



GENDER DISINFORMATION IN THE ARMENIAN MEDIA

**SUMMARY OF THE
FINAL REPORT,
BASED ON THE MEDIA
MONITORING FINDINGS**

The media monitoring was conducted by the OxYGen Foundation within the framework of the “Combating Gendered Disinformation: Reclaiming Narratives 2.0” Project, funded by the Artemis Alliance Project.

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INTRODUCTION

From February to July 2024, media monitoring was conducted to study and reveal the extent of gender disinformation (hereinafter, GD) spread in Armenian media. The monitoring also aimed to identify the most commonly disseminated GD discourses and the specific contexts in which they occur. Additionally, the findings reveal who is most frequently responsible for spreading GD, i.e. whether it be journalists, hosts, or the “hero” of the article or of the video material. The analysis also examines the sex distribution (proportion) of individuals involved in disseminating GD across the Armenian media outlets.

METHODOLOGY

In the initial phase of the project, a two-month pilot monitoring was conducted, based on which the methodology was finalized for the main study. The monitoring focused on the main news releases of 16 Armenian media outlets, as well as programs in the format of debates, interviews, and text publications, including articles, columns, editorials, and interviews.

During the pilot monitoring, no instances of GI were observed in four of the 16 media outlets (although gender stereotypes were still present, the latter will be discussed below). As a result, a decision was made to reduce the number of monitored outlets and focus on those that had disseminated content containing GI, in order to use resources more effectively and productively. Thus, Public TV, Public Radio, Channel 5, and 24news.am were removed from the list of monitored outlets, accordingly. And a total of 12 media outlets were selected for continued monitoring.

Those outlets are:

1. “Armenia” TV
2. “Shant” TV
3. “Aravot” (www.aravot.am)
4. “Hraparak” (hraparak.am)
5. “Zhoghovurd” (Armlur.am)
6. “1in.am” (www.1in.am)
7. “Factor.am” (www.factor.am)
8. “Civic.am”
9. “Armtimes.com”
10. “168.am”
11. “Iravunk.com”
12. “News.am”

The selection of media was based on the following principles: ensuring a comprehensive range of media coverage, including both audio-visual and textual content, to provide diversity.

The choice of media outlets was also decided by their positioning (positionality) within Armenia's socio-political landscape, the variety of content distribution formats, and their impact on public opinion.

During the monitoring, the media were categorized into three groups: those most frequently targeting the authorities; those primarily targeting the opposition; and those relatively neutral. This approach enables the analysis to determine the GD prevalence within each type of media.

Monitoring measurements and assessment during monitoring were conducted in *units*. These units include text materials such as articles, interviews, editorials, and TV content – individual plots of news releases, and debate programs.

The following data were recorded: a) the total number of monitored materials, b) the number of publications containing GD from that total. The content of those publications was analyzed further in more detail, focusing on the specific type of GD being spread, the context in which it occurs, and those who spread it.

In order to understand the sex distribution (proportion) of those spreading GD in the monitored media, the affiliation of the sources spreading GD in text materials as well as in TV broadcasts was studied further.

CONCLUSION

The monitoring of GD in the Armenian media, as well as the analysis of selected outlets and their content within the selected period, showed the following:

- GD is primarily disseminated mainly through online platforms: the fact that almost all cases of GD were observed in online media, with only one case on TV, shows the stronger tendency for online platforms to spread such content more frequently. This significant imbalance calls for an attention and a thorough examination of the role of online media playing in shaping public perceptions and spreading GI, as well as their potential impact on political discourse.
- Journalists are the primary disseminators of GD, followed by politicians. This distribution emphasizes the considerable influence of media representatives and politicians in shaping public perceptions and opinion within the context of GD.
- The data on GD disseminators reveal remarkable tendencies in the Armenian media: almost equal numbers of male and female politicians (59 women, 56 men, accordingly) are responsible for spreading GD. Interestingly, despite frequently being targets of gender-based attacks, women in politics also contribute to the generation and dissemination of GD.

- Online platforms are more prone to disseminating GD, potentially, reflecting editorial bias or less stringent content control.
- Hraparak.am is the leading platform, distributing GD, followed by Aravot.am. Relatively fewer cases were found on 168.am, Armlur.am, News.am, Factor.am and 1in.am.
- The GD disseminated in the Armenian media primarily targets women in public, political, and professional spheres. This content is often aimed at discrediting their abilities, questioning their competence, diminishing their professional skills, and belittling and undermining their dignity, particularly in the case of women are more active politically or publicly.
- The collected and analyzed examples were further classified according to discourse types and narrative genres. As a result, six discourses were identified, each characterized by its own specific narrative(s).

Those discourses are:

- Victim-Blaming Discourse
 - Politics and Gender Disinformation: Discourse Used For Political Manipulation
 - Intersectional Discourses
 - Policy and Legislation Discourses on Gender Equality and Related Issues
 - Discourse Sexualizing and Objectifying Women
 - Discourse on Gender, National Security and Defense Issues
- Observed GD takes several directions and forms of manifestation, namely:
 1. Undermining and discrediting women’s professional abilities: Particularly, those in leadership roles or positions are often targeted by narratives that question their professional capabilities and competence.
 2. Shifting the focusing from women’s actions, initiatives and decisions to their personal lives: Instead of highlighting women’s professional contributions, the emphasis is put on personal attributes and characteristics, using gendered messages and context(s), such as women’s appearance or relationships with colleagues, particularly male ones.
 3. Victim-blaming in the context of gender-based violence: The media often present narratives that explicitly or implicitly blame victims of sexual violence, often portraying them as responsible for the crimes committed against them due to their “inappropriate and provocative” behavior. These narratives reinforce harmful myths about sexual violence, by suggesting that victims are to blame rather than the perpetrators.

