

# The 'old boys club' and glass ceilings for women in the SA news media

By Prof. Ylva Rodny-Gumede

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Despite inroads made in gender and racial equity in the news media in the last decade, the [2018 Glass ceiling report](#) on women in the South African news media shows that female journalists still battle sexist and patriarchal attitudes, lower wages, less opportunities for ascension to managerial positions, and are increasingly targets of online harassment.



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Compiled by the [South African National Editors Forum \(Sanef\)](#) and women's advocacy group [Gender Links \(GL\)](#), the 2018 report highlights inroads made in terms of equity in race and gender in news media since 2006 when the first Glass Ceiling report was released.

## Black males now comprise half of the top media managers

Focused on assessing progress made in the 25 years since the first Glass Ceiling report was published and the ten years since the last report was published, the 2018 research shows that gender equity has improved substantially, and the South African news media can boast having reached gender parity in its workforce.

Here South Africa ranks higher than the rest of the SADC region with 49% of the workforce female, compared to 41% in the rest of the region as per the latest SADC figures recorded. Positive inroads are also noted with regards to women in management position, with 46% female representation in senior management positions and 36% in top management.

Highlighted is also how racial equity has been improved in management and how black males now comprise half of the top media managers. The proportion of black women in top media management has also increased thus addressing some of the concerns raised in previous research around the lack of women in decision making positions in the news media. Black women now constitute 40% of senior managers in the media, suggesting that change is on the way.

While this is encouraging for both gender and racial equity in the South African news media, this rarely translates into equal influence over news agendas and public discourses for women and neither does it have an impact on wages and promotions, which is attributed to an existing 'old boys club' culture in the media.

## **Women still face hurdles**

It is also worrying that pay gaps between male and female media workers seem to be widening and progressive policies around equity with regard to maternity and paternity leave are still lacking. This means women still face hurdles towards real career advancement and empowerment.

Further to this, new threats have emerged in the online space and female journalists are disproportionately experiencing attacks online, including sexual harassment and threats of physical violence. This points to an emerging culture of cyber misogyny used to silence female journalists and that might lead to [self-censorship among female journalists](#), ultimately leaving an already male dominant public sphere with even fewer female voices.

Professor Glenda Daniels, one of the editors of the report says "The time is now for women to speak up and speak out to disrupt the male superiority. Equally, men must call out sexism and violence against women in the newsroom and media as a whole. The salary pay gap must end and we must fight sexism and misogyny especially through online and social media".

## **Sexist and patriarchal structures continue to hold women back**

While advances have been made, there is still a long way to go to reach equity in very real and tangible terms. Sexist and patriarchal structures continue to hold women back in their careers and that impacts negatively on the role that female media workers play in influencing the direction of the industry and the role that it plays in our democratic society. Particularly important is how media houses, platform providers and policymakers protect female journalists and deal with threats emanating from social media including harassment, intimidation and fake news.

In line with the [post-2015 SADC Protocol on Gender and Development](#), the findings will be used to develop strategic interventions to ensure gender equality in the media by 2030.

Given the dearth of research about gender and the media in general, and in the context of the Global South (young democracies and postcolonial societies in particular) this research is of utmost importance to debates around equity, not only with regards to gender, but also in terms of intersections of gender, race and class, and ultimately the role of the news media in democratic public discourse formation.

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