

# An Empirical Study on Media Portrayals and its Effect on Heinous Crimes with Special Reference to Chennai

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**Abstract:** *This study explores the significant impact of media portrayal on public perception, particularly in the context of heinous crimes. The objective of the study is to examine the correlation between media coverage and the public's fear of crime, the research seeks to understand how variations in the intensity and nature of such coverage influence public attitudes towards crime and criminal justice policies. The study delves into the role of sensationalism in media reporting and its potential to undermine public trust in the criminal justice system and law enforcement agencies. Moreover, it aims to investigate how different types of media contribute to shaping public perceptions and attitudes, considering potential biases in the portrayal of heinous crimes. Factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status of victims and perpetrators are critically analyzed to uncover their influence on public perception. The study further investigates the role of sensationalism in media reports, particularly how exaggerated or emotionally charged coverage of heinous crimes may erode public trust in the criminal justice system and law enforcement agencies. Sensationalism, often driven by the media's need to attract and retain audience attention, is scrutinized for its potential to distort public understanding of crime rates, the effectiveness of law enforcement, and the fairness of judicial processes. The study evaluates the long-term effects of media portrayals of heinous crimes on public behavior, including fear-driven behaviors such as avoidance of certain areas or support for more stringent criminal justice policies. The findings are expected to contribute to ongoing debates about media responsibility, public safety, and the ethical considerations of crime reporting in the media.*

**Keywords:** media portrayal, public perception, heinous crimes, public behaviour, sensationalism

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an era where the media has a powerful influence over public perception, its role in shaping narratives around criminal cases has come under increasing scrutiny. The Supreme Court of India, in a pivotal 2023 judgment, addressed the growing concern of "media trials"—instances where sensationalized reporting prejudices an accused and influences public opinion before a legal verdict. Recognizing the potential harm to the justice system, the Court called for the formulation of clear guidelines to regulate police communication with the media and emphasized the need to protect the rights of both the accused and victims. This case reflects a broader trend in the legal landscape, where the judiciary is seeking to strike a balance between freedom of expression and the right to a fair trial, especially in the context of heinous crimes that receive intense media coverage. This study aims to explore how media portrayals affect heinous crimes and public perception, focusing on Chennai. It examines media influence on behavior, societal attitudes, and justice, while also reviewing regulations and comparing trends with other cities.

The evolution of media has been one of the most influential societal developments over the past century. From the early days of print journalism to the modern digital age, media has played a pivotal role in shaping public perception,



influencing social norms, and guiding policy decisions. As media expanded its reach, its portrayals of crime—especially heinous acts such as rape, murder, and terrorism—became more prominent and sensationalized. In cities like Chennai, where traditional values intersect with rapid urbanization and digital growth, the impact of media portrayals on public sentiment and potential criminal behavior warrants close examination. The relationship between what is portrayed in the media and how it might influence or reflect the prevalence of violent crimes has become a key area of academic and policy concern.

Recognizing the power of media and its societal influence, both central and state governments in India have taken initiatives to regulate content and promote ethical journalism. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has issued several advisories and established regulatory frameworks through bodies like the Press Council of India and the Broadcast Content Complaints Council (BCCC). These bodies aim to ensure responsible reporting, especially on sensitive subjects such as crime. In Tamil Nadu, the state government has also engaged in awareness campaigns and cybercrime monitoring programs to mitigate the spread of harmful and potentially inciting media content. Additionally, the Information Technology Act of 2000 has provisions to penalize the circulation of misleading or provocative content online, which is increasingly relevant in today's digitally-driven media ecosystem.

Several interrelated factors affect the nexus between media portrayals and the occurrence of heinous crimes. Sensationalism, competition for viewership, lack of ethical oversight, and the rapid spread of unverified content via social media platforms have significantly contributed to how crimes are portrayed. Repeated exposure to violent content can result in desensitization, normalization of aggression, or even imitation, particularly among vulnerable populations. In cities like Chennai, the socio-cultural diversity, urban poverty, mental health issues, and youth unemployment may act as compounding variables. Furthermore, the lack of media literacy among the public can lead to misinterpretation and exaggerated fear or anger, potentially resulting in retaliatory or impulsive behavior.

Current trends show a notable increase in the coverage of heinous crimes across television, print, and digital media in Chennai. With the rise of 24x7 news channels and social media influencers, crime stories are often dramatized to attract attention. Citizen journalism has also gained prominence, sometimes leading to premature judgments and public trials on digital platforms. The media's role in shaping public discourse, influencing police action, and affecting judicial proceedings has become a subject of both academic debate and policy scrutiny. Moreover, the use of artificial intelligence in content curation has personalized exposure to crime stories, creating echo chambers that reinforce certain narratives. A case law for this context is Supreme Court Case on Media Reporting (2023) The Supreme Court of India emphasized the harmful impact of media trials on the justice system. It directed the government to create guidelines for police briefings to ensure responsible media reporting during criminal investigations. The Court highlighted the need to balance freedom of speech with the rights of the accused and victims, aiming to prevent bias and protect the fairness of trials.

When compared to Countries like the UK, US, Germany, and Australia have stricter media laws to prevent prejudice in heinous crime cases, including gag orders, suppression orders, and contempt laws. These ensure fair trials by limiting media influence. In contrast, India's media regulations are comparatively lenient, often leading to sensationalism and media trials. While India has laws like the IT Act and oversight bodies, enforcement is weaker. Adopting stricter legal frameworks from other countries could help India balance press freedom with justice more effectively.

#### OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the correlation between media coverage of heinous crimes and the public's fear of crime.
- To examine different types of media influence public perception and attitudes towards heinous crimes and criminal justice policies.
- To evaluate the long-term effects of media portrayal of heinous crimes on public behavior and policy support.



## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Benedict, H. (1992) Through critical discourse analysis, this study examines media narratives surrounding sexual assault and domestic violence, focusing on how they contribute to victim blaming. The objective is to explore how language and framing shift responsibility onto victims rather than perpetrators. Findings reveal that news reports often highlight victims' clothing, behavior, or past actions, subtly implying culpability. This narrative discourages reporting and promotes a culture of silence and shame. The research underscores the need for ethical journalism that prioritizes empathy and justice over sensationalism and implicit judgment.

2. Entman, R. M. (1992) This foundational study uses framing theory to analyze how media selectively report crimes and link them to race, immigration, and ethnicity. The objective is to examine how bias in story selection and narrative emphasis reinforces stereotypes. Results show that crimes involving minorities or immigrants are often framed more negatively than those involving majority groups, contributing to xenophobia and social division. Entman argues that framing decisions shape what audiences perceive as typical or threatening, revealing how even subtle media biases can deeply affect societal views on race and crime.

3. Gilliam, F. D., & Iyengar, S. (2000) This experimental and content analysis study investigates how political ideology influences media framing of crime. The objective is to understand how conservative and liberal outlets depict criminal activity differently. The study finds that conservative media often emphasize individual responsibility and minority offenders, while liberal media focus more on systemic issues like poverty or police misconduct. These contrasting frames polarize public opinion, affecting both political discourse and criminal justice policy. The research highlights the powerful role of ideological bias in shaping how audiences interpret crime, justice, and social order.

4. Dixon, Travis & Linz, Daniel (2000) Utilizing content analysis of television news in Los Angeles and Orange Counties, this study explores racial biases in the portrayal of crime. The objective is to determine whether certain racial groups are overrepresented as criminals or victims. Findings show that Blacks and Latinos are more frequently depicted as lawbreakers, while Whites are more likely shown as victims. The study also introduces the "mean world syndrome," where increased crime coverage results in heightened fear among viewers. It concludes that racialized media portrayals contribute to stereotypes, societal bias, and an inflated perception of personal risk.

5. Beckett, K., & Sasson, T. (2003) Using content analysis of 100 media articles covering prominent criminal cases, this research investigates the media's influence on criminal justice policy. The objective is to trace how media narratives drive public opinion and contribute to punitive policy shifts. Results reveal that coverage often simplifies complex legal issues, fostering support for "tough on crime" measures such as mandatory minimums and harsher sentencing. The study highlights the media's role in shaping political agendas by amplifying fear and moral panic, emphasizing the feedback loop between public sentiment, media framing, and legislative action.

6. Cohen-Almagor, Raphael (2005) This theoretical review investigates the evolving relationship between media, government, and terrorism over 40 years. The objective is to assess how media coverage can both combat and facilitate terror by influencing public opinion and terrorist strategy. It highlights the dangers of sensational reporting, which can desensitize viewers and unintentionally amplify violent messages. The study also explores the psychological impact of repeated exposure to violent content, linking it to increased aggression and desensitization. It calls for responsible journalism that balances the public's right to know with ethical coverage that avoids aiding extremist agendas.

7. Kenneth Dowler (2006) This study analyzes the portrayal of sex crimes in local television news using content analysis methods. The objective is to assess the frequency and narrative characteristics of sex crime coverage, particularly regarding victim credibility and public fear. Results show that sex crimes represent about 10% of crime stories and are often reported during the latter stages of legal proceedings (e.g., sentencing). These stories emphasize



dread and victim vulnerability but contain fewer sensational elements. The study underscores how such portrayals reinforce gendered fears and shape public understanding of sex offenses and criminal justice responses.

8. Meloy, M. L., & Miller, S. L. (2011) This content analysis investigates how gender affects the media portrayal of victims and perpetrators in crime reporting. The objective is to reveal disparities in coverage based on gender roles. The study finds that female victims, especially in cases of domestic or sexual violence, receive more emotional and detailed attention, while male victims are often underreported. Male offenders are typically depicted as violent and predatory, whereas female offenders are framed as mentally unstable or emotionally driven. The study emphasizes how such portrayals reinforce traditional gender norms and shape public understanding of gendered violence.

9. Rosenberg et al. (2012) Using a statewide survey of 4,245 California residents, this study explores the effects of crime-related media consumption on public attitudes toward criminal sentencing. The objective was to determine whether exposure to television news and reality crime shows influenced the preference for punishment or rehabilitation. The findings revealed that increased media consumption—regardless of genre—raised support for punitive goals like deterrence and incapacitation. This effect persisted even when controlling for demographics, personal crime experiences, and fear of crime, suggesting that media has an independent influence on public perceptions of justice and appropriate sentencing.

10. Kenneth Dowler (2012) This study employs multivariate analysis to investigate racial representation in local television news crime stories. The objective of the study Focuses on how news characteristics influence the race of suspects and victims, the research examines variables such as story length, stage of crime, firearm involvement, and police response. It finds that certain visual and narrative elements, including the presence of handcuffs and the expression of outrage or sympathy, significantly predict racial portrayals. The objective is to uncover systemic media biases in racial framing and presentation of crime, shedding light on how media subtly shapes public perceptions of race and criminality.

11. Greer, C., & Reiner, R. (2012) Using case study analysis of high-profile trials, this study investigates how pre-trial media coverage influences criminal case outcomes. The objective is to assess the extent to which the media can bias juries and shape public opinion before a verdict is reached. Findings confirm that “trial by media” scenarios are common, where emotional or sensational reporting interferes with legal impartiality. The study identifies media framing, narrative construction, and repetition as key factors influencing perception. It concludes that media exposure can jeopardize fair trials, raising ethical concerns about press freedom versus judicial integrity.

