

VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT AGAINST WOMEN IN THE NEWS MEDIA: A GLOBAL PICTURE



IWWMF

INTERNATIONAL WOMENS MEDIA FOUNDATION



INTERNATIONAL NEWS SAFETY INSTITUTE

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A GLOBAL PICTURE

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FOREWORD

This report provides the first comprehensive picture of the dangers faced by many women working in news media around the world. It describes the types of violence and threats female journalists encounter and considers how these incidents affect their ability to conduct their work. We also identify trends among reported incidents, with the hope of improving the ways in which the safety concerns of women journalists are addressed.

We asked questions about violence and harassment, and physical, sexual, and digital threats, where such acts were committed and who the main perpetrators were. We also asked respondents how their news organisations currently prepare and protect them against harassment and violence.

It is important to note that the objective of this study is not to assess the number of women journalists experiencing these incidents, but rather to gauge the nature and frequency of these types of violations. The report closes by offering suggestions about what individuals and organisations might do to mitigate the dangers of reporting in hostile environments and provide a safe working environment at home.

We thank each person who participated in the survey. Some of the questions were sensitive, personal and not easy to answer, and we salute the bravery of our respondents.

The survey and this report are joint projects between the International News Safety Institute (INSI) and the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF). They are part of a wider program of work initiated by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which has the leading role within the U.N. system regarding the safety of journalists.

They are supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, which has put these issues at the centre of its efforts in the human rights field.

Our thanks go to both UNESCO and the Austrian government for giving generously of their support, encouragement and time.



Methodology

The findings in this report were collected from an online survey in English of 977 self-defined female respondents between August 2013 and January 2014.

The survey was distributed using a snowball sampling technique, for which we contacted female media workers from the databases of INSI and the IWMF and asked them to forward the survey to their colleagues, editors and extended networks.

Key demographic fields in the survey such as full name, email address, nationality and organizational affiliation were mandatory. This information is strictly confidential and was collected to verify respondents' identities. Responses were sorted by email address to eliminate duplications.

All other sections and fields were optional, which resulted in different numbers of total respondents for each question.

We collected qualitative data through open-response fields, where participants were able to expand and explain their quantitative answers. Respondents were offered the opportunity to speak with us by email or directly if desired.

Finally, it is important to note that the conclusions in this report are not representative of women journalists in general. They represent only the self-defined universe of respondents. The survey through which data were collected is subject to the inherent limitations of its sampling technique and the survey tool itself. Nevertheless, the responses received raise relevant issues which may be applicable in other situations and with other persons. It is these responses which inform the important recommendations in this report.

If you would like to view the full data set, please contact INSI or the IWMF directly.

INTRODUCTION

Women journalists have a long history in the news profession, and female correspondents have been risking their lives to cover the news since at least 1849, when Margaret Fuller reported on the invasion of Rome by the French forces of Louis-Napoleon. Female foreign correspondents continued to report from war zones throughout the 20th century, with notable pioneers such as Mary Roberts Rinehart, Sigrid Schultz and Martha Gellhorn.



Mary Roberts Rinehart



Sigrid Schultz



Martha Gellhorn

Around the world, women reporters are covering the most vital and challenging stories of the day – and putting their personal safety on the line to detail corruption, socio-economic divisions, politics and war. They do so in a variety of environments, each of which produces a separate set of risks. The foreign correspondent covering political demonstrations in Egypt must be vigilant toward a host of concerns that are quite separate – but no more or less serious – than those encountered by the woman covering organized crime in Colombia, or the one living through and reporting on instability in Central African Republic.

In many countries today, there is a noticeable bias toward what women cover, with female reporters often confined to “soft” stories and feature writing. There are also cultural norms in many places that do not allow women equal status in crafting the news agenda. Women can be defamed and ostracised for speaking alone with male sources, working late hours, or challenging the status quo.

Although the number of journalists killed in 2013 was lower than in 2012¹, the number of journalists subjected to assault, threat or attack either directly or by threats to their families and loved ones, be they physical, verbal or digital, shows no sign of abating. The number of journalists living daily with insecurity is a major cause for concern.

For some women journalists, this insecurity extends to the workplace, as the prevalence of sexual harassment in newsrooms across the globe is well-documented. Ammu Joseph’s 2005 research with Indian women journalists chronicled widespread harassment that ranged from gossip and character assassination to touching and demands for sexual favours². While some newsrooms adopt anti-harassment policies, the personal and professional implications of workplace harassment mean some victims never report the abuse.

While threats, abuse and violence are part of many journalists' experiences, a number of these types of incidents take on a gender or sexual component when directed at women. The perpetrators of violence, threats and abusive behaviour toward women journalists range from government authorities and criminal gangs to their co-workers, bosses, sources and subjects.

INSI and the IWMF are leading the discussion on what more needs to be done to help our female colleagues moderate these risks.

INSI

The International News Safety Institute was founded in 2003, its mission to provide safety advice and training to journalists to ensure that wherever they work they are able to do so safely, whether covering conflict, civil unrest, corruption, or natural and manmade disasters. Widely regarded as the news industry's safety body, INSI counts as its members some of the world's leading news organisations, such as Reuters, CNN, the BBC, Al Jazeera, ABC, NBC and the Guardian.

In 2012, INSI published *No Woman's Land – On the Frontlines with Female Reporters*, the first book dedicated to the safety of women in the news media. INSI has also pioneered safety training delivered by female trainers for female journalists and continues to work with all journalists around the world to ensure they have the most up-to-date and relevant knowledge, training, equipment and support to stay safe while doing their work.

IWMF

Founded in 1990 by a group of prominent U.S. women journalists, the International Women's Media Foundation is a Washington, D.C.-based organization dedicated to strengthening the role of women journalists worldwide. The IWMF believes the news media worldwide are not truly free and representative without the equal voice of women.

The IWMF celebrates the bravery of women journalists who overcome threats and oppression to speak out on global issues with its Courage in Journalism Awards. The IWMF Lifetime Achievement Awards recognise women news media pioneers who set new standards of excellence in the profession and pave the way for future generations of journalists. Since its inception, the IWMF has honoured more than 100 women, and it continues to support the recipients of these awards and many other female journalists with advocacy and assistance in times of crisis. The IWMF's programs empower women journalists with the training, support and network to become leaders in the news industry.

¹International News Safety Institute (2014, February 18). INSI publishes annual analysis of journalist casualties around the globe [Press release].

²Ammu Joseph, *Making News: Women in Journalism*. New Delhi, 2005. P. 101-109.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on the findings of a global survey on harassment and violence against female media workers, which was launched in August 2013 and completed by almost 1,000 women from around the world.

Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents said they had experienced some form of intimidation, threats or abuse in relation to their work, ranging in severity from name-calling to death threats.

The survey found that the majority of threats, intimidation and abuse directed toward respondents occurred in the work place and was perpetrated most often by male bosses, supervisors and co-workers. It also found that most incidents of harassment and violence were never reported, even though a majority of women who experienced them said they were psychologically affected.

In addition, the survey gathered data regarding sexual violence, physical violence, sexual harassment, and information security threats experienced by women journalists as well as what measures have been taken for prevention, protection and preparedness within news organizations.

The survey was conducted jointly by the London-based International News Safety Institute and the Washington, D.C.-based International Women's Media Foundation.

The survey and this report were carried out with funding from the Government of Austria and supported by UNESCO.

Respondents

Between August 2013 and January 2014, 1,078 people responded to the survey, 977 of whom self-identified as women.

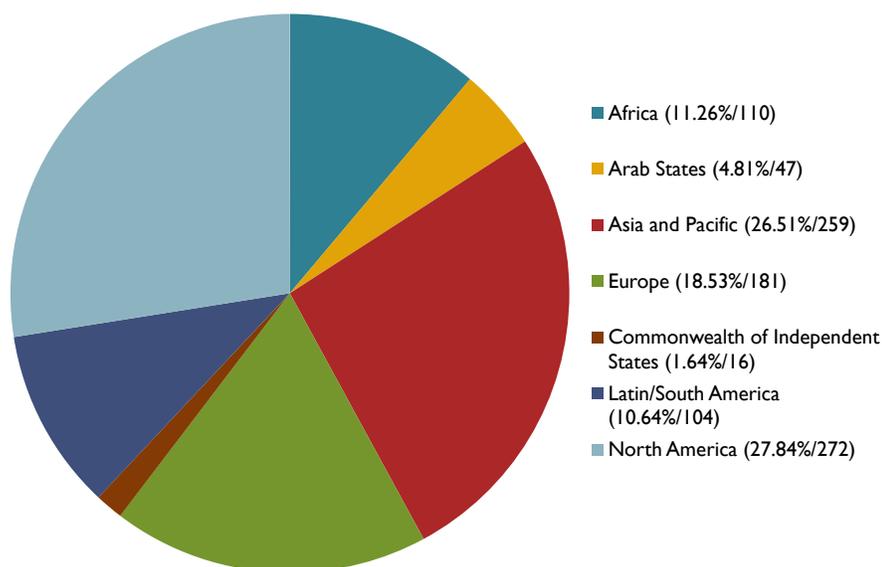
The following results refer only to our female respondents, as the purpose of the study is to observe trends among women media workers.

