

## **Covid-19, women and the media: Study reveals exclusion of female voices in coverage of pandemic**

**pressgazette.co.uk, OCTOBER 30, 2020**

Covid-19 is the story which has dominated the media in 2020, and new research shows that in terms of expert voices – women have been in the tiny minority.

The study by the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at King's College London used big data processes to analyse almost 147,000 articles on Covid-19 published by leading British, Australian and US media outlets between March and July 2020. Most previous research had been based on analyses of smaller numbers of media sources.

In coverage of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and economics, two areas particularly relevant to the coronavirus crisis, for every mention of a well-known female STEM expert, 19 male experts were mentioned. For every reference to a well-known female economist, five male economists were named.

The study also found that while a third of quotations in the articles were from women, female voices featured more often in articles in subject areas traditionally seen as feminine. Fifty-three percent of quotations in arts and entertainment coverage came from women for instance, compared to only 27% in business and 24% in science.

Women were also more-often quoted in articles on specific topics thought of as more feminine. Seventy percent of quotations in articles on domestic violence and 53% of quotations on articles on childcare came from women, while in pieces on the UK economy only 14% of quotations were from women.

"The imbalance is worse when it comes to those who are cited in the press as authorities on the pandemic – the more expert and well-known the voices become, the further women's share in them decreases," said report author Laura Jones. "When we looked at all voices there are more women in non-expert positions. This is not entirely blameable on the media however. It's also reflective of the fact women are under-represented in positions of power."

The research builds on earlier findings that show that male bias in media coverage of the Covid-19 crisis reflects the dominance of men in certain professions.

Findings from City University's Expert Women Project earlier in 2020 showed that three times as many male experts than female experts appeared on high-profile TV and radio programmes such as BBC News at 10 and Channel 4 News.

"Those men were mostly politicians or advisers put forward by the government," said Professor Lis Howell, who led the research. "Editors have expressed frustration with this. It probably reflects the fact that the Cabinet has a ratio of five men to one woman at the most senior level."

While the Global Institute for Women's Leadership study focused on the UK, US and Australia, global data suggests a similar global picture.

Eleanor Mills – chair of Women in Journalism, which campaigns for more women's voices to be heard in the media – said that while the marginalisation of female voices in news coverage reflected a lack of women at the top in many industries, media organisations were not without censure.

"Covid-19 has really focused what's going on in media," she said. "It's made it more obvious and extreme. There's still a default mechanism in the kind of media brain that when things get serious the default is to ask a man."

"But you can, as a serious editor in media, insist you have an equality of voices represented. If you turn a lens on this and put it to organisations, you can move the dial on this – but you need somebody in charge that minds."