



# THE REPORT OF THE MEDIA MONITORING ON THE DOMESTIC MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

## The Office of the Equal Opportunities Ombudsperson



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# ABOUT THE MONITORING

## An Idea

Victim-blaming and unethical portrayal of victims of men's violence against women in the online news media were taken as an object of this media monitoring. The aim was to evaluate how common this practice is in the media, since the media has an impact on the attitudes of the society. At the same time, the monitoring team reacted to unethical publications with direct mailing to journalists, inviting them to follow [the guidelines](#) of ethical writing about victims of men's violence against women and, thus, raising awareness on the importance of the issue.

## Pilot Study

Media monitoring was started by a pilot study carried out in January 2018. It was organized as a preliminary media monitoring that would: 1) examine the context of media portrayal of domestic men's violence against women; 2) specify a tendency of victim-blaming in publications; 3) test the chosen design of the monitoring. The pilot monitoring focused on reports and articles that were published in 10 Lithuanian news portals in November and December of 2017. As a result, 64 articles were identified as problematic and analyzed accordingly, also having text parts of victim-blaming being marked and singled out.

The monitoring was done and data was analyzed according to the guidelines of ethical writing about violence against women that were prepared specifically for journalists as one of the outcomes of this project. The guidelines served as a quality standard for the general monitoring as well.

After analyzing the results and having consultations with one governmental institution (The Suicide Prevention Bureau) that does media monitoring to track how particularly sensitive social issue - i.e. suicide - is portrayed in the media, there was an updated and improved framework of monitoring laid down.

## Process

The monitoring was done according to the structured analytical framework to address the title of publication and the text itself with corresponding critical evaluation of each of these aspects. We would also register the month, the exact date, the genre and the home news portal of the publication.

In case of recognized victim-blaming, a leaflet with the guidelines of ethical writing about men's violence against women were sent to the author of the article, also giving feedback about the most problematic aspects of the text and thus raising awareness how to properly represent gender-based violence in the media.

The process of monitoring included all publications about domestic men's violence against women showed up in either regional or national online news portals, starting from 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2018 and finishing by 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2019 (21 months in total).

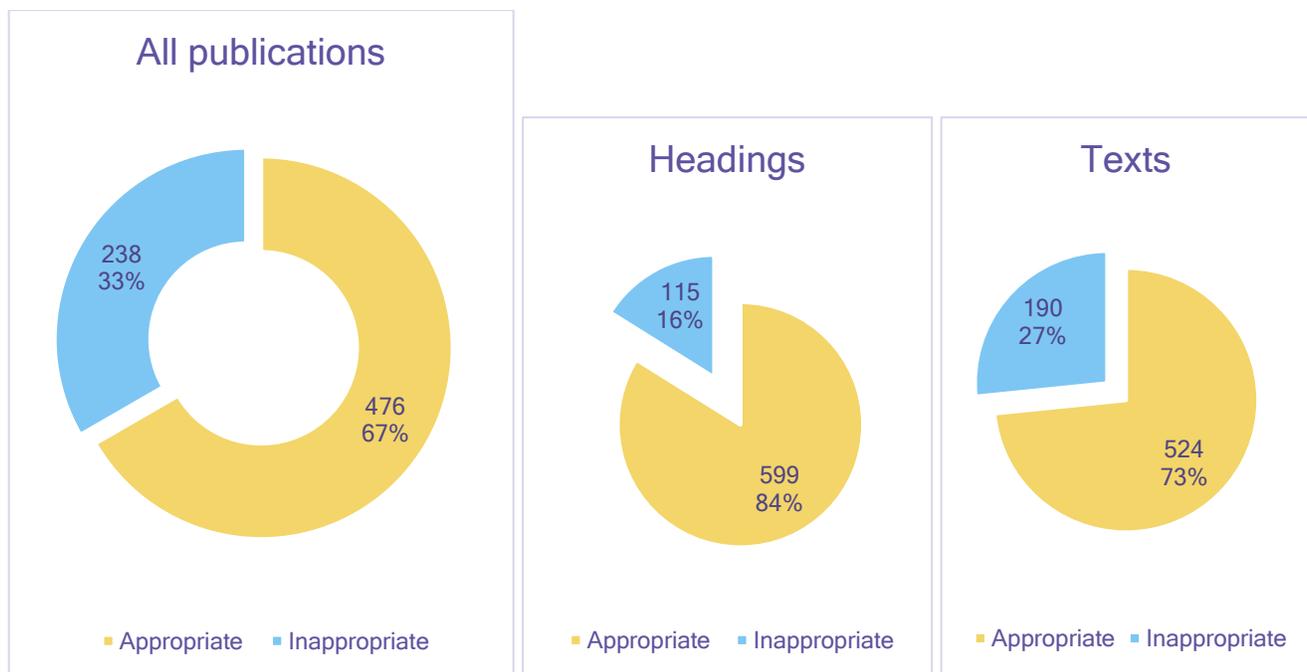
## UNETHICAL WRITING ABOUT MEN'S VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