Percentages

Percentages in this section and throughout the report have been rounded to the nearest decimal point.

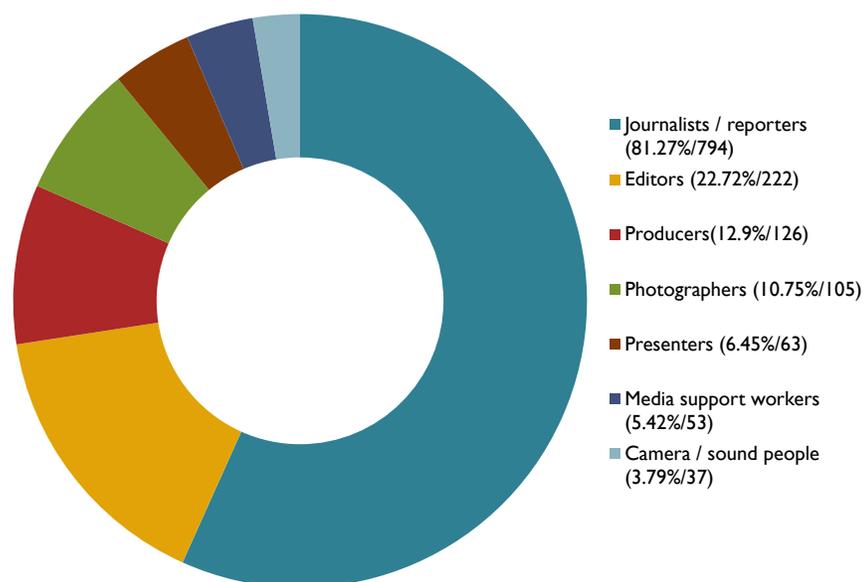
Nationality

There were 989 responses in this section, with 977 total respondents. The 12 additional responses were cases of dual nationality. Regional breakdown (percentage/number of responses) was as follows:



Job Role

Respondents' job roles were broken out into the following categories³:

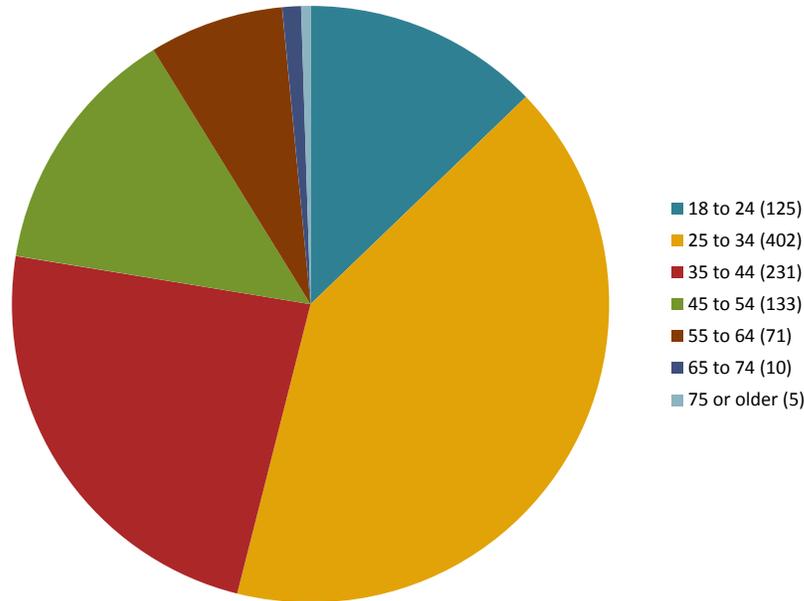


³Respondents were able to select all options that apply.

In addition to respondents who chose among the above categories, 135 women selected “other.” Researchers, bloggers and columnists were some of the positions cited by this group.

Age

Distribution of respondents' ages was as follows:



Type of Media

Of the 977 respondents, the largest number (49.3%/482) worked for a newspaper. Online media was the second most frequent response, with 43.6% (426). Magazine journalists were 24% (234), television journalists were 20.6% (201), and radio journalists were 15.6% (152). A smaller segment (7.1%/69) said they worked in multiple media.

Some respondents (87) left qualitative responses indicating they worked in types outside these options, and nearly half of these worked for news agencies.

Type of Employment

About half of the 977 respondents (52.1%/509) said they were “employees,” while the remainder said they were “freelancers” (27.4%/268), “both employees and freelancers” (17.6%/172) or “other” (6%/59).

Key Findings⁴

Intimidation, Threats and Abuse

- Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64.8.7%/597 of 921) said they had experienced acts of “intimidation, threats and abuse” in relation to their work.
- The total number of acts reported in this section was 1,954. The most frequently reported acts were classified as “abuse of power or authority” (217), “verbal, written, and/or physical intimidation (including threats) to you” (204), and “attempts to damage your reputation/honour” (181).

⁴Respondents were able to select all options that apply.

- The most commonly reported perpetrators of “intimidation, threats and abuse” were bosses (31.7%/597 of 1882 incidents where perpetrators were cited). Other perpetrators included supervisors, co-workers, interviewees, government officials, police, subordinates and “other.”
- The majority of perpetrators were male (63.6%/1029 of 1617 incidents where the perpetrator’s sex was selected).
- More than half of respondents (44.6%/136 of 305) to a question about the effects of “intimidation, threats and abuse” said they experienced psychological trauma. Around one-third (35.6%/288 of 810) who experienced such acts said they reported the incidents to an employer, police or another authority.

Physical Violence

- More than one-fifth (21.6%/118 out of 547) of respondents said they had experienced physical violence in relation to their work.
- Of 310 acts reported in this section, the most frequent were “pushing” (77), “shoving” (52), and “assault with an object or weapon” (21).
- Nearly half (45.5%/70 of 154) of acts where location was reported occurred “in the field.” Other acts took place “in the street” while covering protests, rallies, or other public events (26%/40 of 154), and “in the office” (18%/21 of 154).
- The main perpetrators of reported acts of physical violence were “other” (36.8%/43 of 157) – which included strangers in a crowd or public place, politicians and soldiers – “police” (20.5%/24 of 157), and “interviewees” (18%/21 of 157). More than three-quarters (77.2%/88 of 114) of respondents who listed sex of perpetrator said “mostly men” carried out the physical violence.
- Around one-third (34.9%/88 of 252) of respondents said they reported acts of physical violence against them.

Sexual Violence

- Of 546 respondents, 14.3% (78 of 546) said they had experienced sexual violence in relation to their work.
- Nearly one half (48.9%/65) of the 133 acts reported were “touching you in a sexual manner against your will (i.e., kissing, grabbing, fondling).”
- Of the 106 acts in this section where location was provided, 38.7% (41) took place “in the field,” and 24.5% (26) happened “in the office.”
- Around one half of 111 acts where a perpetrator was classified were committed by a “co-worker,” “boss,” or “supervisor”. “Other” accounted for 22.5% (25) of acts. Respondents included other journalists, fixers and protesters in this category. Almost all (94.6%/70 of 74) respondents who cited the perpetrator’s sex said men committed the acts of sexual violence.
- Only 19.3% (34 of 176) of respondents said they reported sexual violence to their employer, the police or another authority.