12. Robert S. Arold (2013) This research examines how media coverage of violent crime shapes public reaction, considering gender, media format, and cultural immersion. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study seeks to understand whether the medium used (e.g., TV, newspaper) affects perceived crime risk and trust in the media. Results indicate significant gender differences in fear response and highlight the public's skepticism toward sensationalized media. Furthermore, it investigates whether immersion in American culture heightens belief in the distorted narratives presented. Findings underscore the complex role of media in amplifying crime-related anxiety and shaping cultural norms.

13. Aleem et al. (2021) This study explores the relationship between media exposure and fear of crime among university students, combining surveys with secondary research. The research reveals that despite being young and educated, many students feel unsafe on campus. It identifies mass media as a significant contributor to fear, especially through its role in perpetuating the “copycat effect,” where widely reported crimes are imitated. The study emphasizes the psychological impact of sensationalized news on vulnerable individuals and highlights the need to better understand media’s role in shaping crime-related anxieties among youth.



14. Works et al. (2019) Analyzing nearly 4,000 homicide articles from the Vancouver Sun, this study categorizes reporting into thematic frameworks to evaluate how visual elements like image inclusion correlate with narrative types. Using 107 coding variables, the study found that the "Sympathetic Victim" theme most strongly predicted the presence of victim imagery, more so than fear, sensationalism, or social commentary themes. The objective was to determine how visual framing affects audience perception of victims and crime severity, revealing that emotive storytelling significantly influences which homicides receive more personalized and attention-grabbing coverage.

15. Alnemer, Homoud (2023) This study surveys 630 respondents across 13 regions in Saudi Arabia to explore how digital platforms contribute to modern criminal activity. The objective is to examine how apps like TikTok, Twitter, and Snapchat are used for fraud, child exploitation, and financial scams. It highlights the need for improved electronic protection laws and international cooperation. Findings stress the importance of family engagement and security awareness in preventing crimes that exploit digital media's reach and anonymity, signaling an urgent call for cross-border cybercrime policies and digital monitoring strategies.

16. Chen, Zhuoli (2024) Using the WiseSearch database, this content analysis investigates how Hong Kong newspapers frame foreign domestic helpers, particularly in legal conflict stories. The study aims to uncover how these portrayals influence social attitudes by employing agenda-setting and framing theories. It finds that the media tends to represent domestic helpers as sources of concern, frequently associating them with fear rather than trust. This portrayal reinforces their status as "outsiders" and lacks sympathetic coverage. The findings suggest that such framing contributes to societal divisions and perceptions of domestic workers as threats rather than contributors.

17. Fatuma, Amani (2024) Conducting a desk review of secondary data, this study assesses the influence of Tanzanian media coverage on public perceptions of crime. The research compiles reports and academic literature to evaluate how frequent and sensationalized coverage of violent incidents shapes feelings of insecurity and fear. The objective is to understand the relationship between media representation and social attitudes toward crime. Findings suggest that disproportionate media focus on violent crime distorts public understanding of crime prevalence and nature, contributing to heightened fear and mistrust in public safety.

18. Yusuf et al. (2024) Focusing on the post-COVID period, this content analysis evaluates crime reporting in Nigerian mainstream print media, with particular attention to violent crimes like assault and murder. The study analyzes over 4,000 reports from 2021–2022, aiming to assess how editorial choices affect public perception. Findings reveal that crime against persons dominated headlines, emphasizing the role of media in guiding societal concern. The study advocates for more thoughtful, in-depth crime reporting and editorials to foster informed public discourse and responsible journalism that supports social development and crime prevention efforts.

19. Mensah, Ronald (2024) Through qualitative analysis and case study methodology, this research explores how social media is used to combat crime-related stigma in Ghana's tourism sector. The objective is to improve destination marketing by addressing public safety concerns through digital platforms. The study identifies strategies like user-generated content, real-time engagement, and cooperation with law enforcement as effective in reshaping Ghana's image. It reveals that crime narratives on social media can significantly damage tourism unless countered with accurate, reassuring information. The research suggests strategic digital communication can help shift public perception and enhance tourism outcomes.

20. Vasadze, Nana (2024) Through theoretical and narrative exploration, this article examines the dual nature of crime reporting in Georgia—both informative and ideological. The objective is to analyze how the media's polarized ideological positions can either incite hostility or mitigate public anxiety. The study highlights that constant media focus on crime can motivate potential offenders, yet also informs and educates the public. It emphasizes the long-term





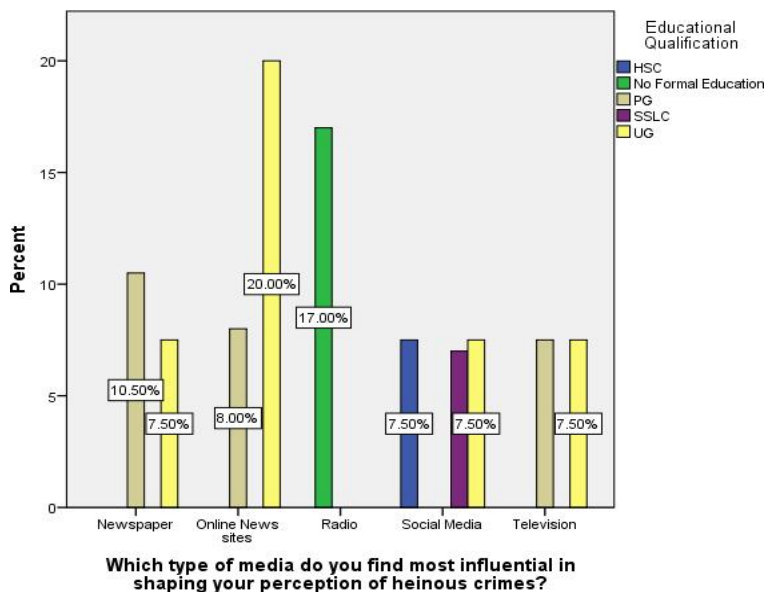
societal impacts of media narratives, noting that the framing of crime stories can influence behavior, policy, and public trust. This work advocates for a balanced approach to crime journalism.

## METHODOLOGY

Research method followed is empirical research. The data is collected through a questionnaire and the sample size is 208. Convenience sampling method is adopted in the study to collect the data. The samples were collected from the general public with special reference to Tamilnadu region. The independent variables are gender, age, educational qualification, monthly income, occupation. The dependent variables are the media most influential in shaping the perception of heinous crime, media exercise more restraint when reporting on heinous crimes to avoid sensationalism, ways in which media influence the public perception in heinous crimes, Intense media scrutiny can prejudice public opinion, potentially influencing the outcome of legal proceedings and undermining the fairness of trials, Coverage of heinous crimes can spur advocacy groups to push for changes in laws. The researcher used graphs to analyze the data collected.

## DATA ANALYSIS

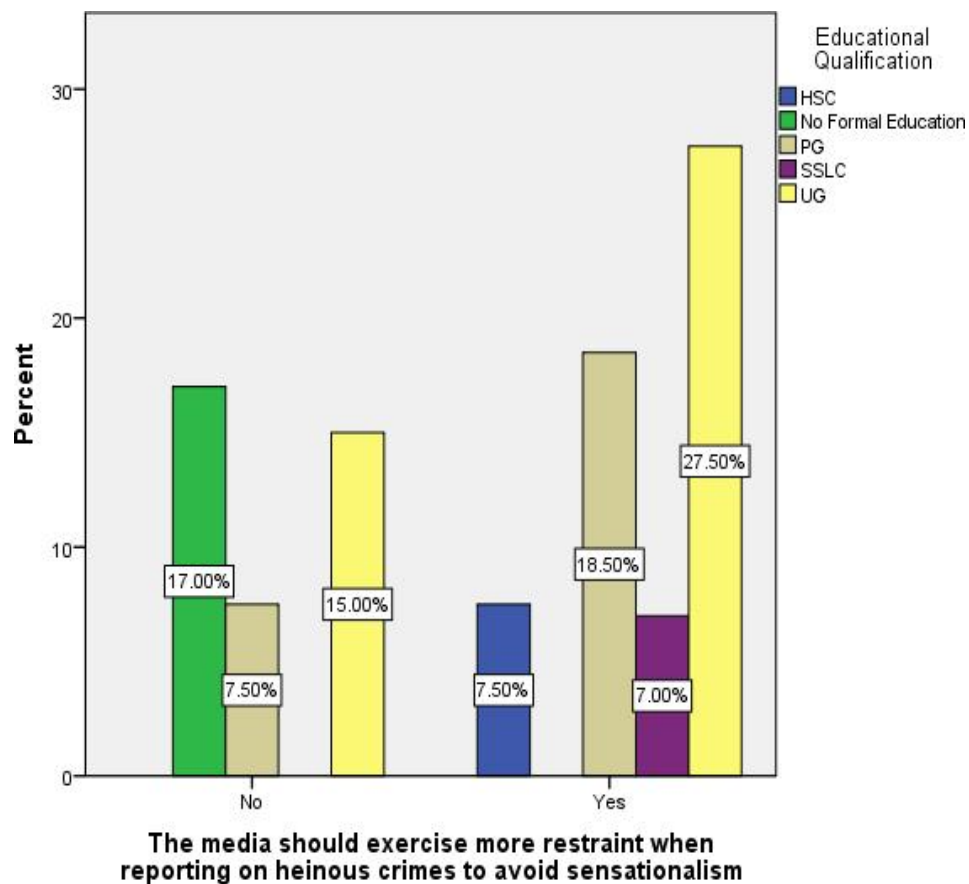
FIGURE 1



Legend: Figure 1 represents the educational qualification distribution of the sample population and their opinion on the most influential media in shaping perception of heinous crimes



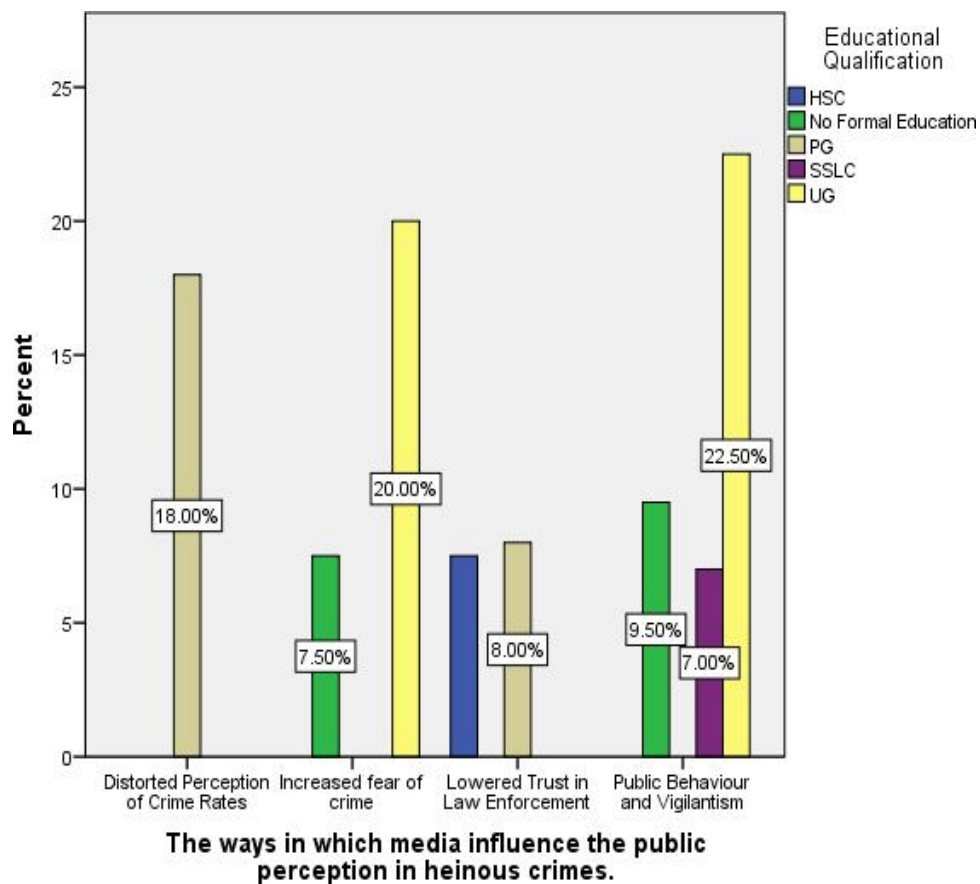
FIGURE 2



Legend: Figure 2 represents the educational qualification distribution of the sample population and their opinion on whether media should exercise more restraint when reporting on heinous crimes to avoid sensationalism