- Using such phrases as "men suffer from violence as well", distracting from the fact that violence is the consequence of gender inequality
- Describing men as monsters
- Avoiding to emphasize the behaviour of man
- Describing only a victim
- Using such words as "tariamai", "neva", "esq" ("supposedly")
- Considering why a woman stays with the abuser or returns to him
- Depicts an abuser as a man to whom something unexpected happened
- Making fun of violence against women, using irony and thus undermining its importance
- Describing violence as an ordinary incident
- Discussing the appearance of a victim, details of sex life, behavior, state (sobriety / drunkenness)
- Assuming that the only cause of violence was the abuse alcohol or drugs

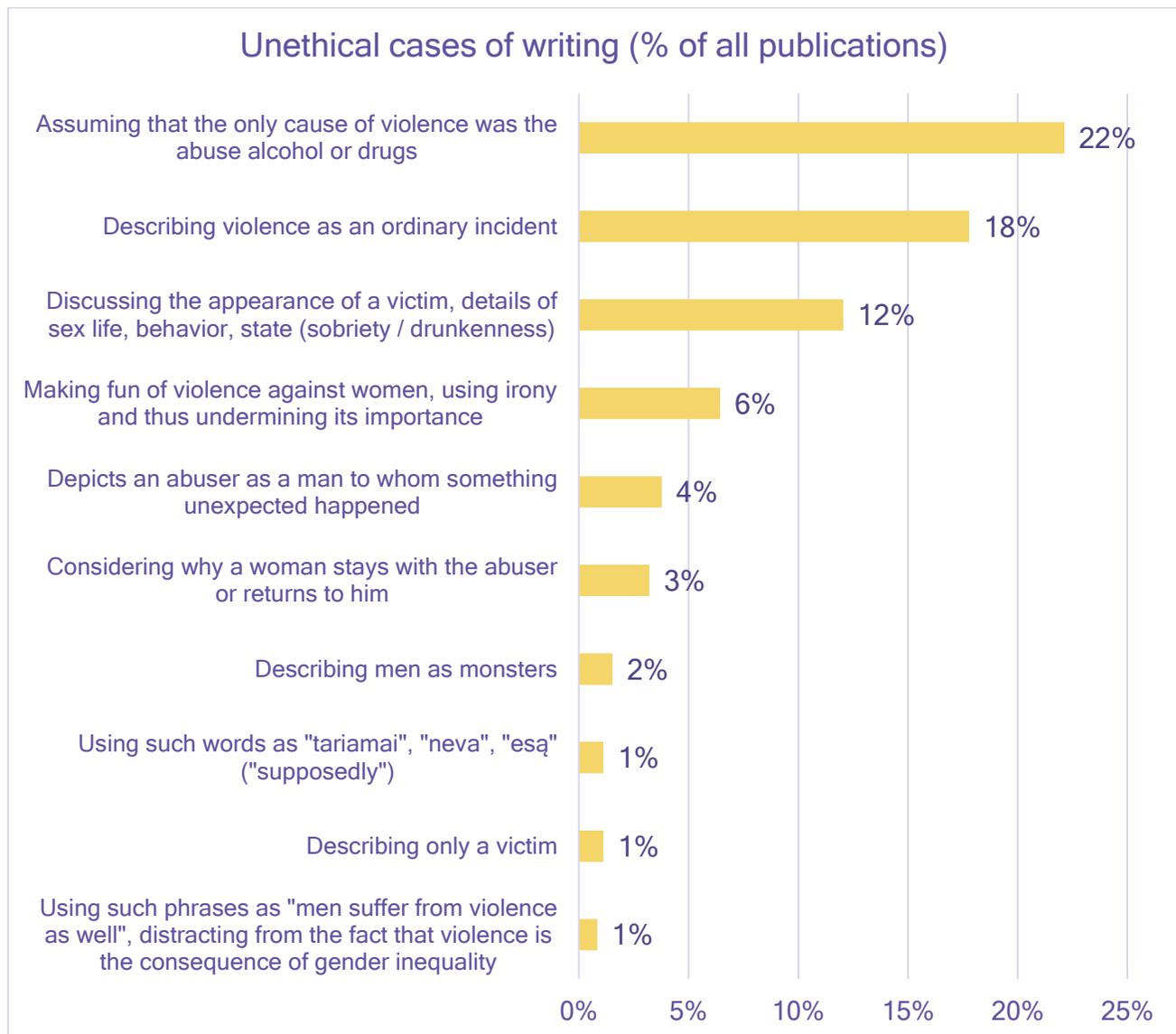
# THE FINDINGS

## Results & Examples

During the period of monitoring, 714 publications in total were registered and analyzed according to the guidelines. 476 of them were evaluated as appropriate, while 238 publications had unethical aspects when writing about men's violence against women. As a result, we sent 137 letters to the journalists addressing their publications.



Unethical cases were registered mostly in the texts (27%) than in the headings (16%), as we would evaluate the headings and the texts separately. The presumption that the main problems of unethical writing would be tracked in the headings of the articles because of the so-called “click-baiting”, proved to be wrong. There were such cases but it wasn't a tendency, comparing to problems we found in the texts itself.



Concerning the particular cases of unethical writing, the most usual one was “assuming that the only cause of violence was the abuse of alcohol or drugs” (22%) (i.e. making gender irrelevant and distracting from the fact that the cause of such violence is the power imbalance and inequality within a couple). The journalists would emphasize that a perpetrator was “under the influence of alcohol”, “blinded by alcohol” etc., as if it was alcohol to blame for violence, not a person’s actions. They would also denote the blood alcohol concentration numbers of a perpetrator as his main characterizing feature.