Sexual Harassment

- Nearly half (47.9%/327 of 683) of respondents said they had experienced sexual harassment at their jobs.
- Of 999 total acts reported, the most common were “unwanted comments on dress and appearance” 20.2% (202), “suggestive remarks or sounds” 18.6% (186), “jokes of a sexual nature” 16.9% (169), “invasion of personal space” 15.5% (155) and “unwanted physical contact” 14.7% (147).
- The most common locations for harassment were “in the office” (42.2%/181 of 429 acts where location was given) and “in the field” (32.4%/139 of 429).
- Of 512 acts where the perpetrator was classified, the categories of “co-worker,” “boss,” and “supervisor” made up more than half (55.3%/283). “Interviewees” made up 16.4% (84) of the total. Among acts where the sex of the perpetrator was given, 93.8% (270 of 288) were committed by “mostly men.”
- Less than one-fifth of respondents (16.9%/117 of 693) said they reported incidents of sexual harassment.

Tapping, Hacking and Digital Security Threats

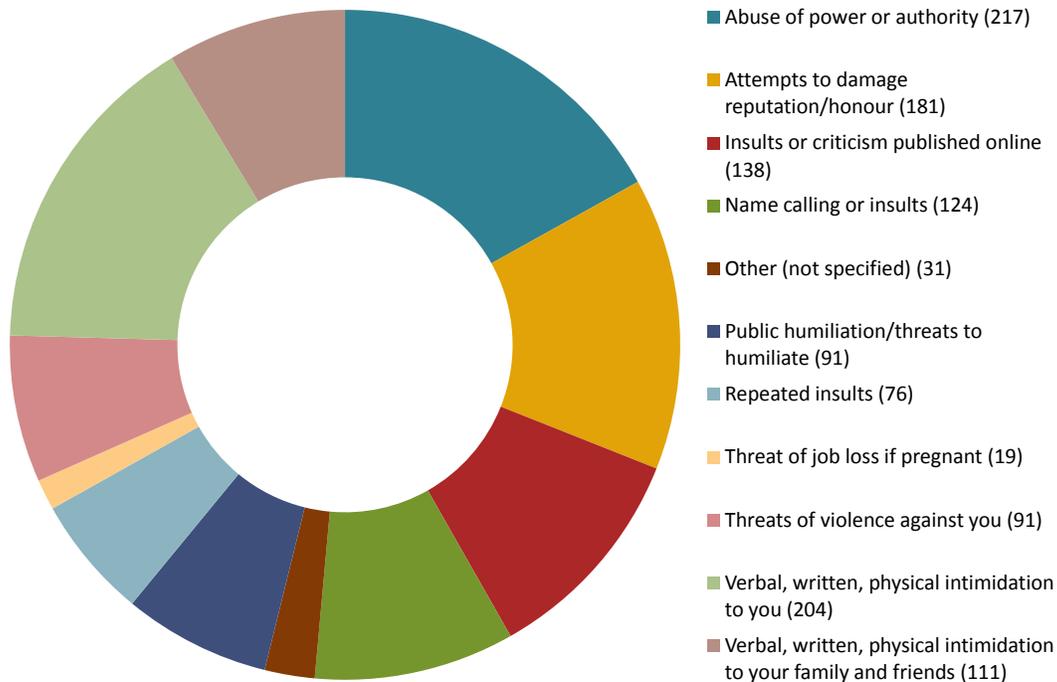
- More than one-fifth of respondents (21.1%/106 of 502) said they had experienced “digital/online account surveillance”. About the same number reported “email or other digital/online account hacking” (20.3%/104 of 512), and “phone tapping” (20.9%/111 of 532). A smaller number (17.3%/74 of 428) reported “hacking” (of websites, etc).
- Some respondents (19.2%/41 of 214) reported they had source material stolen, including the identities of sources, emails and interview content. The most commonly named means of stealing source material was email hacking.
- The most common targets for breach among 469 reported incidents were personal email accounts (18%/89) and work email accounts (17.3%/81). Other channels included personal mobiles (14.5%/68), social media accounts (12.9%/59), and work mobiles (11.9%/56).

Preparedness, Prevention and Protection

- Less than one-third (30.3%/134) of 443 respondents said their organisations take measures to protect their personal security.
- One-fifth of respondents said their organisations prepare them for work-related harassment (21.3%/103 of 484) or work-related violence (21.8%/102 of 467).
- A similar number (22.8%/103 of 451) said their organisations provide training and/or resources for digital/online security, and 20.1% (89 of 443) said they were provided training and/or resources for source protection.
- Among preparedness measures offered, respondents mentioned high-risk environment training, bodyguards, drivers and fixers, chaperones during late hours and check-in protocols.
- Less than one-third (31.2%/132 of 423) of respondents said they are provided emotional support or professional counselling/therapy in the event of work-related harassment or violence.

INTIMIDATION, THREATS AND ABUSE

The survey defined intimidation, threats and abuse with the following acts (numbers indicate frequency of reported incidents⁵):



Almost two-thirds (64.8%/597) of 921 respondents answered “yes” to the question “have you experienced intimidation, threats or abuse in relation to your work?”

The most frequently reported acts were classified as “abuse of power or authority,” “verbal, written and/or physical intimidation including threats to you,” and “attempts/threats to damage your reputation or honour.”

Most reported acts of intimidation, threats or abuse took place in the office. These acts included “abuse of power or authority” (70.8%/153 of 216), “verbal, written and or/physical intimidation including threats” (47.5%/69 of 202), and “attempts/threats to damage your reputation or honour” (34.2%/85 of 179).

Other reported incidents of “intimidation, threats and abuse” took place in the field (when reporting outside the office), at home, in the street (covering protests, mobs, rallies, etc.) and online.

⁵Respondents were able to select all acts relevant to their experiences. For this reason, the sum of the responses equals more than the total number of respondents to this question.

According to respondents, most acts committed in the office were perpetrated by a boss (31.7%/597 of 1882 incidents where perpetrators were cited) or supervisor (13.2%/260 of 1882).

One example came from a U.S.-based journalist, who said “I was slapped, regularly insulted and called demeaning names, not given certain assignments that were given to male co-workers instead, and forced to work overtime without being paid for it.”

Other perpetrators included co-workers, police, government officials, and subordinates. A respondent from India said “general discrimination is a major problem,” but especially for her, as a manager. “No one likes [a] female boss,” she said, “especially in the media field.”

Dozens of respondents from several different regions said their supervisors or co-workers had used public criticism of their work, personality or general competence as a humiliation and intimidation tactic. This kind of abuse largely occurred in the office, in front of other newsroom staff. Examples given ranged from “character assassination” to direct insults, including one woman who was routinely berated by her boss for resembling the boss’ ex-wife.

Interviewees were also reported perpetrators. A journalist from the Philippines said she was threatened by an interviewee after publishing a story about the subject’s abuse of a home staff member. The same woman said she had been “shouted at and intimidated a number of times by male reporters from different media outlets” in the course of her work.

An American journalist working in the Middle East recalled entering an Orthodox Jewish community to report and being told to leave or face stoning.

When perpetrators were members of the government or officials, reported incidents typically included threats of imprisonment or detention, blackmail and public defamation. One Mexican journalist said that a prison director attempted to discredit her, telling other reporters that she paid inmates at his prison for information about drug sales.

Some respondents said they were forced by state officials to sign pledges promising not to write critically about the government. Other acts of “intimidation, threats and abuse” by public officials include surveillance of journalists, written and verbal intimidation and withdrawal of press passes or accreditation. One journalist said:

“I was forced to leave my country, Zimbabwe, in 1985 after years of threats and intimidation and scary surveillance by intelligence officers because of my reporting. At the time I was the only Zimbabwean working for the foreign media. Three times my accreditation was withdrawn, making it very difficult for me to do my job. I finally left when I was threatened with imprisonment if I wrote another story unfavourable to the government.”

A number of respondents reported threats against their family members in retaliation for their work. These included threats to harm or kidnap their children and threats to harm their spouses, parents and siblings.