FIGURE 3

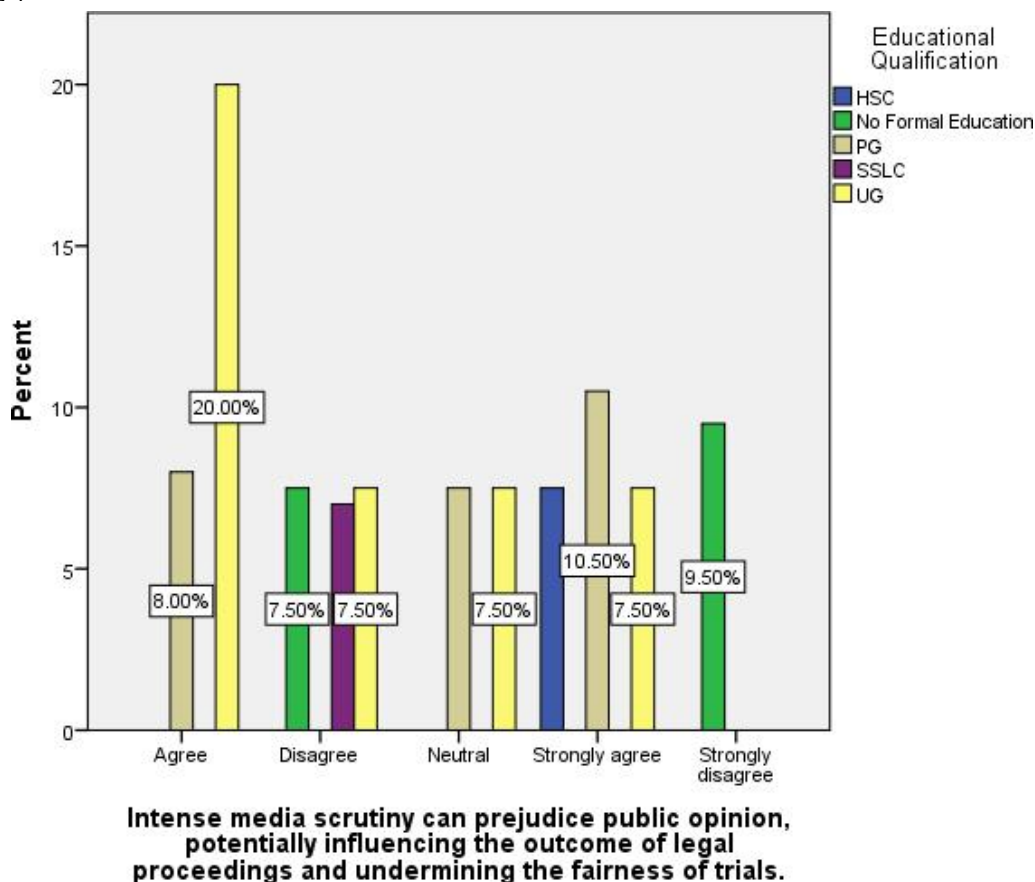


Legend: Figure 3 represents the educational qualification distribution of the sample population and their opinion on the ways in which media influence the public perception in heinous crimes





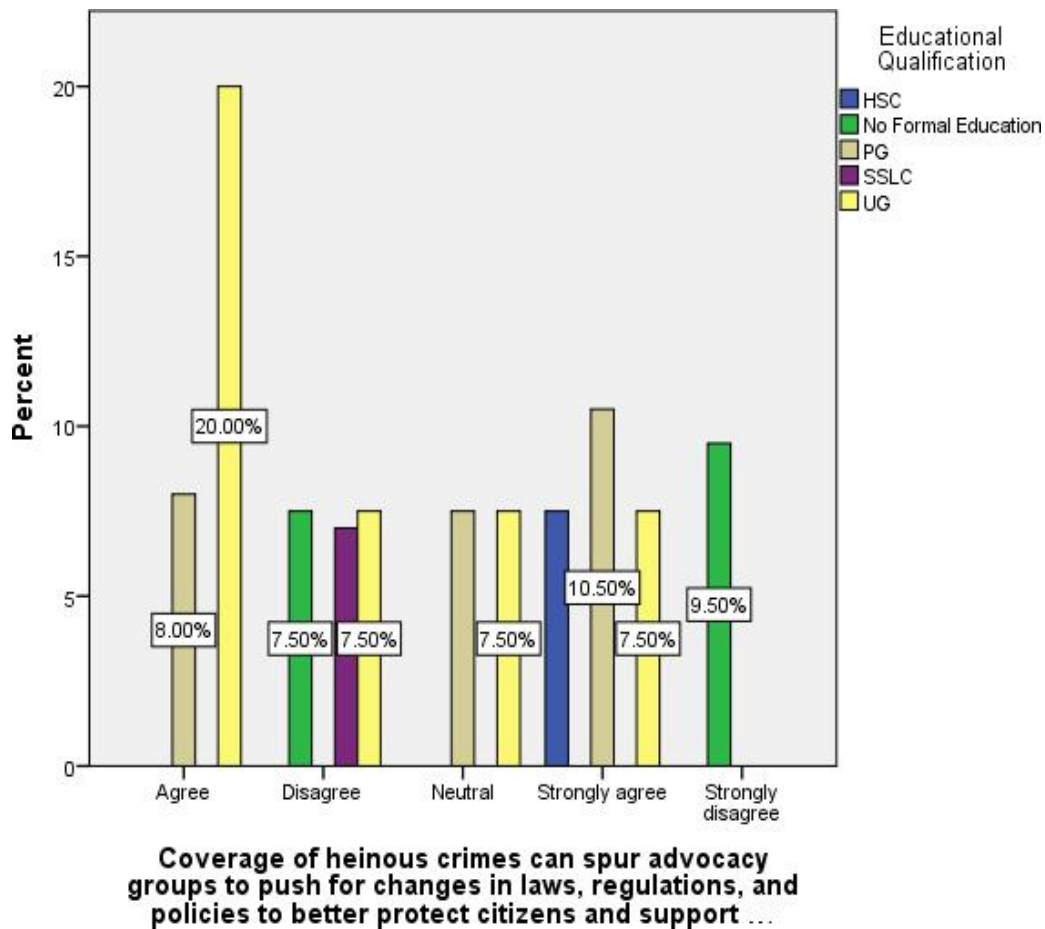
FIGURE 4



Legend: Figure 4 represents the educational qualification distribution of the sample population and their agreeability on whether intense media scrutiny can prejudice public opinion, potentially influencing the outcome of legal proceedings and undermining the fairness of trials.



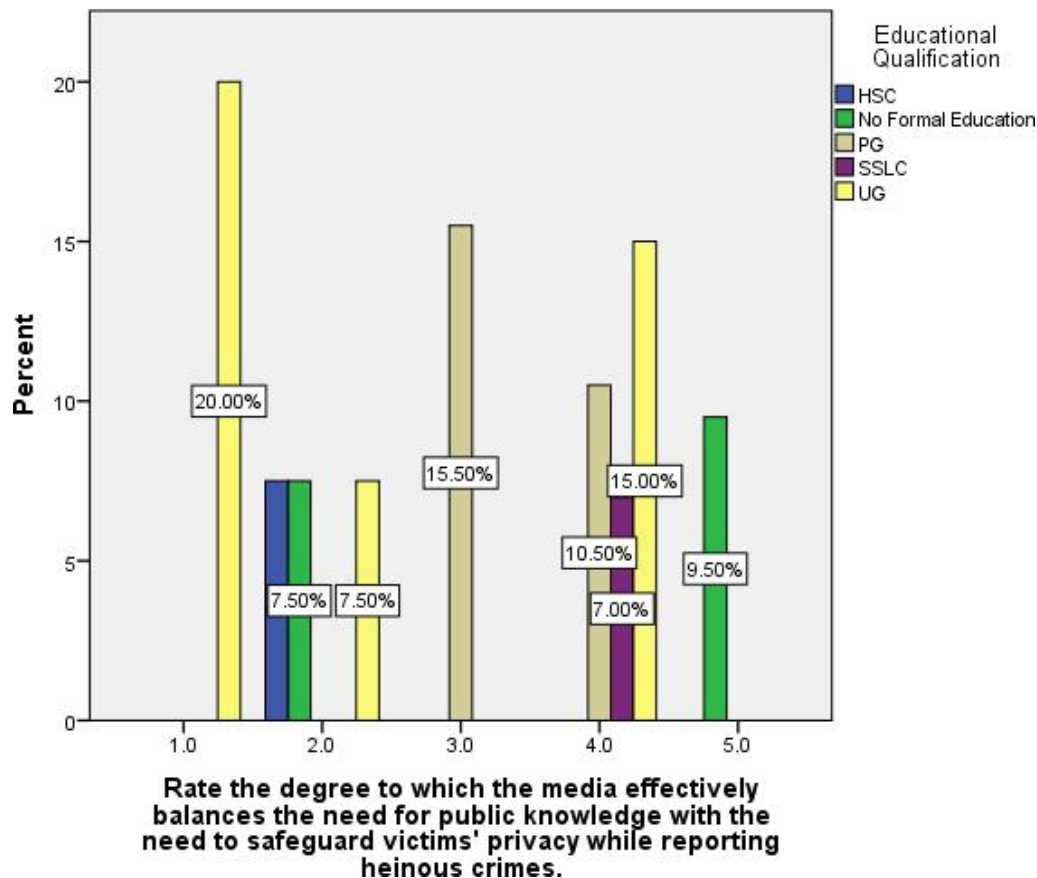
FIGURE 5



Legend: Figure 5 represents the educational qualification distribution of the sample population and their agreeability on whether coverage of heinous crimes can spur advocacy groups to push for changes in laws, regulations and policies to better protect citizens and support victims.