However, the monitoring team came up with the decision that not every mentioning of an alcohol in this context should be seen as unethical reporting. Unethical are those cases when alcohol is presented as the one and only reason of men’s violence against women.

## EXAMPLES

Headline: “The culprit of domestic violence - an alcohol”



Headline: “The consequences of alcohol in Tauragė: an injured woman, a man custody while a minor is staying with relatives”



Another common miswriting was “describing violence as an ordinary incident” (18%) and, as a result, giving impression that it’s only a conflict, disagreement or a family drama - not a crime. This kind of framing suggest an understanding to think about men’s violence against women as an incident where both parties are equally responsible for the act of violence.

## EXAMPLES

Headline: “Family drama ended up with an injured woman”



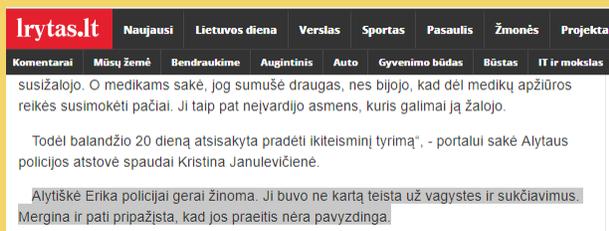
Headline: “Domestic conflict cannot do without knives - two men and a woman injured”



The third most common case of unethical writing was “discussing the appearance of a victim, details of sex life, behavior, state (sobriety / drunkenness)” (12%), forming a reader’s impression that violence can be justified if a victim is herself of questionable morality or behavior. Usually the journalists would draw attention to the woman’s state (drunkenness).

## EXAMPLES

**Text:** “The woman [a victim] from Alytus is well known to the police. She has been repeatedly prosecuted for theft and fraud. She admits that her past is not exemplary.”



**Headline:** “A drunken man in Sakiai region had beaten even more drunken and pregnant woman”



Another example of miswriting seen in journalists’ publications was “making fun of violence against women, using irony and thus undermining its importance” (6%) which was added to the check-list of monitoring after the monitoring had been started. The team was disturbed by the repeating instances of such writing and decided to track how common this practice is.