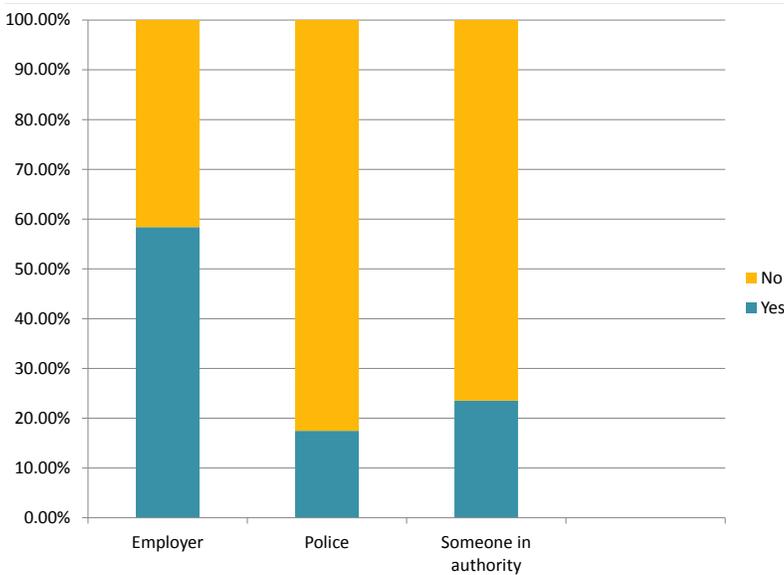
A respondent from Pakistan said she repeatedly received death threats and threats against her family members.

For all acts defined in this section, the main perpetrators were male (63.6%/1029 of 1617 reported incidents where perpetrator’s sex was cited).

Reporting Intimidation, Threats and Abuse

Respondents were asked if they reported any acts of “intimidation, threats and abuse” to their employers, police or another authority (selecting multiple options was possible). More than half (58.4%/188 of 322) of respondents said they reported such acts to their employers, fewer than one in five (17.5%/43 of 246) said they reported to the police and less than a quarter (23.5%/57 of 242) reported to another authority.

Did you report acts of “intimidation, threats and abuse/to whom?



When asked “what was the outcome of reporting the intimidation, threats and abuse?” a small number of the 238 qualitative responses indicated a positive outcome for the respondent. But the overwhelming majority of responses alluded to a climate of impunity, such as a Pakistani journalist who said there was “no justice for female[s] in her country,” a British journalist who said she was told to “stop complaining” and an Indian journalist who said “my boss didn’t believe me and said I was over-reacting and told me to grow up.”

One Cameroonian journalist said, “I never reported it. To whom should I report? The same person who intimidated me is the same person to whom under normal circumstances, I was to report.”

One journalist from the United States said, “I was too freaked out to report my situation (this was my first job right out of college), and the person I was working for who was causing the abuse was/is a very well-known figure in this industry. It would have been my word against his, and I felt completely powerless. I also felt that it would be career suicide to bring something like this against this guy.”

When respondents did report acts of “intimidation, threats and abuse,” results ranged from nothing changing to being forced out of a job. Some said they regretted reporting abuse, as negative responses from supervisors, colleagues and authorities made the situation worse.

An American journalist wrote: “After reporting...harassment and intimidation, I was the one sent home and removed from my normal responsibilities. Quickly the investigation turned on me. Embarrassing details about my personal life were dragged out and discussed by my supervisors. The HR department ruled against me based on incorrect factual information, and I appealed the decision. After the appeal, which also caused me extreme emotional duress and panic, my harasser was let go with a very generous severance package, though the institution still did not acknowledge wrongdoing. I never really recovered from the stress of reporting, and am not sure if I should have done it.”

Several respondents said their news organisations were more supportive of the perpetrator than the complainant.

Though not in the majority, some respondents said they experienced positive outcomes to reporting abuse. Incidents were cited when authorities took complaints seriously, leading to those responsible being convicted or sent to jail. When acts of intimidation or abuse took place in the office, some reported that perpetrators were dismissed from their jobs or reprimanded.

Impact of Intimidation, Threats and Abuse

When asked to describe the effect of “intimidation, threats and abuse,” respondents said they were concerned for their personal security and in some instances became depressed and experienced psychological trauma.

Some women said they started using pseudonyms or pen names after receiving threats. Others decided to stop reporting from specific regions, while a few were forced to permanently relocate. One respondent from Bahrain said, “I had to leave the country fearing for my safety...I have been living in the United States since then (more than 2 years now).”

A number of the women explained how they were forced to give up journalism entirely, while others left their jobs – either of their own accord or after being fired, as this Australian journalist described:

“I was sacked from my job – the management made it clear that they would not discipline the perpetrator.” Many stayed at their jobs but were no longer able to cover certain beats, or were discouraged from reporting specific stories by their editors.

Other journalists dropped stories because they feared for their own security, such as this journalist from South Africa: “I was too scared to publish their article as they also send me threats, that I must not even think of publishing that article, I pulled the story for my safety instead.”

Some respondents reported suffering repercussions in the workplace after receiving threats from external sources. Some said their salaries were cut, while others reported being demoted and subjected to gossip and unwelcome comments.

A journalist from Cameroon described what happened when she reported threats: “I was ostracised by other colleagues. No one wanted to be seen with me. I was removed from my office and asked to stop all work but continue reporting to the office. My salary was slashed.”

A number of respondents said they became accustomed to harassment and threats or chose to ignore them, though many of these still reported a psychological effect.

Digital Threats and Abuse

Increasing attention is being given by the media to digital threats and abuse. In the past year, a number of stories have been written about the online harassment of women journalists. In July 2013, three women journalists in the United Kingdom received bomb threats via Twitter, and a *Guardian* story from November 2013 looked into the issue of such attacks, stating that the Internet “provides a conduit that enables many who hold [misogynistic] views to attack and abuse women and girls, from what they rightly perceive to be an incredibly secure position.”

A January 2014 article in *Pacific Standard* by journalist Amanda Hess includes the author’s own experience with online harassment, when she was sent graphic death threats via Twitter. She interviewed a number of women journalists who have received public threats of rape, torture and death.

Survey respondents reported threats, substantial criticism, name-calling and verbal abuse online. More than 25% of “verbal, written and/or physical intimidation including threats, to family or friends” took place online.

Online Sexual Harassment

One of the most common ways in which women respondents are targeted online is through the use of sexual harassment. A definition of online sexual harassment has not been established, exacerbating the difficulties of redress. According to Danielle Keats Citron, a professor at the University of Maryland School of Law, “cyber gender harassment has a set of core features: (1) its victims are female, (2) the harassment is aimed at particular women, and (3) the abuse invokes the targeted individual’s gender in sexually threatening and degrading ways.”⁶

⁶Law’s Expressive Value in Combating Cyber Gender Harassment, Danielle Keats Citron, Michigan Law Review, Vol. 108: 373. P. 378; 390.

Survey respondents said they had been subjected to such harassment by email, and on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. One journalist from India said: “They will upload my photograph with ugly comments and people used to start commenting using abusive language in Facebook.”

Some respondents said threats against them detailed sexualised violence, as in this comment from a Moroccan journalist who spoke of ‘the threat of murder, rape and publish[ed] photos of me to the Internet and Facebook with the discredit of lies.”

One respondent from the United States said, “I frequently – typically after appearing on air as a commentator on political issues – receive threatening or harassing phone calls, emails and messages on Twitter that can range from comments on my appearance to threats of rape or other sexualized violence, to comments about my lack of intelligence.”

Another example from the United States demonstrates that online abuse does not always relate to a journalist’s work:

“For the nearly five years I worked as a technology journalist at a magazine, I was constantly criticized online. Often, this had nothing to do with the content of my articles. I was called a whore for writing a negative article about Apple, people searched me online to come up with embarrassing information and posted it beneath my articles, and people often made belittling or sexist jokes as comments. The conventional wisdom to ignore comments sections did not apply because my bosses required me to look at and respond to comments.”