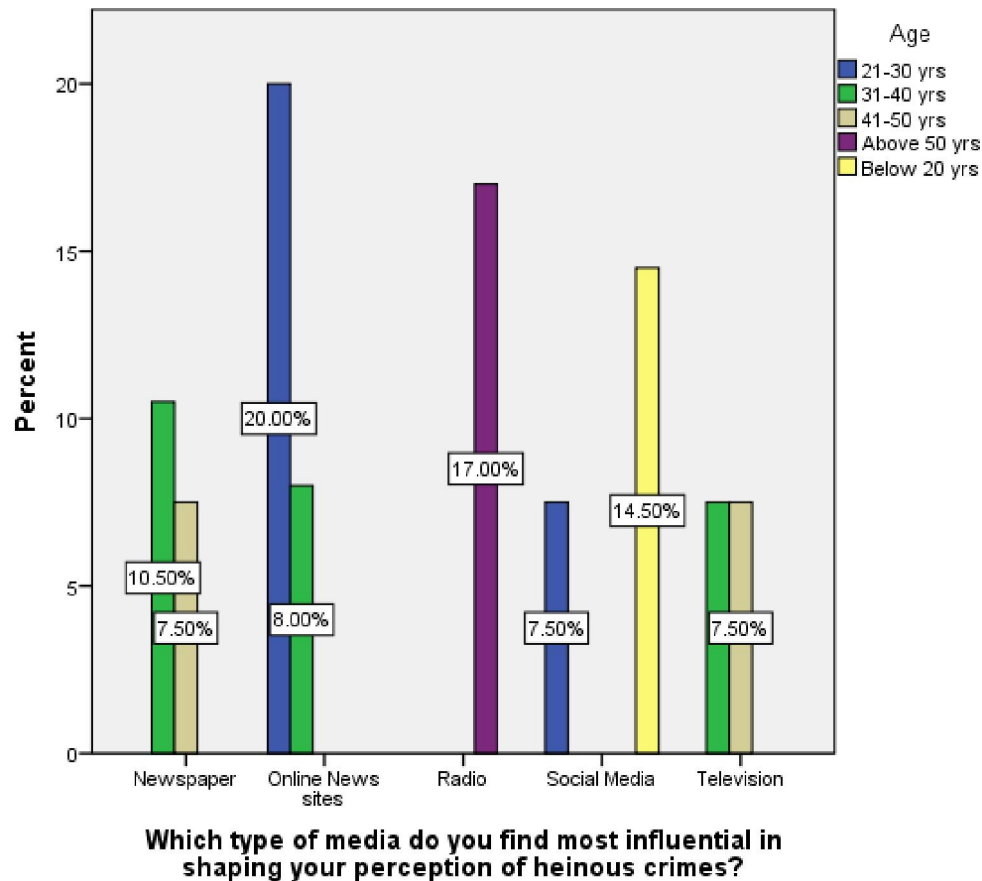
FIGURE 6



Legend: Figure 6 represents the educational qualification distribution of the sample population and their opinion on whether the media effectively balances the need for public knowledge with the need to safeguard victims' privacy while reporting heinous crimes.



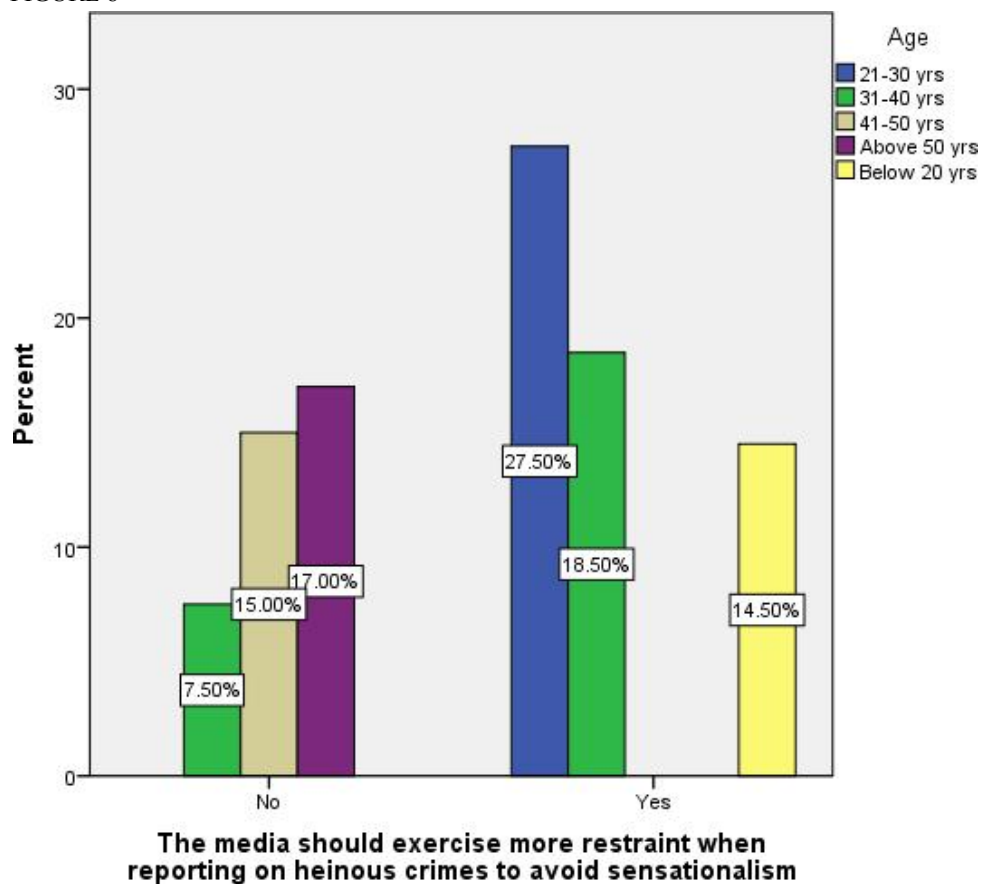
FIGURE 7



Legend: Figure 7 represents the age distribution of the sample population and their opinion on the most influential media in shaping perception of heinous crimes.



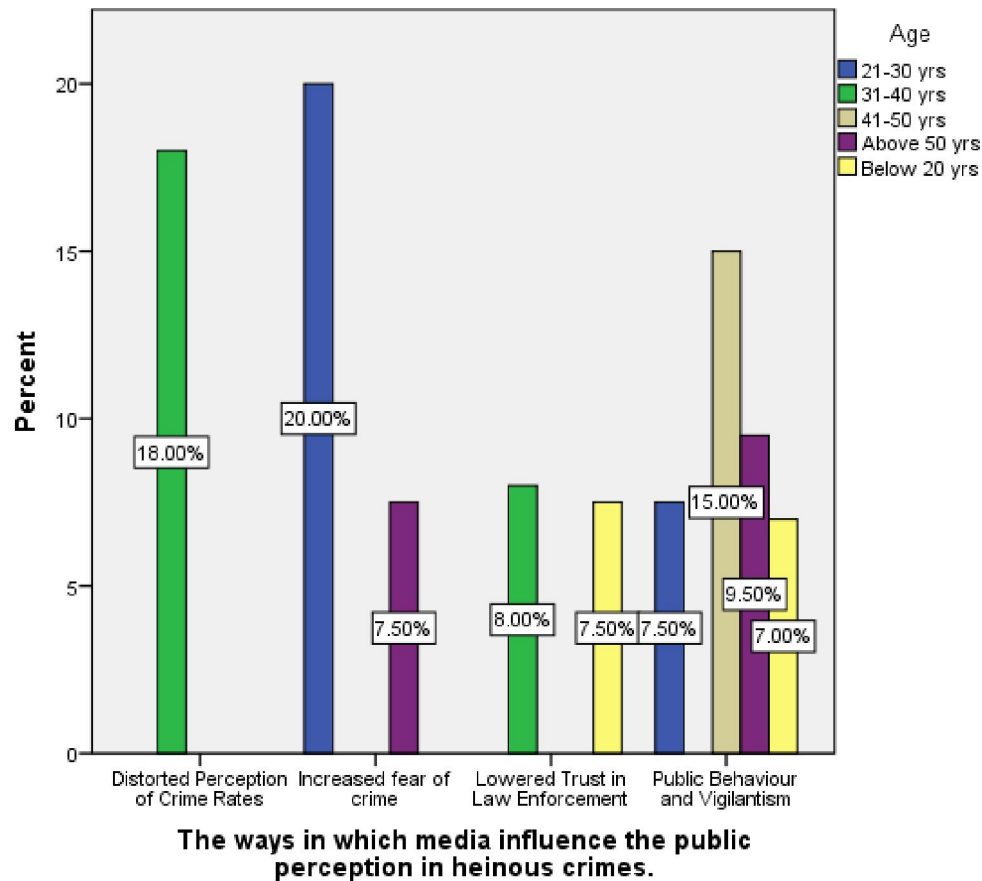
FIGURE 8



Legend: Figure 8 represents the age distribution of the sample population and their opinion on whether the media should exercise more restraint when reporting on heinous crimes to avoid sensationalism.



FIGURE 9

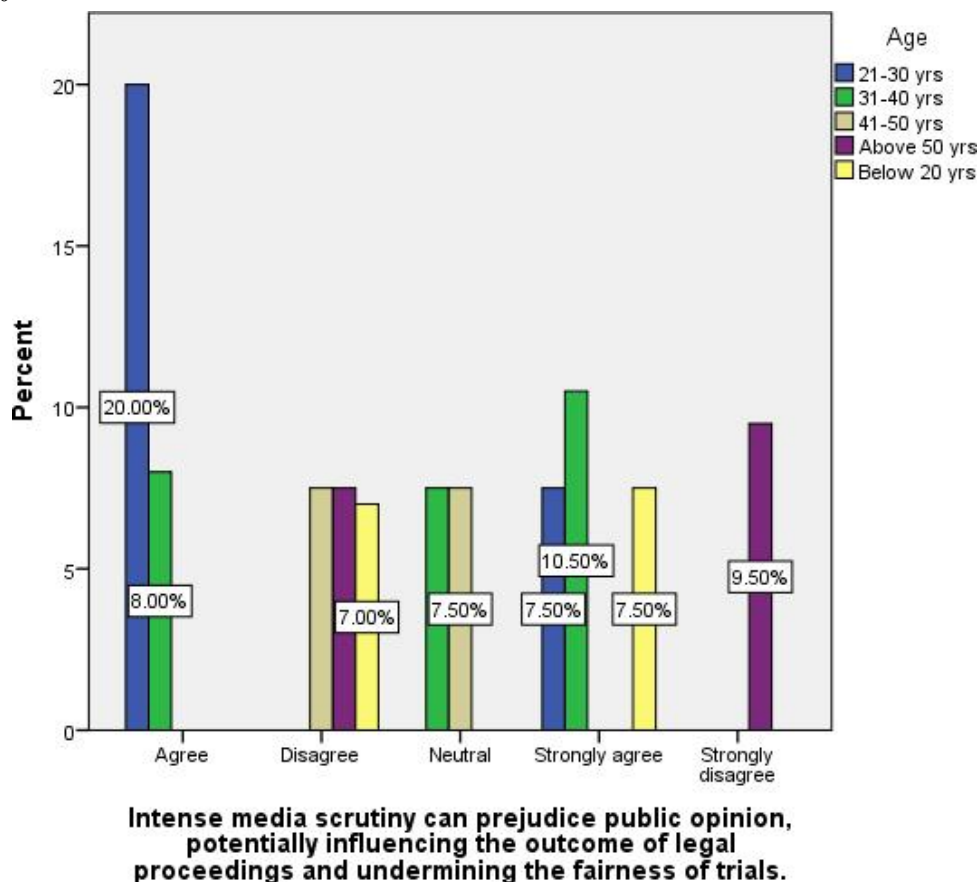


Legend: Figure 9 represents the age distribution of the sample population and their opinion on the ways in which media influence the public perception in heinous crimes.