## EXAMPLES

**Heading:** “Instead of cracking Easter eggs, they were cracking each other”

**Text:** “A woman from Panevezys was waiting for the festive Sunday with her face scratched. She accused the acquainted man of violence.”



**Heading:** “A man in Kelme visited his ex lover just to beat her”

**Text:** “Monday evening for a woman living in Kelme will stay in her memory for a long time. Her former partner raised not only his hand but also his leg.”



Heading: "Violent couple in Prienai: one was beating, another was biting"

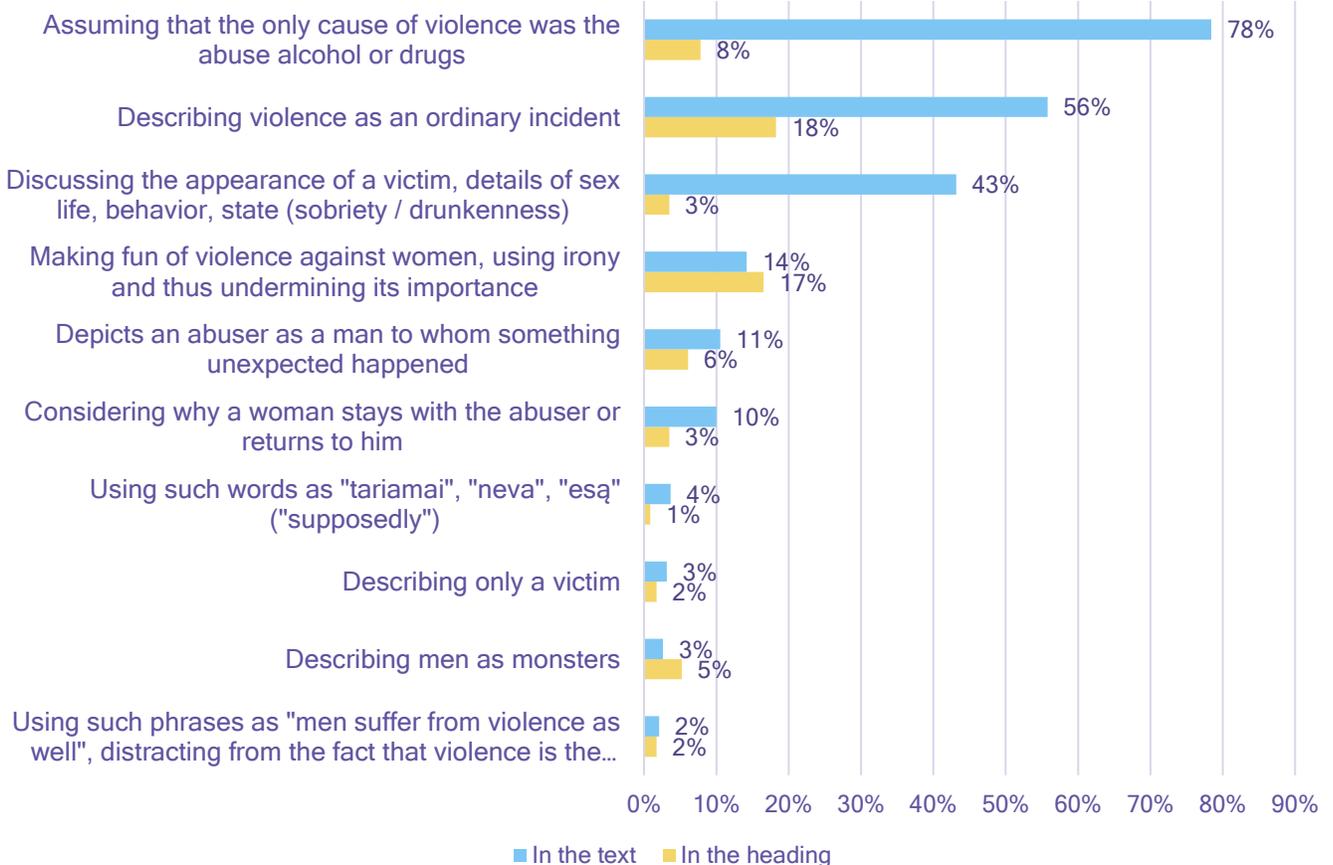
Text: "Pasvalys Hospital is treating a hosted brother's brutally beaten grandmother. An old woman was not only battered like an apple, but also shaved bald."