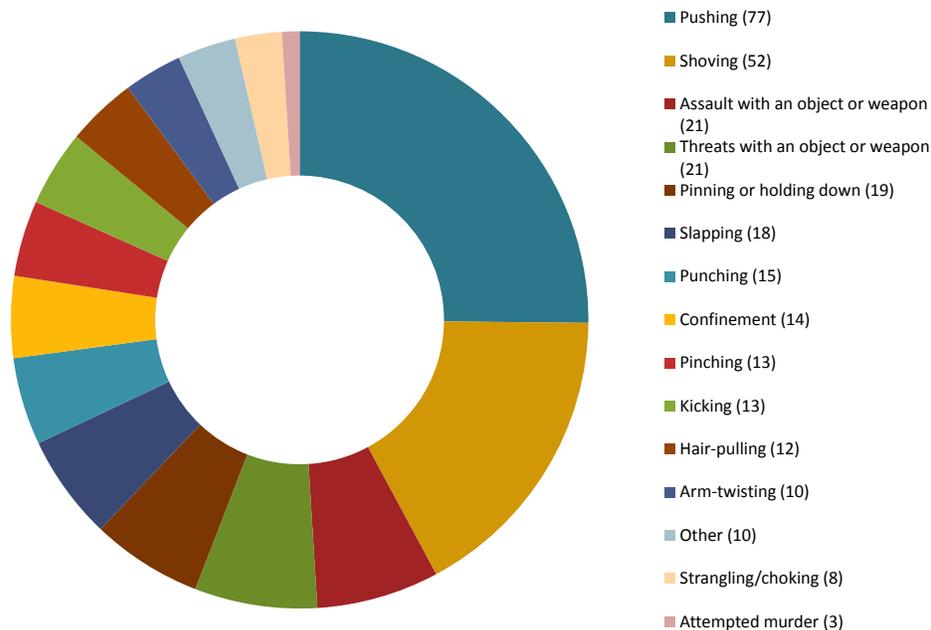
For journalists who experience online harassment, one of the most difficult aspects is that the perpetrators are often unknown, which gives them an added layer of protection. As this Canadian journalist explained: “Primarily the threats/insults come from anonymous online commenters. I’ve had people threaten to assault me repeatedly; one threatened to ‘human flesh hunt’ me. I’ve been called every name in the book (cunt, bitch, hag, slut, prude, idiot, etc.) and have had my education/intelligence/integrity questioned repeatedly. I’ve had people attempt to impersonate me to make it sound like I say horrible things.”

Respondents said that the use of harassment online is sometimes effective in silencing them and their colleagues. A Canadian respondent said she rarely does online journalism after facing numerous threats and insulting comments through digital platforms. A journalist from Argentina said she writes online under a pseudonym to avoid abuse.

As Keats Citron said, “Cyber gender harassment damages women as a group and society as a whole by entrenching gender hierarchy in cyberspace...they reinforce gendered stereotypes, casting men as dominant in the bedroom and the workplace and women as subservient sexual objects who are not fit to work online.”

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

The survey defined physical violence with the following acts (numbers indicate frequency of reported incidents⁷):



When asked “have you ever experienced any physical violence in relation to your work?” nearly a quarter (21.6%/118) of 547 respondents said “yes.”

The most frequently reported acts of physical violence were pushing and shoving, assault with an object or weapon, threats with an object or weapon, and pinning or holding down.

An Albanian journalist reported that someone tried to run her over with a car when she was walking. It wasn't the only incident in which a car was used as a weapon: a respondent from the United States wrote: “[I was] Tailgated and followed while driving my car; led to my car being totalled.”

Other reported uses of a weapon were more conventional, such as with a Venezuelan journalist who reported being threatened with guns by her sources when covering paramilitary groups.

Most incidents of physical violence took place in the field (45.5% /70 of 154 where location was reported), with more than one-quarter (26%/40 of 154) occurring in the street.

Other reported acts of physical violence took place at the office (one respondent said her co-worker “ripped hair out of my head and caused me to bleed” while she worked at her desk); some acts took place in a vehicle, as with an Indian journalist who said her car was stoned as she left an interview.

⁷Respondents were able to select all acts relevant to their experiences. For this reason, the sum of the responses equals more than the total number of respondents to this question.

The main perpetrators of physical violence fell under the general classification of “other” (27.4%/43 of 157 where a perpetrator was cited). Many of these were strangers in mob or crowd environments. Respondents commented that “other” also included media workers in “media scrums,” diplomats, politicians’ bodyguards, fixers and soldiers.

Police were cited as the perpetrators in 15.3% (24 of 157) of reported incidents of physical violence; interviewees perpetrated 13.4% (21 of 157) of all incidents, respondents said.

Some journalists said they were assaulted by subjects of their stories who were upset at the way they were portrayed. An American journalist recalled how a U.S. Army recruitment officer “wrestled” her for her tape recorder in an attempt to delete his interview.

One journalist said she was assaulted while covering a family that had been killed in a fire. While at the family’s funeral, a relative unhappy with the reporter’s coverage “picked me up out of my seat, dragged me outside by my hair, shoved me into a wall, dragged me down a staircase and then pushed me through the exit doors into the street, threatening me with additional violence the whole time.”

Several photojournalists said they were beaten or physically restrained after taking photos. In some cases, their camera was the target.

Men were overwhelmingly the main perpetrators, accounting for 77.2% (88/114 where perpetrator’s sex was noted) of reported incidents. But women were the perpetrators of some acts of violence, as reported by an Italian journalist: “My head was banged on a door which needed to be opened by a code number. I asked the person to dial it please, as she was not letting me by, and that’s when she banged my head on the door.”

Reporting Physical Violence

Respondents were asked if they reported any acts of physical violence to their employer, police or another authority; 35% (88 of 252) said “yes”. Around half (51.5%/50 of 97) said they reported it to their employer. More than a quarter (26.3%/21 of 80) reported it to police, and 22.7% (17 of 75) reported it to someone in authority. In a qualitative question about the outcome of reporting the violence, most said there was no result.

Impact of Physical Violence

Respondents said physical violence affected them psychologically, leaving them with feelings of anger, fear and guilt. Some were physically harmed by the violence, citing broken bones, bruising and bleeding.

One journalist working in Brazil explained the psychological trauma of her attack: “I was scared as hell just to walk on the street for a few weeks. I had troubles to fall asleep for a long time. And as I was walking in a street at night, I always turned round to check that no one was following me. And I am still traumatized to get into a car and avoid them as much as possible.”

A few respondents said acts of physical violence made them more aware of professional risks and more vigilant in preventing them. One Greek journalist said: “You learn how to minimize the risks as much as possible, and each experience makes you a bit wiser.”

Reporting in Mobs and Crowds

One of the most dangerous places for women journalists is on the street, when they are working in crowds. Staying safe in this kind of environment has been a significant challenge for many of those covering the Arab uprisings.

A number of the incidents of physical violence reported in the survey took place when women journalists were covering protests or demonstrations, such as in the following example from an American journalist: “When covering a large rally that turned into a riot several years ago, I was grabbed, pushed and physically restrained as I tried to take photos of the perpetrators of violence.”

In this instance the physical violence resulted in serious injuries to another American journalist: “Someone shouted that I was a spy. Sixty seconds later a mob of 100+ villagers were tearing me to pieces. Broken back, ribs, internal injuries, concussion.”

A Middle East-based journalist reported, “I’ve been picked up by my vagina twice in Cairo, I’ve been grabbed, groped, pinched, yanked by my hair by men in the streets in Egypt and Palestine. I have twice been cornered in vehicles by men, one time grabbing my throat until I kicked him in the face.”

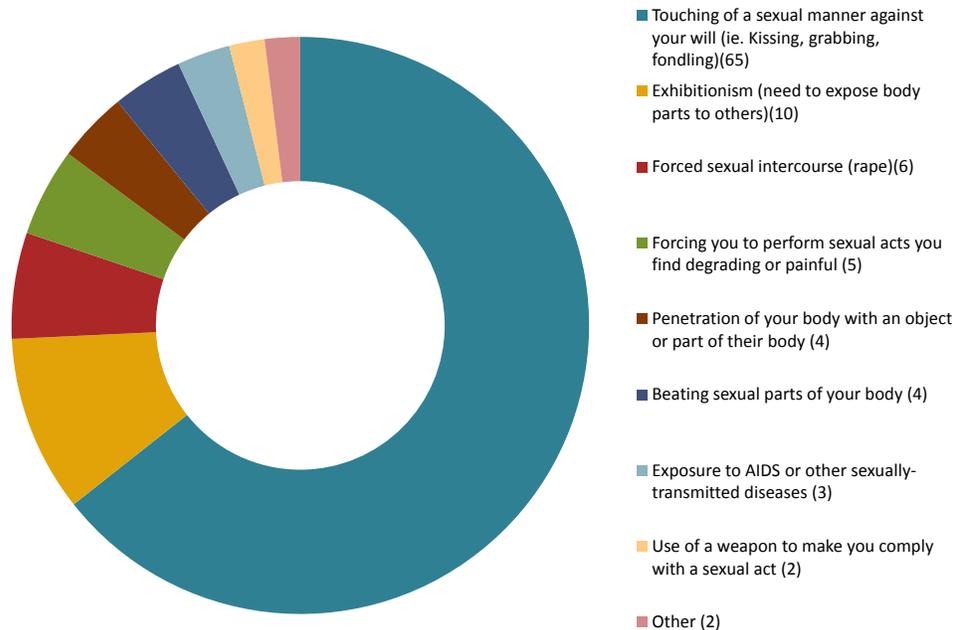
Again, in Egypt, an American journalist reported being attacked by a crowd: “Once I was caught in a mob attack where about 100 men tried to rape me. Luckily they only assaulted me with their fingers and hands, and I escaped with my clothes on, thanks to Egyptians [who] saved me.”