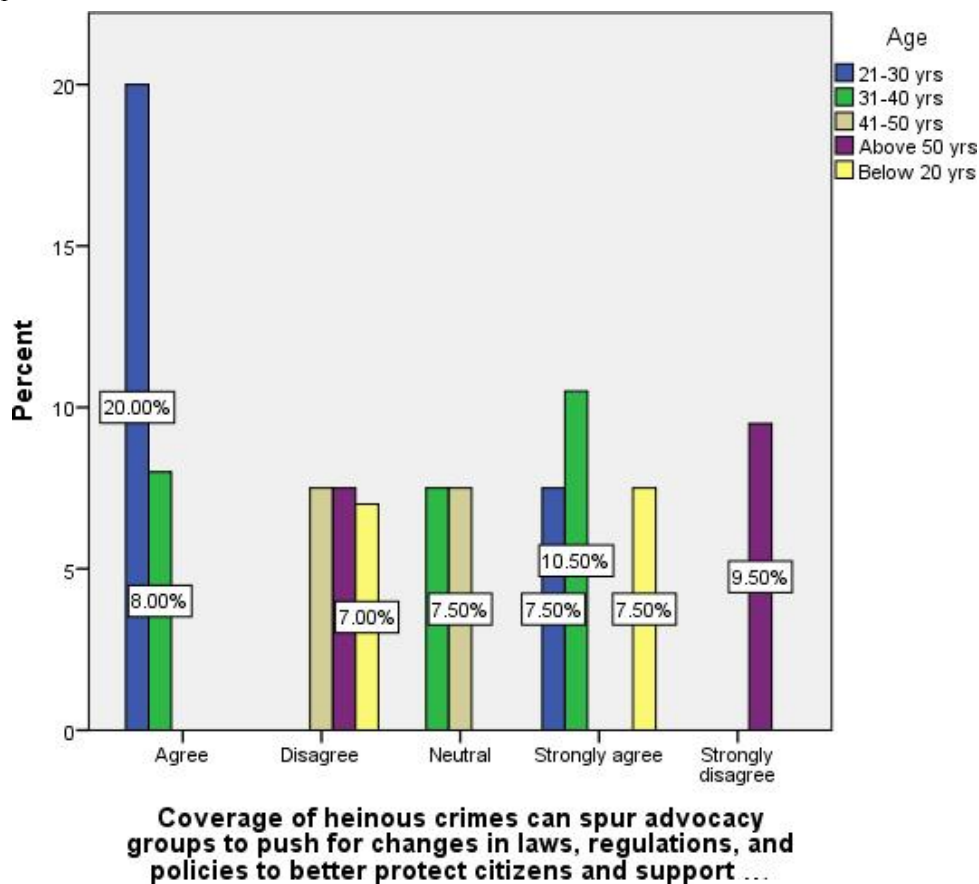
FIGURE 10



Legend: Figure 10 represents the age distribution of the sample population and their agreeability on whether intense media scrutiny can prejudice public opinion, potentially influencing the outcome of legal proceedings and undermining the fairness of trials.



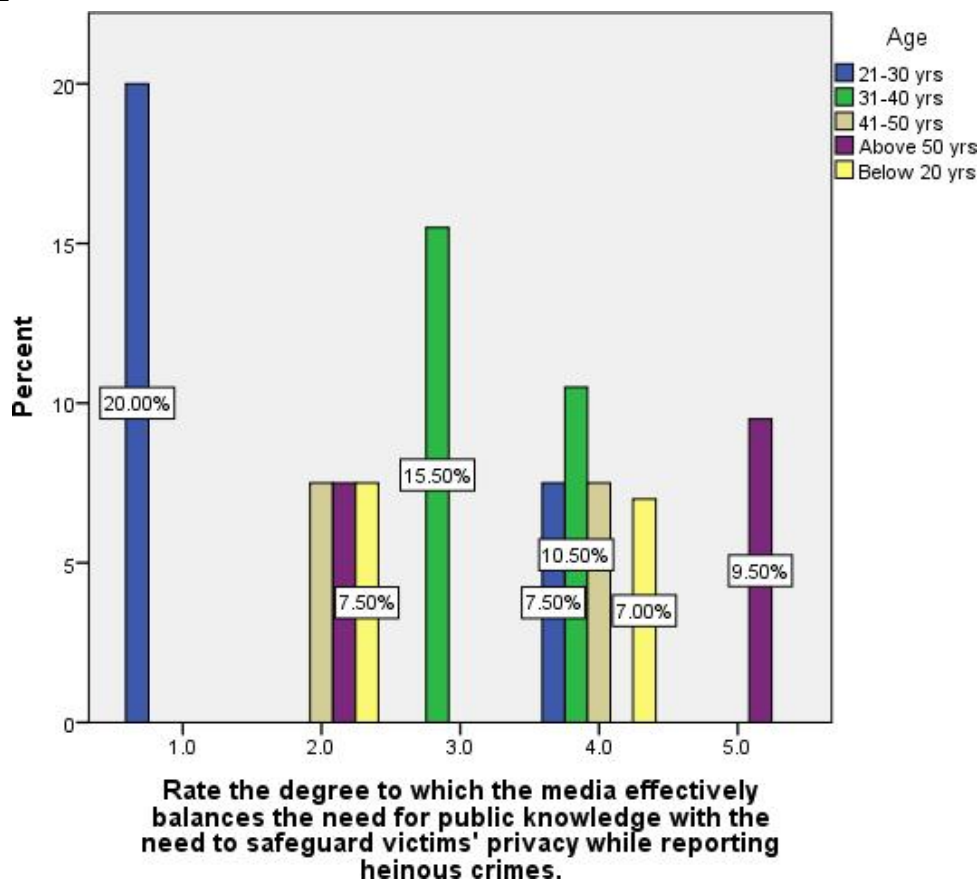
FIGURE 11



Legend: Figure 11 represents the age distribution of the sample population and their agreeability on whether coverage of heinous crimes can spur advocacy groups to push for changes in laws, regulations and policies to better protect citizens and support victims.



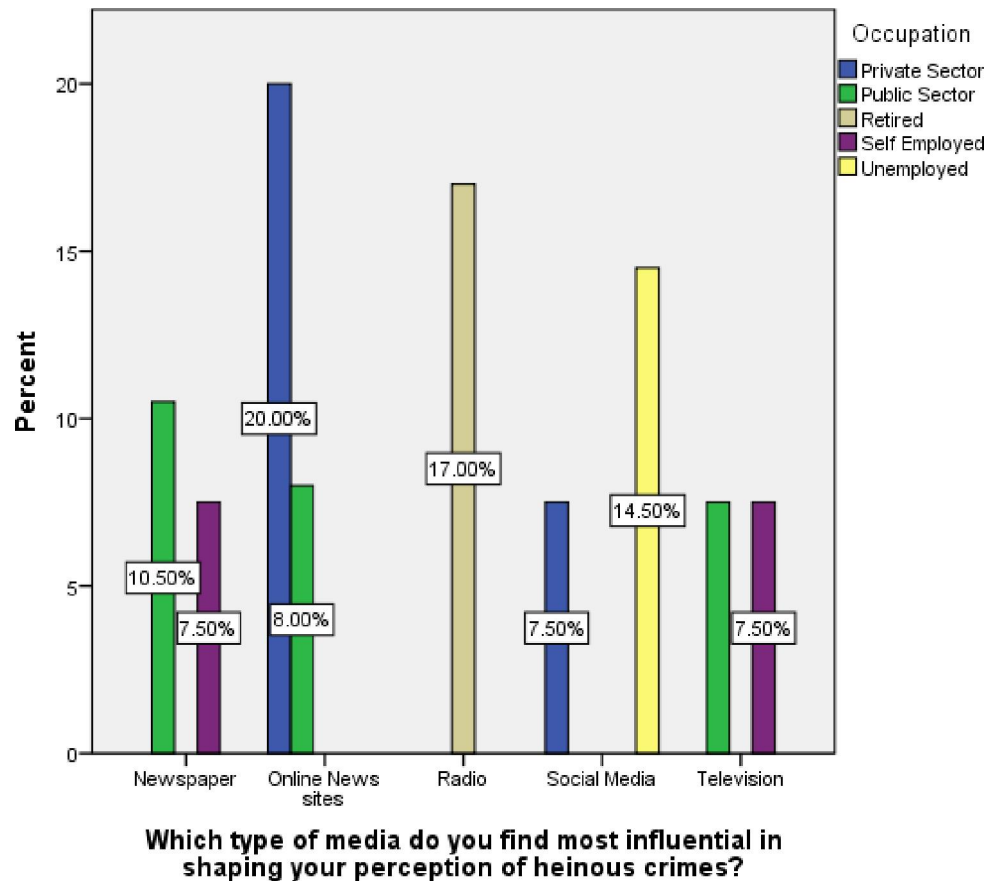
FIGURE 12



Legend: Figure 12 represents the age distribution of the sample population and their opinion on whether the media effectively balances the need for public knowledge with the need to safeguard victims' privacy while reporting heinous crimes.



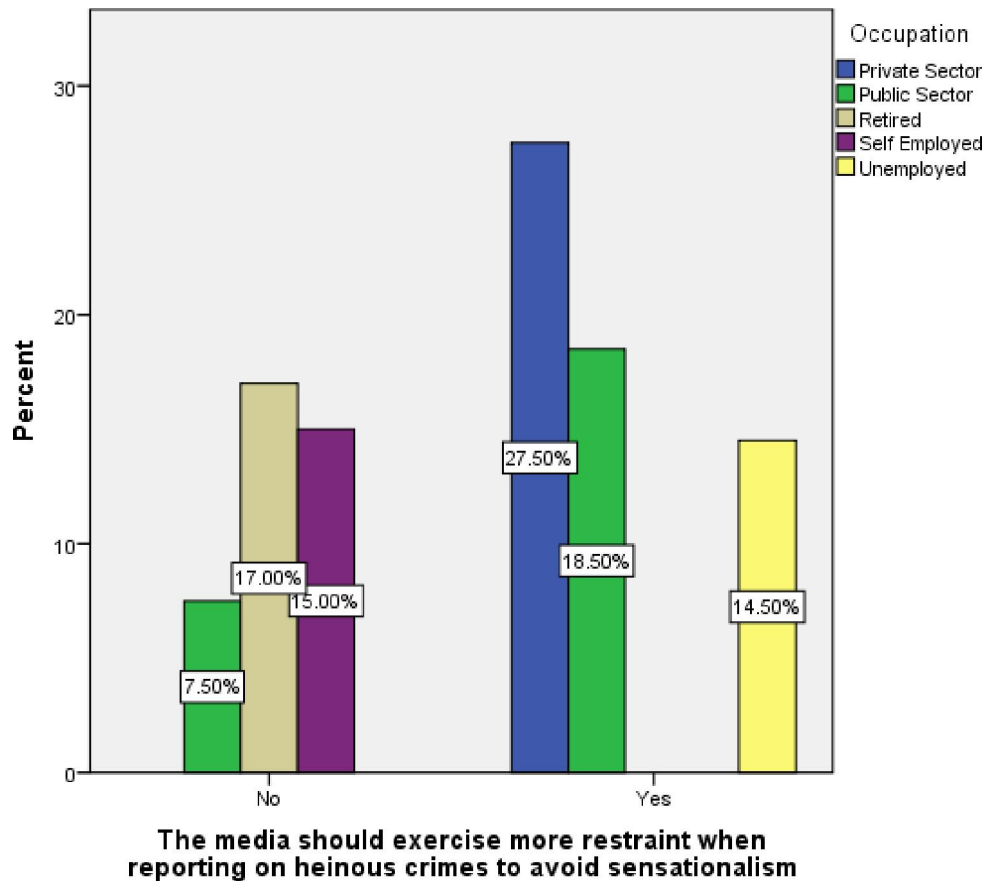
FIGURE 13



Legend: Figure 13 represents the occupation distribution of the sample population and their opinion on the most influential media in shaping perception of heinous crimes.