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4. Sexualization and objectification of women: Women, particularly those actively involved in political or public spheres, are often subjected to sexualized narratives that overshadow their professional achievements by focusing on their appearance or personal lives. This practice hinders their advancement, engagement and participation.
 5. Using gender stereotypes, gender-based anecdotes and stories as tools: Women actively involved in politics are often targeted by GD, where their gender is used and manipulated to undermine their actions, authority, distract from the content and real issues, or silence them entirely.
 6. Violation of personal and professional boundaries: The media often exploits a woman's personal life (relationships, family, children, relatives) to discredit her professional skills.
- These discourses on GD, along with their narratives, reflect deep-rooted societal attitudes and approaches aimed at discrediting, harming, and diminishing women's role, position, and authority. This is done deliberately and consciously. The tactics employed serve as a tool for spreading and validating GI.
 - Gender stereotypes, on the one hand, prepare the ground for the spread and "legitimization" of GD, on the other hand, they justify the same disinformation. Taken separately, gender stereotypes are not GI themselves, i.e. while gender stereotypes function in isolation; however, in the context of the current monitoring, those gender stereotypes which are used as tools to target and harm women have been considered as part of GD.
 - Women who are active in political and public spheres are mostly targeted, regardless of party affiliation. The goal is the same: to silence, prevent activity, devalue, "silence and restrain" their voices.
 - The Human Rights Defender of the Republic Armenia (RA), the minister of Education, Science, Sports and Culture of RA, and the RA prime minister's wife have been among the most frequently targeted individuals.
 - GI mostly occurs at the content or text level, which may be accompanied by images (photos). Sometimes headlines (titles) also contain elements of GD.
 - A notable pattern is that when a woman is the target of GD, she is more likely to respond to that GD, when the disseminator is also a woman, and vice versa, whenever the disseminator is a male, a woman tends not to respond.
 - GD not only harms the targeted women, but also reinforces existing stereotypes in society that undermine the role of women and hinder progress toward gender equality. The role of the media is crucial here; it shapes public perceptions, and its engagement

in the dissemination of GD further hinders women's participation in political, social and professional spheres.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into consideration the findings and the conclusion of the media monitoring analysis, the team of experts makes the following recommendations:

Recommendations for Legislative and Policy Development:

- Incorporating provisions on GI in the context of amending and improving the RA law of 2013 on equal rights and equal opportunities for women and men.
- Passing an Anti-Discrimination Bill with comprehensive provisions on GD as well as gender-based hate speech.
- Incorporating GD topics in the context of relevant public campaigns and awareness initiatives planned in the context of the Strategy for Gender Policy Implementation of RA (2024-2028).
- For the upcoming phase of the Strategy Draft for Gender Policy Implementation (starting in 2028), plan and incorporate awareness and educational programs on GD, with clearly defined actions, expected outcomes, and performance indicators. This should be outlined in the action plan, with state agencies as primary implementers and CSOs as co-implementers (with consent).

Practical Recommendations:

- Establishment of a unified platform to support women, comprising representatives from the expert community and representatives of CSOs, to promptly respond to cases of GD, as well as plan and implement preventive campaigns, and present relevant data and reports to various state commissions.
- Development of guidelines on gender-sensitive and gender-responsive media and conducting training sessions for media community representatives on the topics related to GD.
- Development of a training module on gender discrimination and GD for mentor teachers under the coordination and supervision of NCEDI and conducting (online) training courses for school teachers across the RA.

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- Incorporation of GI-related questions into the social science curriculum in schools, especially within the section on gender equality, stereotypes, and discrimination.
 - Establishment of a media monitoring group during political elections to track and report the situation to the public accordingly, delivering clear messages on the issue, explaining why it is a problem with its potential consequences.
 - Developing and presenting a comprehensive monitoring report with the joint efforts of the expert community and CSOs, which will be presented to the RA National Assembly Human Rights Committee, and conducting open and closed discussions with legislative representatives.
 - Incorporating the findings and recommendations of this monitoring report into the alternative CSO report ahead of the 2026 meeting of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.
 - Incorporating GD and gender-based hate speech in the annual awareness campaigns and statements made by the RA Human Rights Defender Office.
 - The RA Television and Radio Committee monitoring of GD, with its findings reported in their annual reports.
 - Bringing the gender and GI-related issues into the the agenda of Gender Committee(s) at the regional (marzpet) level, and organizing and conducting public awareness campaigns at the marz/regional level.
 - Inclusion of provisions in media (particularly for online platforms) ethical codes that would reject the use of gender, personal or family information as tools.
 - Developing guidelines for the media to prevent the the manipulation of gender content and ensure balanced, respectful coverage of woman politicians and figures, with a focus on their professional work of the politician rather than on their personal life or gender.
 - Support self-regulatory mechanisms and adoption of internal media codes of conduct regarding gender representation and disinformation, promoting more responsible journalism.
 - Conducting additional research on potential political motivations behind the dissemination of GI, particularly in those media outlets that most often target representatives of the government or those of the opposition.