Pasvalio ligoninėje gydoma priglauto sūnėno žiauriai sumušta senolė. Į medikų rankas pakliuvusi senutė ne tik sudaužyta lyg obuolys, bet ir nuskusta plikai.

When differentiating the data by the frequency of unethical writing cases in texts and headings, we observe rather different tendencies.

### Unethical writing cases (% of all inappropriate publications)



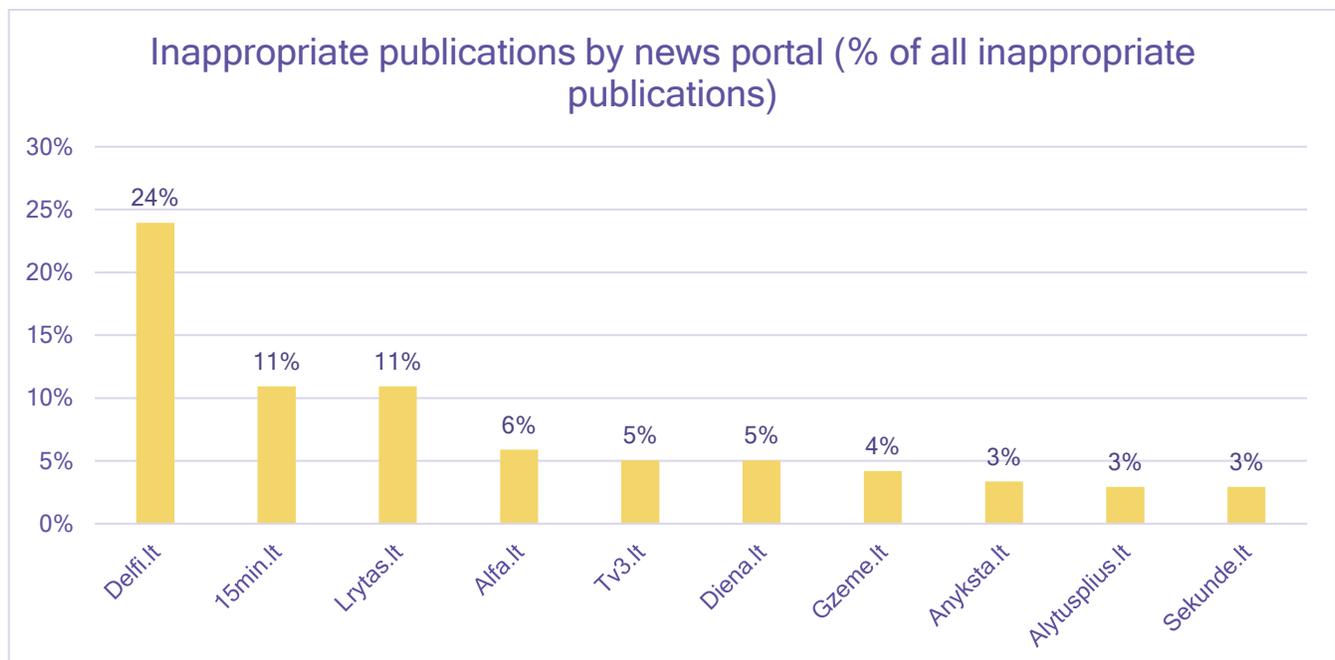
Unlike in texts, the most usual miswriting cases in headlines were “describing violence as an ordinary incident” and “making fun of violence against women”. There were only two cases when unethical writing elements were found in the headlines more frequently than in the texts. When it comes to making fun of violence against women and describing men as monsters - the tendency of the so-called “click-baiting” is apparent. This means that sometimes journalists try to make the headline provocative, sensational and “catchy” to attract more readers, even though the topic requires sensitive approach.

The differentiated data unveils one more striking fact: almost 80% of inappropriate publications were marked as such because it had first and foremost the “assumption the only cause of violence was the abuse of alcohol or drugs”. This means that the gendered aspect of domestic men’s violence against women should be seen as extremely important topic when raising awareness for journalists.