One journalist reported being routinely groped and physically assaulted in crowds during the course of her six years working in Pakistan.

But it isn’t always protesters who are responsible for acts of physical violence against journalists. A Turkish journalist said: “While I was working on the street to cover demonstrations I get shot by plastic bullets (several times) and threatened to be shot by a pepper gas gun. Also threatened to get arrested. But most of my colleagues get beaten, shot by pepper gas in the head/face/body, get arrested.”

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The survey defined sexual violence with the following acts (numbers indicate frequency of reported incidents⁸):



For the purpose of this survey, we chose to separate sexual acts of a violent nature from those of a verbal or physical but nonviolent nature. Reporting of acts in the second category can be found in the next chapter, *Sexual Harassment*. Responses to the study indicate that acts of sexual violence are often preceded by harassment.

When asked “have you ever experienced any sexual violence in relation to your work,” 14.3% (78 of 546) respondents said “yes.” The most frequently reported act of sexual violence was “touching of a sexual manner against your will,” while vastly smaller numbers reported acts such as exhibitionism and forced sexual intercourse (rape).

More than one-third of all reported incidents of sexual violence (38.7%/41 of 106) took place in the field. The next most often reported location was in the office (24.5%/26 of 106) followed by in the street, other (with specific mention of hotels, networking events and conferences), in a vehicle and at home.

Almost one-third – the largest percentage – of perpetrators were classified as “other” (22.5%/25 of 111 acts where perpetrator was noted). Respondents commented that “other” included protesters (while covering an event or rally) as well as politicians, diplomats, and event organisers.

Other reported acts of sexual violence were committed by co-workers (18.9%/21 of 111), bosses (15.3%/17 of 111) and supervisors (13.5%/15 of 111).

⁸Respondents were able to select all acts relevant to their experiences. For this reason, the sum of the responses equals more than the total number of respondents to this question.

One Ugandan journalist reported that her supervisor summoned her to his office and forced her to watch a sexually explicit film on his computer, after which he “said he wanted to put [me] in the mood just the way he was feeling. He immediately grabbed me by the hand and started forcing me to touch his penis and to kiss his lips.”

Other reported acts of sexual violence were perpetrated by interviewees, government officials and police. A Spanish journalist reported being harassed repeatedly by an interviewee while colleagues looked on. The treatment eventually escalated to violence:

“A government official that I was supposed to interview in a third-world country told me that I was ‘just a fucking journalist’ and that he was literally going to ‘fuck’ me. The harassment went on for about 4 hours in the presence of another journalist and a UN representative who did nothing to defend me from his grabbing, insulting and disgusting and gross comments until the government official of that country pulled down his pants in an attempt to rape me. It was then when finally the U.N. director grabbed my hand, and we started running away to get out of the island we were stuck in. Afterwards the U.N. director said he had not defended me because he thought I was handling the harassment like a bullfighter.”

Men were the main perpetrators in the vast majority (95.6%/70 of 74) of reported acts where the perpetrator’s sex was cited.

Some respondents reported being raped and some had their bodies penetrated by an object or body part. One woman said she was raped after two hours of sexual harassment.

A British respondent described her experience of covering the Arab uprisings: “I have been cut on the waist, masturbated on, held in a taxi while the driver locked the door and masturbated, mobbed in Tahrir square, smacked on my behind, [and] followed....”

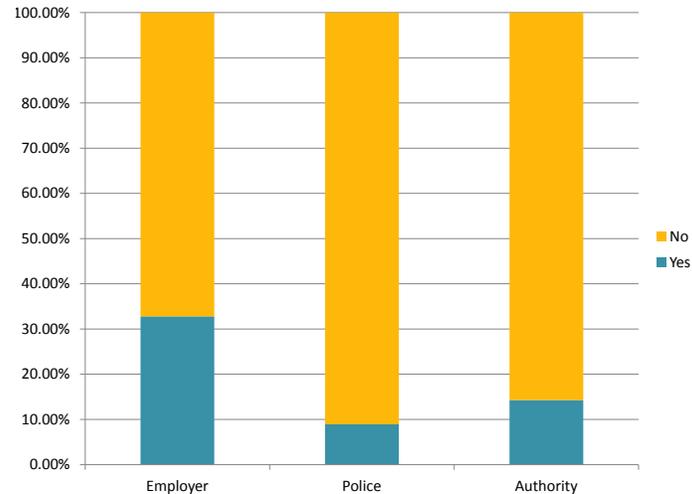
A journalist from the United States describes an incident of sexual violence she experienced: “I was taken to an isolated car park after accepting a lift from a prosecutor and forced to perform oral sex.”

A photojournalist from India described how she was violated by the bodyguard of a government minister, who “blatantly pushed me away...with his hands square on my breasts. He did this in full view of the crowd and police around. He was smiling at me the whole time.”

A British journalist who was based in Pakistan described being sexually assaulted by “other journo and/or other men in press scrums groping my crotch and breasts...on one occasion, when I was pregnant with my first child, a man at a demo in Karachi grabbed my breast so hard it hurt for days and knocked me off balance.”

Reporting Sexual Violence

Did you report the sexual violence/to whom?



More than three-quarters (80.7%/142 of 176) of the women who experienced acts of sexual violence said they did not report them.

When incidents were reported, journalists were more likely to tell their employer than police or another authority. In their qualitative responses when asked why they chose to report/not report acts of sexual violence, some women said they thought reporting the incident would make it more traumatising.

Impact of Sexual Violence

Some respondents explained the impact of acts of sexual violence: “It had a psychological impact, hatred, mistrust,” said one woman. Another said, “I was deeply humiliated. It was difficult to continue facing my bosses after this happened.”

Most respondents cited psychological effects from the violence. One U.S. journalist said, “I dropped out of the paper, attempted suicide, and ended up running away.”

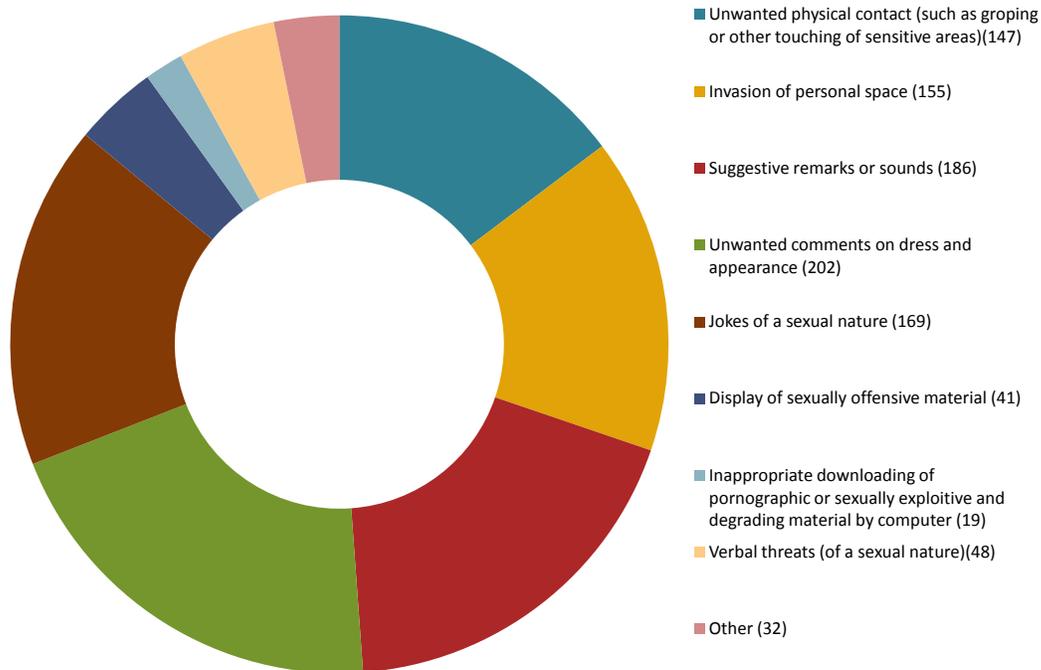
A Spanish journalist said, “[I] left the country and the company I was working for. Have been suffering fear and anxiety towards men ever since.” And another writes: “It has affected my marriage, and I’m depressed about it.”

