based violence and femicide, including patriarchy, inequality, and institutional failures. Researchers and academics can build on these findings by further exploring how media framing influences long-term perceptions and behaviours related to gender-based violence.

Based on these insights, recommendations include the implementation of ethical guidelines within media organizations that promote responsible, balanced reporting, emphasizing systemic issues. Also, there is a need to develop journalism training, focused on contextual and systemic storytelling. Additionally, fostering collaborations among media, researchers, and community organizations can produce comprehensive narratives that educate and mobilize societal action. Finally, broader societal efforts should promote community-based prevention initiatives supported by media campaigns that emphasize systemic change. Media literacy programs would be essential in helping audiences to critically engage with content and distinguish between emotional storytelling and a deeper understanding of systemic issues. Figure 2 visually summarizes the key conclusions, implications, and recommendations derived from this study. It illustrates how the findings relate to media framing, public awareness, and practical steps for stakeholders.

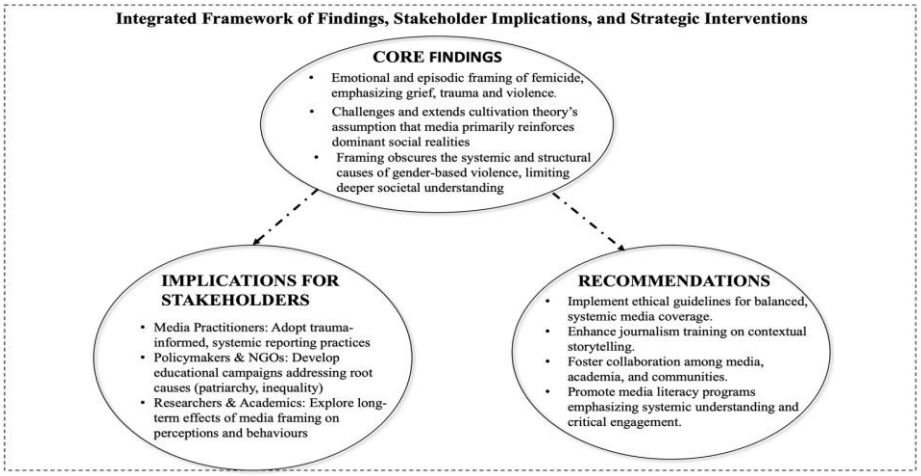


Figure 2. A conceptual overview of the study's key findings, implications, and recommended strategic actions

This model encapsulates the interconnected relationship between media framing, public perception, and strategic responses highlighted in the study. Gaining an understanding of these connections can help foster informed media discourse, ultimately contributing to more effective efforts to address the systemic issues of gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa.

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