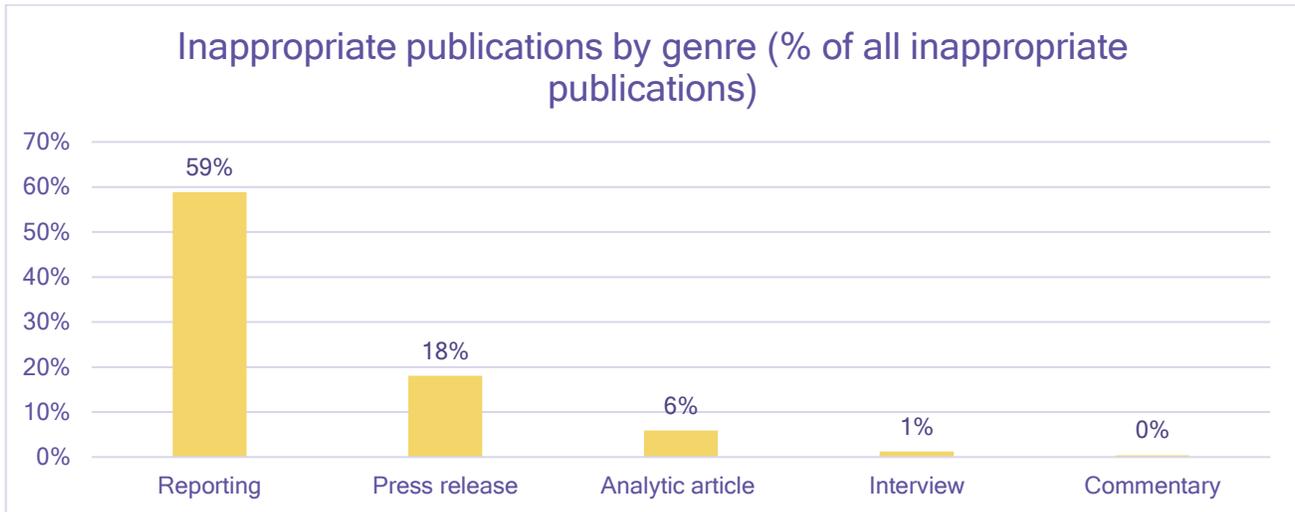
It’s worth to notice that 538 publications (75% of all publications) did not provide contacts of help lines and shelters at the end of the text. When mailing to journalists, the team would include the information sheets with these contacts for journalists to use as well.

## Additional Data

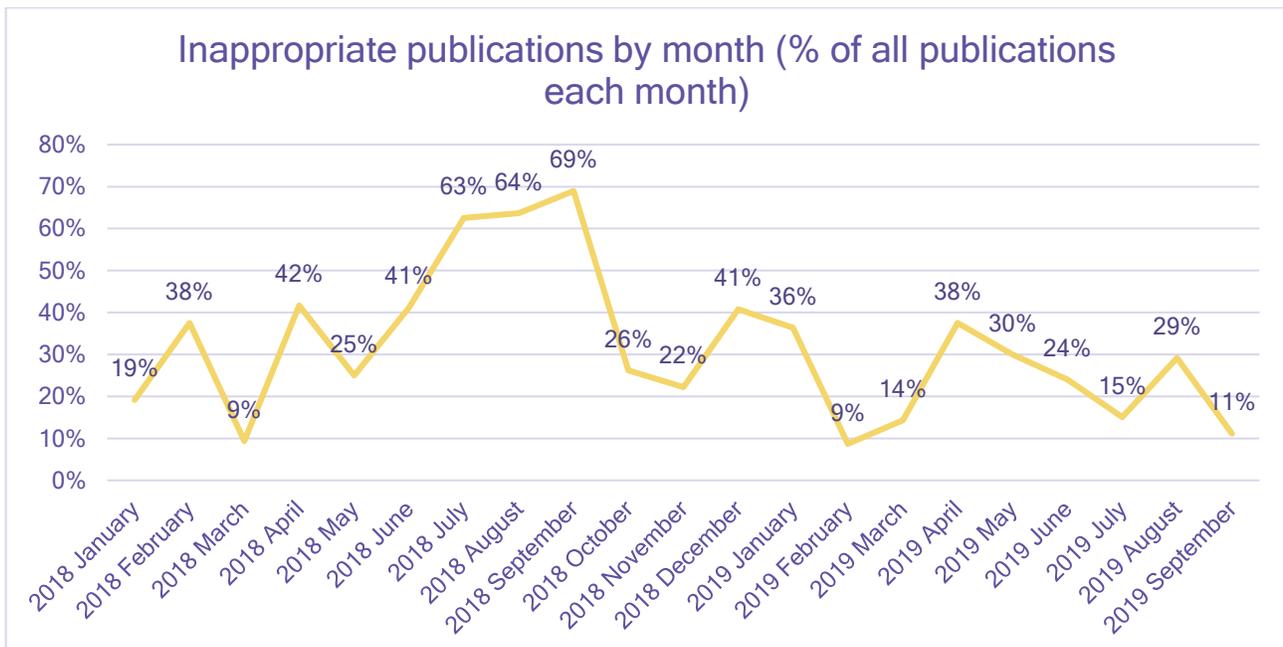
The most frequent unethical publications were found in the biggest national news portals DELFI, 15min, Lrytas. However, regional media was not immune to victim-blaming attitudes and other unethical cases of writing in their publications.