Some respondents said they became more vigilant toward mitigating danger while doing their jobs. One Australian journalist who worked in Egypt said being violated “made me more careful about how I cover protests. I don’t cover protests at night unless they are very important, and I haven’t covered protests in Tahrir in over 6 months.”

Another foreign correspondent said she has become “more aware while working. I now dress like a man and cover my hair in protests to avoid catching attention, and I carry pepper spray and a taser.”

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

The survey defined harassment with the following acts (numbers indicate frequency of reported incidents⁹):



Almost half (47.9%/327) of 683 respondents said “yes” when asked “have you experienced sexual harassment in relation to your work?”

The most frequently reported act of sexual harassment was “unwanted comments on dress and appearance.” These include remarks reported by one woman who was told “you should wear tight pants more often; they make you look slim.”

Other reported acts include “suggestive remarks or sounds” such as catcalling and “jokes of a sexual nature,” as well as “invasion of personal space,” and “unwanted physical contact.” An American journalist said “many of the subjects I interviewed for a specific project were male and thought it was okay to touch my shoulders, give me unwanted hugs or pats on the back, [and] make sexual/degrading jokes about females.”

Many respondents who said they had experienced sexual harassment encountered several different acts, as described by an American journalist:

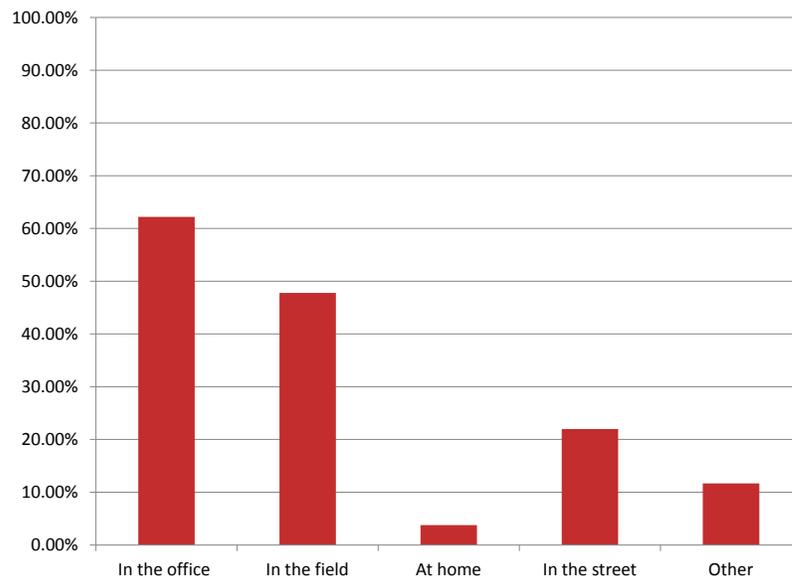
“I’ve been shoved into dark rooms and molested, followed into my hotel room, harassed over the radio in front of everyone [with whom] I work with sexual suggestions humiliating me, [received] comments

⁹Respondents were able to select all acts relevant to their experiences. For this reason, the sum of the responses equals more than the total number of respondents to this question.

about how I look and what I should wear, being hit on even after saying no a million times to boss and then retribution where I am denied my pay...I could go on forever.”

The majority of those who responded to the question “where did the sexual harassment take place?” said it occurred in the office (42.2%/181 of 429). Other incidents happened “in the field,” “in the street,” “other” (these included press scrums, crowds and online) and “at home.”

Where did reported acts of sexual harassment take place?



An Indian journalist reported her experience with sexual harassment in the office: “The boss would physically touch me in the corridors, stalk me all over the office, try forcing himself on me, kiss me, [and] fondle me when alone with me.”

A Swedish journalist reported that she was sexually harassed numerous times in her office by her supervisor and co-workers, who engaged in “touching, hugs, hello kisses too close to the mouth, nibbling! Comments on my dress, my shoes, my makeup, the way I walked and my body. Comments on whether I was pregnant or not. Requests to take pictures of me in a bikini. Downloading porn on the field computer that we all used. Degrading jokes about women.”

The same journalist reported experiencing “grunting when I was looking especially “delectable” and “comments on my sex life.”

More than half of reported incidents where a perpetrator was classified (55.3%/283 of 512) were committed by a “co-worker,” “boss,” or “supervisor.” One American journalist recalled being given the nickname “Legs” by her male editors, who “used that moniker to refer to me whenever sending me out on assignment to talk to mostly male sources (i.e., police, firefighters, veterans). Let’s throw ‘Legs’ at them!”

An Albanian journalist said she was excluded from meetings where major work decisions were made because her mostly male bosses and colleagues swapped “lewd” jokes and stories throughout. A respondent from New Zealand said she regularly experienced “remarks about the size of [my] breasts... and having to listen to my supervisor share explicit stories about sexual experiences with various women in the workplace.”

Among the 512 incidents, other perpetrators of sexual harassment were “interviewees” (16.4%/84), “other” (9.2%/47), “government official” (7.8%/40), “police” (4.7%/24), “don’t know” (3.9%/20), and “subordinate” (2.7%/14). Respondents who classified the perpetrator as “other” named friends of colleagues, conference delegates, people in crowds and soldiers as among those responsible.

Among acts where the sex of the perpetrator was given, 93.8% (270 of 288) were committed by “mostly men.”

Some respondents described being harassed while reporting. A Mexican journalist said she was being interviewed on-camera about a story when she described certain government actions as “immoral,” and the interviewer replied, “Speaking of immoral, what are you doing tonight?”

An American journalist said one of her beats involved sourcing police case reports, and the officer in charge would give them to her “only after he had made sexually suggestive remarks.” She said these remarks were quite blatant, such as “I want to fuck you.”

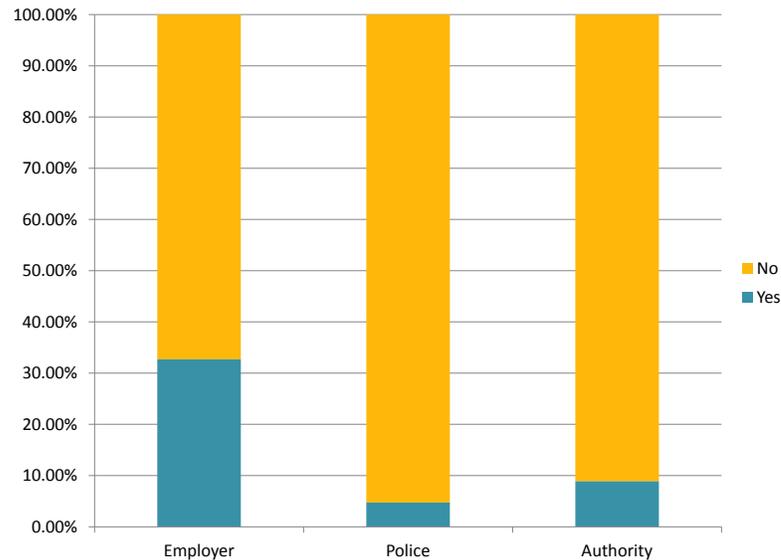
Many respondents indicated that sexual harassment is so common it has become a routine part of their jobs. One British journalist described a range of incidents spanning several decades, beginning with an incident where she was called to an office as a young journalist and told it was because senior management wanted to gang rape her.

She said she was “sexually threatened (in my mid-twenties), sexually assaulted by my boss, demeaned, diminished, compared unfavourably to young male colleagues. Offered an abortion when disclosing I was pregnant (in my early thirties). Told on resigning (in my mid-forties) that my boss “never really believed that the mothers of children should be at work in the evenings.”

The word “ongoing” was used several times by respondents to describe the harassment they faced. Another British journalist said she had been subjected to sexual harassment “most of my life,” adding “now I am over 40 it is a blessed relief to be ignored for my looks and respected for my work.”

Reporting Sexual Harassment

Did you report the sexual harassment/to whom?



A small minority of respondents who experienced sexual harassment said they reported it. Of those who did report at least one incident, 32.7% (88 of 269) said they reported it to their employer. Far fewer reported to the police (4.7%/10 of 211) or another authority (8.9%/19 of 213).