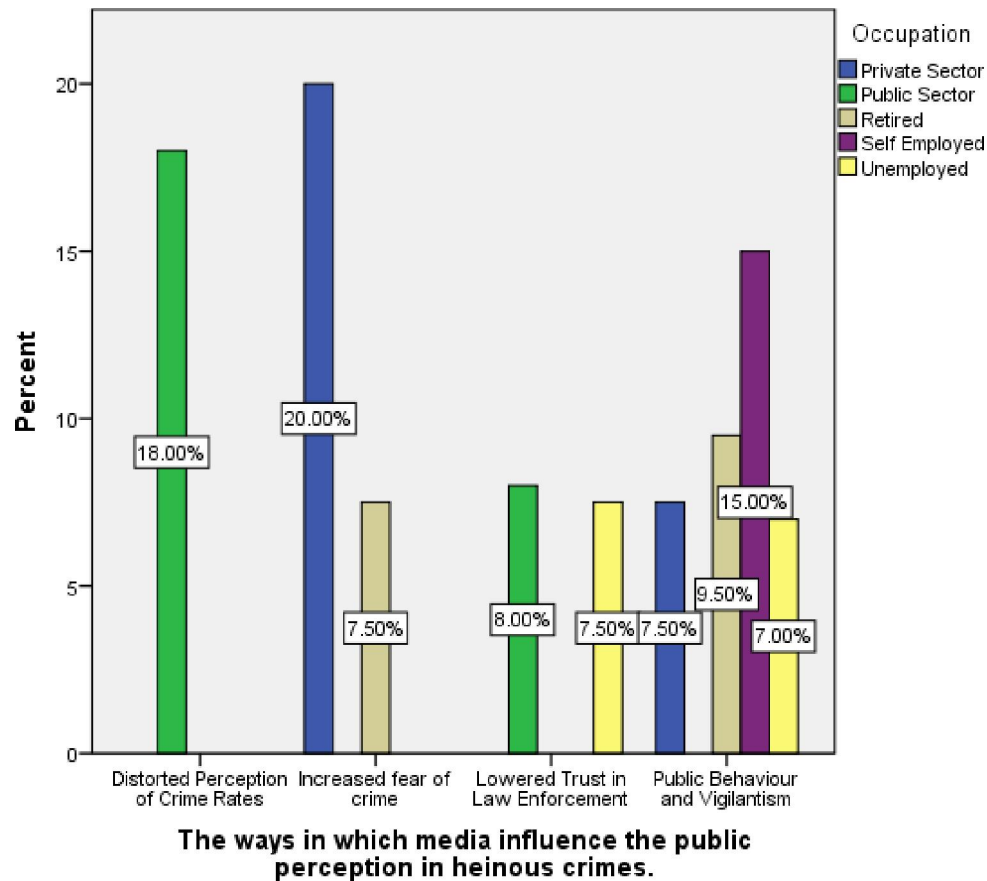
FIGURE 14



Legend: Figure 14 represents the occupation distribution of the sample population and their opinion on whether the media should exercise more restraint when reporting on heinous crimes to avoid sensationalism.



FIGURE 15

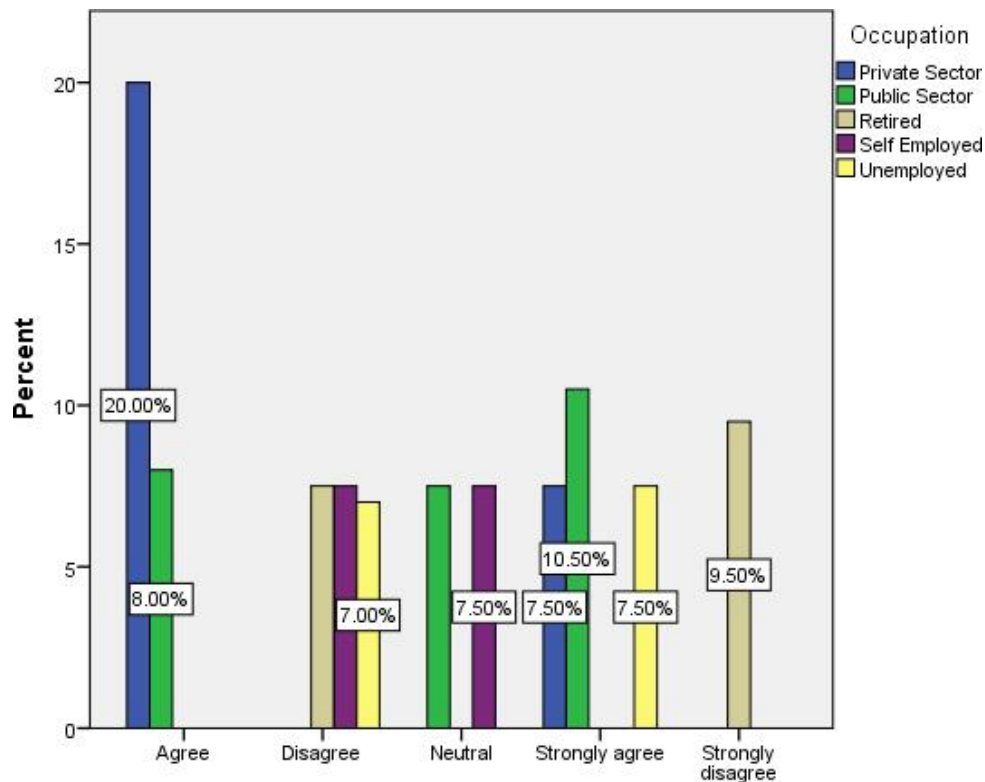


Legend: Figure 15 represents the occupation distribution of the sample population and their opinion on the ways in which the media influence the public perception in heinous crimes.





FIGURE 16



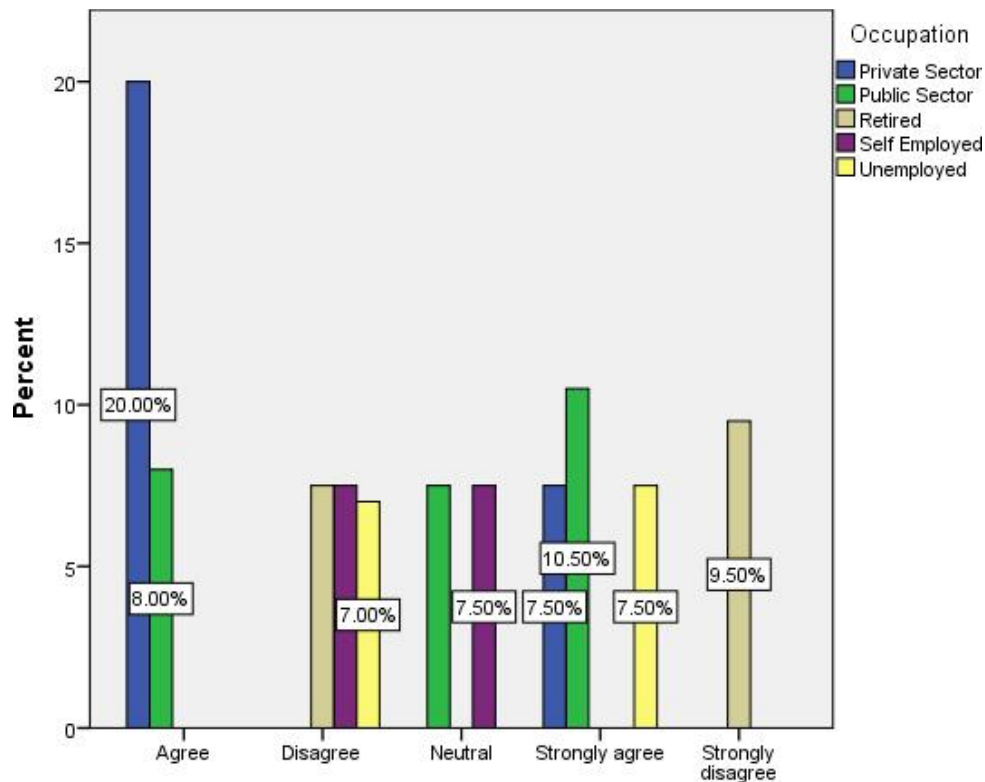
**Intense media scrutiny can prejudice public opinion, potentially influencing the outcome of legal proceedings and undermining the fairness of trials.**

Legend: Figure 16 represents the occupation distribution of the sample population and their agreeability on whether intense media scrutiny can prejudice public opinion, potentially influencing the outcome of legal proceedings and undermining the fairness of trials.



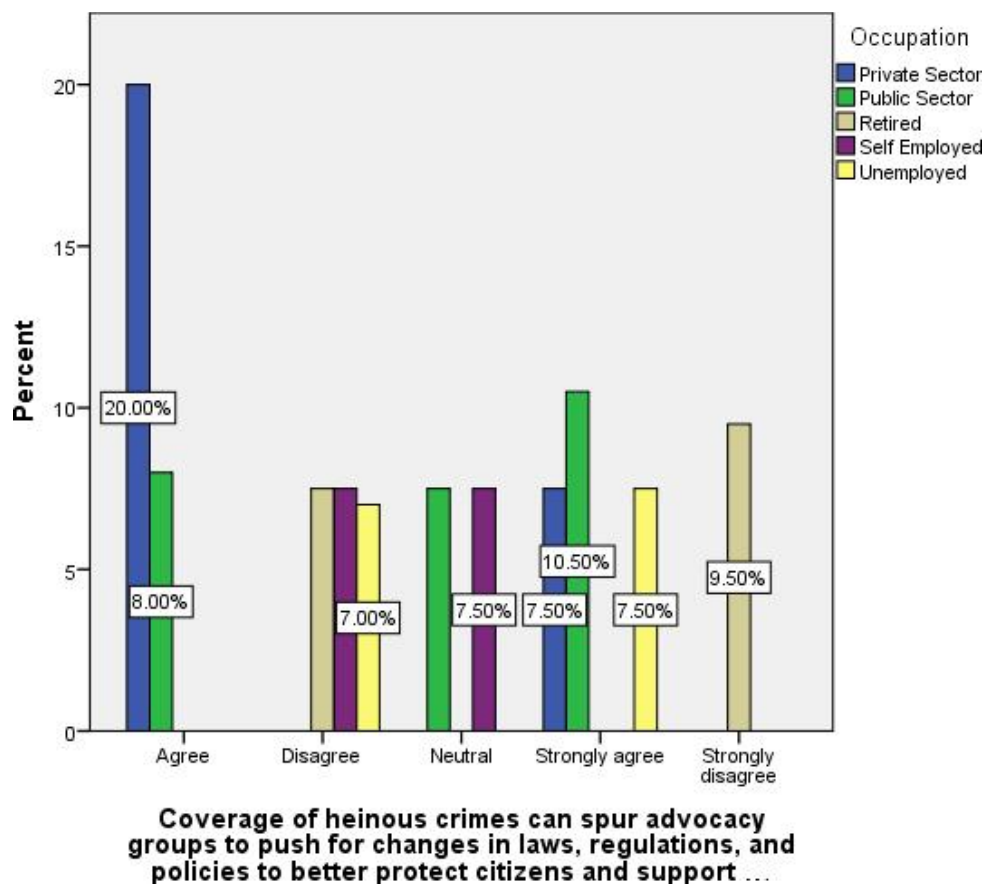
FIGURE 17





**Intense media scrutiny can prejudice public opinion, potentially influencing the outcome of legal proceedings and undermining the fairness of trials.**