When looking at the genre of inappropriate publications, we observe that report (mostly about the real cases of violence) is a genre where unethical cases are the most common. This could be partly explained by the fact that this kind of publications are usually based on the police reports and unethical details about an act of violence and a victim are being presented to the media channels by the police. However, journalists rarely see the importance to refrain from reproducing unethical information to avoid victim-blaming.



The numbers of unethical publications changed over time. There were months (like July, August, September 2018) when inappropriate publications would reach 60-70% of all publications of those months but this tendency did not recur in 2019. The cause of such a big number of unethical publications during this period remains unclear. However, it can be presumed that the “wave” of inappropriate articles wasn’t repeated because of the awareness raising actions that the team had taken during the process of monitoring.



It's worth to notice that even though the team did not undertake the comprehensive monitoring of the visual side of publications (title photo, illustrations inside the publication), we still took into account the visuals and registered them (although inconsistently). Without accessible methodology we could not evaluate the visuals properly but we come up with some remarks on it anyways.

The most troubling aspect of the visual side of publications were recurrent display of illustrative photos showing an act of men's violence against women. In the photos the illustration of violence could take a form of an object of abuse: a knife, a fist, an axe or a gun. It could also show an act of violence itself: a man beating a woman in a face, a woman crying in the corner, a woman trying to escape from a man, while a perpetrator would be in the front, with clenched fists or a gun in his hand, holding a woman or approaching her. All these visuals are reproducing violence in a symbolic way and cannot provide women readers (among who might be women currently suffering from violence) with an empowering message. The monitoring team would suggest to use empowering images or images that emphasize the possibility of receiving help (for instance, images of the police, the ambulance, the lawyer or a judge, the photo of a women's crisis center etc.), avoiding to cause a symbolic victimization with disturbing visuals, reminding and recreating an act of violence.

## EXAMPLES



# CONCLUSIONS

- Victim-blaming attitudes and unethical depiction of women in the online news media account to one-third of publications (33%).
- It more often shows up in the text of a publication (27%), than in a headline (16%).
- The most frequent unethical aspects in publications were as follows: “assuming that the only cause of violence was the abuse of alcohol or drugs” (22%), “describing violence as an ordinary incident” (18%), “discussing the appearance of a victim, details of sex life, behavior, state (sobriety / drunkenness)” (12%), “making fun of violence against women, using irony and thus undermining its importance” (6%).
- Since almost 80% of inappropriate publications were marked as such because it had first and foremost the “assumption the only cause of violence was the abuse of alcohol or drugs”, the gendered aspect of domestic men’s violence against women should be seen as extremely important topic when raising awareness for journalists.
- “Click-baiting” tendency is visible only looking at two cases, when unethical elements found in the headlines were more frequent than in the texts. When it comes to “making fun of violence against women” and “describing men as monsters” - the tendency of the “click-baiting” is apparent.
- Even though the team did not undertake the comprehensive monitoring of the visual side of publication, it was observed that the visuals are mostly reproducing violence in a symbolic way and cannot provide women readers (among who might be women currently suffering from violence) with an empowering message.