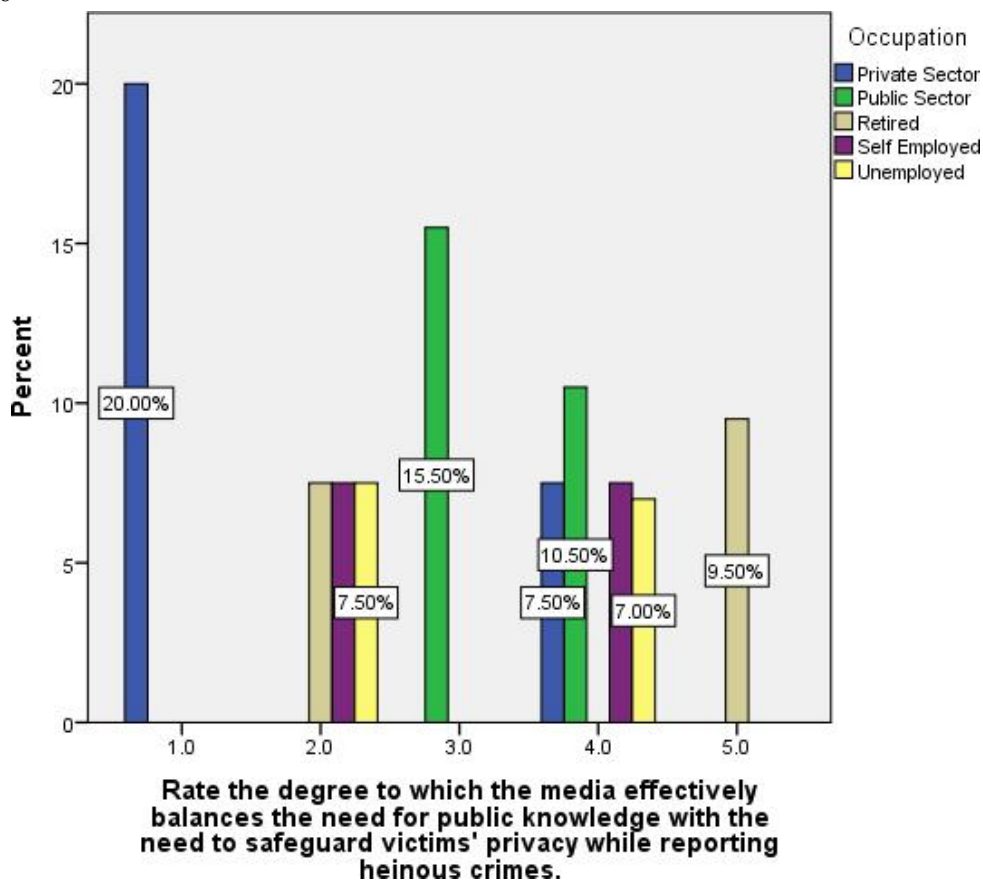




Legend: Figure 17 represents the occupation distribution of the sample population and their agreeability on whether coverage of heinous crimes can spur advocacy groups to push for changes in laws, regulations and policies to better protect citizens and support victims.



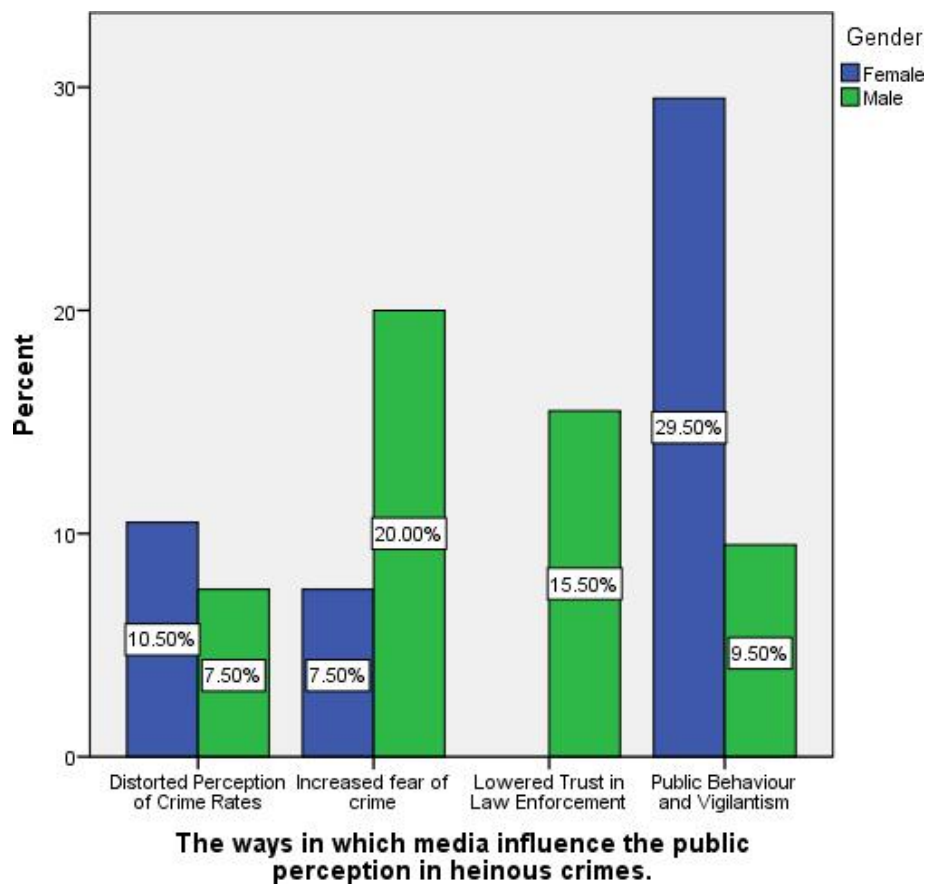
FIGURE 18



Legend: Figure 18 represents the occupation distribution of the sample population and their opinion on whether the media effectively balances the need for public knowledge with the need to safeguard victims' privacy while reporting heinous crimes.



FIGURE 19

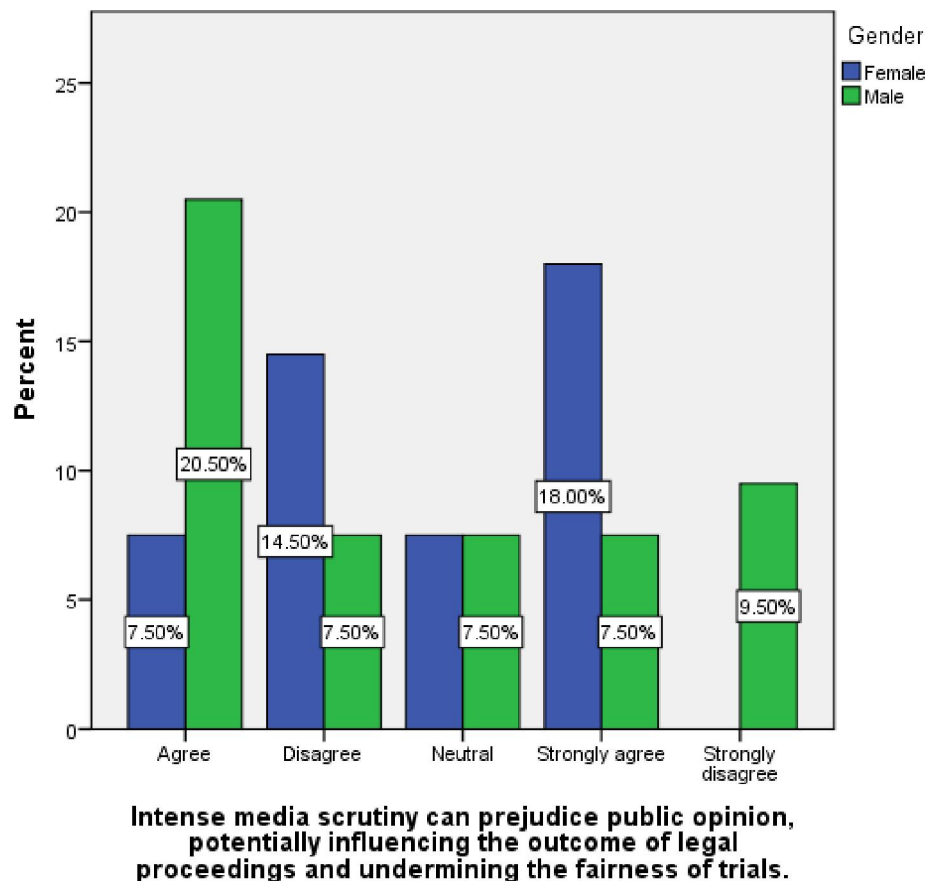


Legend: Figure 19 represents the gender distribution of the sample population and their opinion on the ways in which the media influence the public perception in heinous crimes.





FIGURE 20



Legend: Figure 20 represents the gender distribution of the sample population and their agreeability on whether intense media scrutiny can prejudice public opinion, potentially influencing the outcome of legal proceedings and undermining the fairness of trials.

## RESULT

In Figure 1, the chart shows that 20% undergraduates preferred online news sites whereas 10.50% postgraduates preferred newspaper while 17% respondents with no formal education preferred radio as the type of media most influential in shaping perception of heinous crimes. In Figure 2, the chart shows that 27.50% undergraduates and 18.50% postgraduates responded yes whereas 17% respondents with no formal education responded no to the idea that media should exercise more restraint when reporting on heinous crimes to avoid sensationalism. In Figure 3, the chart shows that 22.50% undergraduates preferred public behaviour and vigilantism whereas 18% postgraduates preferred distorted perception of crime while 7.50% respondents with no formal education preferred increased fear of crime as the ways in which media influence the public perception in heinous crimes. In Figure 4, the chart shows that 20% undergraduates agree and 10.50% postgraduates strongly agree while 9.50% respondents with no formal education strongly disagree with the notion intense media scrutiny can prejudice public opinion, potentially influencing the outcome of legal proceedings and undermining the fairness of trials. In Figure 5, the chart shows that 20% undergraduates agree and 10.50% postgraduates strongly agree whereas 9.50% respondents with no formal education strongly disagree with the notion coverage of heinous crimes can spur advocacy groups to push for changes in



laws, regulations and policies to better protect citizens and support victims. In Figure 6, the chart shows that 20% undergraduates rated ineffective whereas 9.50% respondents with no formal education rated very effective that the media effectively balances the need for public knowledge with the need to safeguard victims' privacy while reporting heinous crimes. In Figure 7, the chart shows that 20% respondents of age 21-30 yrs preferred online news sites whereas 10.50% respondents of age 31-40 yrs preferred newspaper while 17% respondents with above 50 yrs preferred radio as the type of media most influential in shaping perception of heinous crimes. In Figure 8, the chart shows that 27.50% respondents of age 21-30 yrs and 18.50% respondents of age 31-40 yrs responded yes whereas 17% respondents of age above 50 yrs responded no to the idea that media should exercise more restraint when reporting on heinous crimes to avoid sensationalism. In Figure 9, the chart shows that 20% respondents of age 21-30 yrs preferred increased fear of crime whereas 18% respondents of age 31-40 yrs preferred distorted perception of crime rates while respondents of age 41-50 yrs preferred public behaviour and vigilantism as the ways in which media influence the public perception in heinous crimes. In Figure 10, the chart shows that 20% respondents of age 21-30 yrs agree and 10.50% respondents of age 31-40 yrs strongly agree while 9.50% respondents of age above 50 yrs strongly disagree with the notion intense media scrutiny can prejudice public opinion, potentially influencing the outcome of legal proceedings and undermining the fairness of trials. In Figure 11, the chart shows that 20% respondents of age 21-30 yrs agree and 10.50% respondents of age 31-40 yrs strongly agree whereas 9.50% respondents of age above 50 yrs strongly disagree with the notion coverage of heinous crimes can spur advocacy groups to push for changes in laws, regulations and policies to better protect citizens and support victims. In Figure 12, the chart shows that 20% respondents of age 21-30 yrs rated ineffective whereas 9.50% respondents of age above 50 yrs rated very effective that the media effectively balances the need for public knowledge with the need to safeguard victims' privacy while reporting heinous crimes. In Figure 13, the chart shows that 20% respondents of private sector preferred online news sites whereas 10.50% respondents of public sector preferred newspaper while 17% retired respondents preferred radio as the type of media most influential in shaping perception of heinous crimes. In Figure 14, the chart shows that 27.50% respondents of private sector and 18.50% respondents of public servant responded yes whereas 17% retired respondents responded no to the idea that media should exercise more restraint when reporting on heinous crimes to avoid sensationalism. In Figure 15, the chart shows that 20% respondents of private sector preferred increased fear of crime whereas 18% respondents public sector preferred distorted perception of crime rates while 15% self employed respondents preferred public behavior and vigilantism as the ways in which media influence the public perception in heinous crimes. In Figure 16, the chart shows that 20% respondents of private sector agree and 10.50% respondents of public sector strongly agree while 9.50% retired respondents strongly disagree with the notion intense media scrutiny can prejudice public opinion, potentially influencing the outcome of legal proceedings and undermining the fairness of trials. In Figure 17, the chart shows that 20% respondents private sector agree and 10.50% respondents public sector strongly agree whereas 9.50% retired respondents strongly disagree with the notion coverage of heinous crimes can spur advocacy groups to push for changes in laws, regulations and policies to better protect citizens and support victims. In Figure 18, the chart shows that 20% respondents of private sector rated ineffective whereas 9.50% retired respondents rated very effective that the media effectively balances the need for public knowledge with the need to safeguard victims' privacy while reporting heinous crimes. In Figure 19, the chart shows that 29.50% female respondents preferred public behaviour and vigilantism whereas 15.50% male respondents preferred lowered trust in law enforcement as the ways in which media influence the public perception in heinous crimes. In Figure 20, the chart shows that 18% female and 20.50% male agree whereas 14.50% female and 7.50% male disagree with the notion intense media scrutiny can prejudice public opinion, potentially influencing the outcome of legal proceedings and undermining the fairness of trials.

## DISCUSSION

In Figure 1, the reason 20% Undergraduates prefer online news sites is because the convenience and speed of online news, along with its accessibility on multiple devices, make it the preferred medium for this group. They are accustomed to accessing information online, where news is available in real-time and in various formats, including articles, videos, and social media posts.



In Figure 2, the reason Undergraduates and Postgraduates responded yes is because Higher education typically involves exposure to discussions about media ethics, bias, and the social responsibilities of journalism. In Figure 3, the reason Undergraduates preferred public behavior and vigilantism because they might be particularly attuned to cases where media coverage has led to strong public reactions, including vigilantism. They may recognize that sensational media reports can provoke emotional responses, leading some individuals to take justice into their own hands. In Figure 4, the reason respondents with No Formal Education strongly disagree because they might prioritize transparency and the right to information, believing that media scrutiny is essential for holding the legal system accountable. They may not fully recognize the potential for bias or prejudice arising from intense media coverage. In Figure 5, the reason Undergraduates and Postgraduates agree because these groups are likely aware of the media's power to drive social change by bringing issues to the forefront of public consciousness. They recognize that media coverage of heinous crimes can galvanize public opinion, leading to advocacy for changes in laws and policies that better protect citizens and support victims. In Figure 6, the reason Undergraduates rated ineffective because they might be particularly critical of how the media handles sensitive information, especially regarding victims' privacy in heinous crimes. They may feel that the media often prioritizes public interest and sensationalism over the rights and dignity of victims, leading them to rate media effectiveness as low. In Figure 7, the reason that respondents aged 31-40 Years prefer newspapers because this age group might represent a transitional demographic that grew up with both traditional and digital media. They may still value the depth and credibility associated with newspapers, viewing them as more reliable sources of well-researched news compared to some online platforms, which they might perceive as less regulated. In Figure 8, the reason that respondents aged Above 50 Years responded no because Older respondents may value transparency and directness in media reporting, believing that the public has a right to know all details, regardless of how sensational they might be. They might be less concerned with the potential negative impacts of sensationalism, focusing more on the need for comprehensive information. In Figure 9, the reason that respondents aged 21-30 Years preferred increased fear of crime because Younger respondents, particularly those who consume a lot of news online, might be more susceptible to sensationalist reports that emphasize the dangers of crime. This can lead to an increased fear of crime, especially as this age group might be more socially connected and exposed to peer-shared stories that amplify crime-related fears. In Figure 10, the reason respondents aged 21-30 Years 20% agree and 31-40 Years strongly agree because Younger and middle-aged respondents are likely to be aware of how media scrutiny can influence public opinion and potentially bias legal proceedings. They may recognize that intense media coverage can shape public narratives about a crime or an accused individual, which can, in turn, affect jury decisions or even the behavior of legal professionals. In Figure 11, the reason respondents Aged Above 50 Years (9.50% strongly disagree because Older respondents might be more skeptical about the media's ability to drive meaningful policy change, perhaps due to a belief that legislative processes are more complex and less influenced by public opinion than younger people might think. In Figure 12, the reason that Respondents Aged Above

50 Years 9.50% rated very effective because Older respondents may have more trust in traditional media practices and may believe that the media generally does a good job in balancing the need to inform the public with the need to protect victims' privacy. In Figure 13, the reason respondents of Public Sector 10.50% prefer newspapers because Public sector employees, who often have more structured work schedules, might prefer traditional newspapers for their in-depth coverage and perceived credibility. In Figure 14, the reason Private Sector say yes to more restraint because they are more exposed to diverse media critiques and discussions

on platforms like social media, might be more aware of the negative impacts of sensationalist reporting. They are likely to advocate for restraint to avoid unnecessary fear or misinformation that could affect their work-life balance. In Figure 15, the reason Self-Employed respondents preferred public behavior and vigilantism because they have a direct stake in their local communities, might be particularly concerned with how media influences public behavior. They may view vigilantism as a consequence of media-fueled fears, which could affect their business operations or community relationships. In Figure 16, the reason respondents of Private Sector agree because they are more exposed to high-profile cases through media, might be more aware of how intense scrutiny can influence public opinion and potentially prejudice legal outcomes. They may recognize the risks of biased reporting and the potential for media to sway judicial processes. In Figure 17, the reason respondents of Private Sector agree because they are more engaged with social and



political issues through online platforms, might view media coverage as a powerful tool for driving advocacy and policy change. They may see the media as a necessary catalyst for reforms, especially in response to heinous crimes. In Figure 18, the reason Retired Respondents rated very effective because they may have more trust in traditional media practices and might believe that the media generally does a good job in balancing public knowledge with the need to protect victims' privacy. They may view the media as responsible and trustworthy, reflecting their long-standing habits and media consumption patterns. In Figure 19, the reason Male Respondents preferred lowered trust in law enforcement because they might have had direct or indirect negative experiences with law enforcement, may be more critical of how law enforcement is portrayed in the media. Media reports that focus on law enforcement failures or corruption might resonate more with male respondents, leading to a preference for narratives that lower trust in these institutions. In Figure 20, the reason Female Respondents are 14.50% disagree with the notion because they might prioritize transparency and believe that media scrutiny is essential for ensuring fairness in legal proceedings. They might see media as a necessary tool for holding the legal system accountable, particularly in cases where women's rights and safety are at stake.

#### Limitation

One of the major limitation of the study in the sample frame .There is a major constraint in the sample frame as it is limited to a small area. Thus, it proves to be difficult to explore it to a larger population. Another limitation is the sample size of 208 which cannot be used to assume the thinking of the entire population in the particular country, state or city. The physical factors have a larger impact, thus limiting the study

## II. CONCLUSION

Media has a powerful influence on public perception and behavior. In recent years, portrayals of crime in media have raised concerns regarding their psychological and social impact. This study explores how media representation may correlate with heinous criminal activities in Chennai. It also aims to understand public reactions and behavioral shifts due to crime-centric media. The paper delves into both news media and entertainment. The objective is to identify how often media highlights heinous crimes, assess public responses, analyze any patterns between crime rates and media coverage, and determine whether sensationalism contributes to fear or imitation. It also seeks to evaluate regulatory frameworks and public awareness levels regarding media influence. The Findings revealed that excessive and sensationalized media coverage of heinous crimes in Chennai leads to heightened fear and desensitization among viewers. In some cases, criminals reportedly mimic actions seen in news or films. News channels and social media often prioritize viewership over ethical reporting, which distorts public perception. Factors Affecting the Topic include the frequency and tone of media reporting, the psychological profile of the audience, socio-economic background, media literacy, and lack of regulatory checks on sensational content. Peer influence and online trends also play a role in how such portrayals are interpreted. Suggestion is that Media houses must adopt ethical reporting standards, focusing on facts without sensationalism. Public awareness campaigns on media literacy should be implemented. Regulations must be strengthened to monitor violent content. Encouraging positive storytelling and community-driven journalism could help reshape media narratives. Future Scope can expand to other metro cities and compare trends. Psychological assessments can be integrated to study long-term effects. Collaboration with law enforcement and media experts can help design frameworks for responsible media communication. Conclusion is that the media plays a crucial role in shaping societal norms and attitudes. In Chennai, the portrayal of heinous crimes appears to influence both fear and behavior. While the media cannot be entirely blamed, responsible journalism and informed viewership are vital to mitigating negative impacts.

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