When asked “why did you decide against reporting the sexual harassment?” in a qualitative response question, many women said they feared negative consequences to themselves. A respondent from Egypt said “no one” reports sexual harassment because “they care more about what will the people say about a girl [who has] been touched [by] a strange man.”

A Tunisian reporter echoed this concern, stating that after being harassed she “even didn’t trust policemen or authorities who could accuse me instead of [the] men harassing me.”

Others said they were implicitly or explicitly discouraged from reporting harassment, as with an American crime reporter who was repeatedly harassed by a police officer. When she approached her editor about the officer’s behaviour, she was told “he does that to everyone” and urged to ignore it.

Several respondents noted a climate of impunity toward sexual harassment, where those being harassed are ignored. A Russian journalist said that sexual harassment in newsrooms is “familiar and considered normal. Only rape and causing serious bodily harm are considered an occasion to refer to the authorities.”

Some said their organizations had insufficient internal mechanisms for handling sexual harassment reporting. They noted a hierarchical newsroom structure in which the bosses and editors who were perpetrating the harassment were those to whom one would report an incident.

A respondent from India said, “I didn’t know who I could complain to – we didn’t have a HR dept or any kind of grievance redressal system.” [sic]

Similarly, a Canadian journalist working overseas wrote: “There was no official or authority to whom I could report...my employer, on another continent was not in a position to do anything about it.”

Some consequences included escalated harassment or job loss, as with an Australian respondent who reported harassment to her station manager, and was told “if I couldn’t stand the heat, I should get out of the kitchen.” She was soon fired and sent a harassing letter by the same manager.

Those who did report sexual harassment were asked “what was the outcome...?” Responses indicated mostly negative effects, from being disregarded to losing assignments or, in a few cases, being fired.

An American journalist said that when she was sexually harassed, the result of reporting the behaviour was “nothing. The employer accused me of having a relationship with my boss, and just being angry that it didn’t work out.” She added, “It was far more traumatic than if I hadn’t said anything.”

Other respondents said they faced similar experiences and were discouraged from talking about the harassment by supervisors, colleagues and in some cases union representatives. Several said they were told to “grow up” or “forget it.” Another said her editor was sensitive to her complaints, but ultimately “advised me to reject or ignore inappropriate behaviour by the harasser” because “making a formal complaint could have endangered my news outlet’s access to the agency.”

Harassment by powerful sources was cited in several other examples, including a journalist from Zimbabwe who said “in the case of the diplomat, an American, my boss persuaded me not to complain... Against my better judgment, I dropped it and now wonder how many other women that man went on to harass.”

A few respondents said they were taken off beats or reassigned when they complained of sexual harassment. One journalist from India said reporting harassment “only made sure you were never given plum assignments. One is expected to take it as an inevitable part of the job.”

Some respondents said they experienced positive outcomes when reporting sexual harassment. When harassment took place at work, a few women said the perpetrators were “verbally warned,” censured or fired. Others noted a lack of official response but said their colleagues were supportive.

Impact of Sexual Harassment

When asked “how did your experience of being sexually harassed affect you?” many respondents said the harassment had psychological consequences. An American journalist said, “I was overwhelmed by shame, humiliation and anxiety. I would sit in my office in a cold sweat.”

Dozens of respondents cited emotional or psychological effects. Others said they blamed themselves for the treatment. A Spanish journalist said “I kind of tried to forget about it and moved on but ended up in psychological therapy years later, as I suffered from really bad self-esteem, depression, extreme fear of men and being around them.”

Some women said they quit their jobs after experiencing repeated harassment, and a few said they relocated entirely.

Respondents also said they made an effort to change their behaviour around others, including not making eye contact, not attending work social functions (when harassment occurred in the workplace) and not forming friendships with anyone related to work. Several women said they have modified the way they dress for work, or make an effort to present themselves as personally conservative.

An Israeli respondent who reported being harassed by interviewees said she became “colder and more critical, more distant, during my interviews.”

Many women said they were able to ignore sexual harassment. A respondent from the Falklands said, “It doesn’t bother me too much although I do feel a bit nauseated sometimes.”

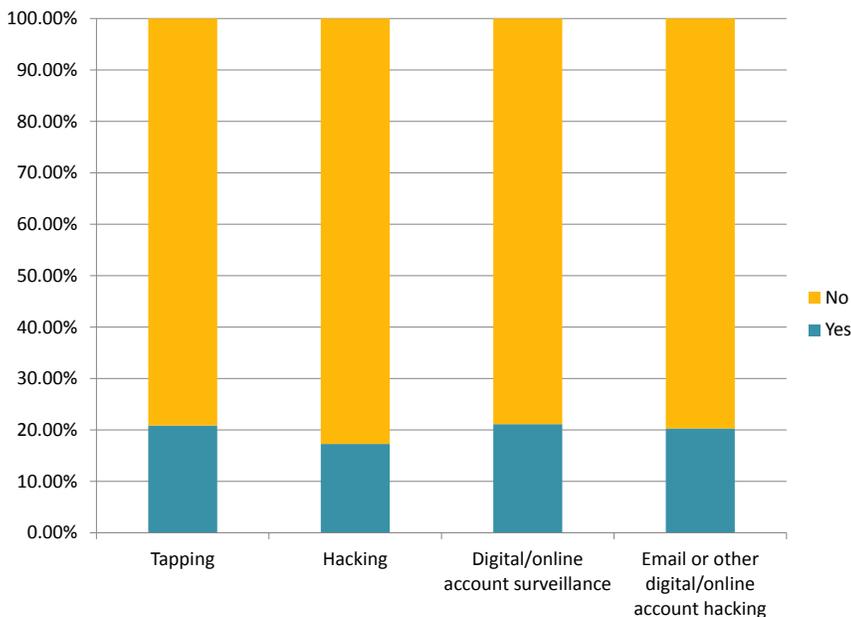
Those who reported psychological effects said the trauma was ongoing. An American journalist based in Egypt said, “It has caused me to be much more paranoid, and more aggressive when another incident occurs. I had a month of severe depression in 2012 after a series of incidents occurred. I’m learning to cope better now, but I still find it hard to motivate myself to work, knowing that sexual harassment is almost always a guarantee.”

TAPPING, HACKING AND DIGITAL SECURITY THREATS

The survey defined “tapping, hacking and digital security threats” as the following:

- Tapping is the monitoring of telephone and Internet conversations by a third party, often using covert means.
- Hacking is the interception of telephone calls or voicemail messages.
- Digital security threats occur when the security of a digital/online account or file has been breached/hacked or threatened.

Have you ever experienced tapping, hacking and/or digital security threats?



More than one in five (21.1%/106 of 502) respondents said they had experienced digital/online account surveillance, while 20.3% (104 of 512) reported email or other digital/online account hacking and 14.6% (74 of 428) said they experienced another form of hacking (personal websites and online news sites were commonly cited targets). Around one in five (20.9%/111 of 532) said they had experienced phone tapping. Some respondents (19.2%/41 of 214) reported they had source material stolen, including the identity of sources, emails and interview content. The most commonly named medium for stealing source material was email hacking.

Nearly half of the journalists who experienced tapping, hacking and digital security threats (45.6%/68 of 149) said they “don’t know” who the perpetrator was, while more than a quarter (27.5%/41 of 149) said it was a government official, 15.4% (23 of 149) named police as the perpetrator and 12.1% (18 of 149) selected “other,” (comments mentioned activists, story subjects, lobbyists and competitors).

The most common targets for breach among 469 reported incidents were personal email accounts (19%/89) and work email accounts (17.3%/81). Other channels where hacking was reported included personal mobiles (14.5%/68), social media accounts (12.6%/59), and work mobiles (11.9%/56).

One Russian journalist said she was informed by the FSB (state security apparatus) that her phone was tapped and her apartment bugged. A respondent from Turkey also encountered state phone surveillance: “I called a news source and we arranged a meeting point for an interview. When I arrived there, the gendarmery [sic] was already there waiting for us.”

A Zimbabwean respondent described her experience with phone tapping, saying, “I even had conversations with the intelligence officers who were listening in!”

Surveillance by official actors spanned the globe. A Canadian journalist reported her phone was tapped by the Canadian Ministry of the Interior, and an American journalist discovered her personal records were being sourced by the National Security Agency.

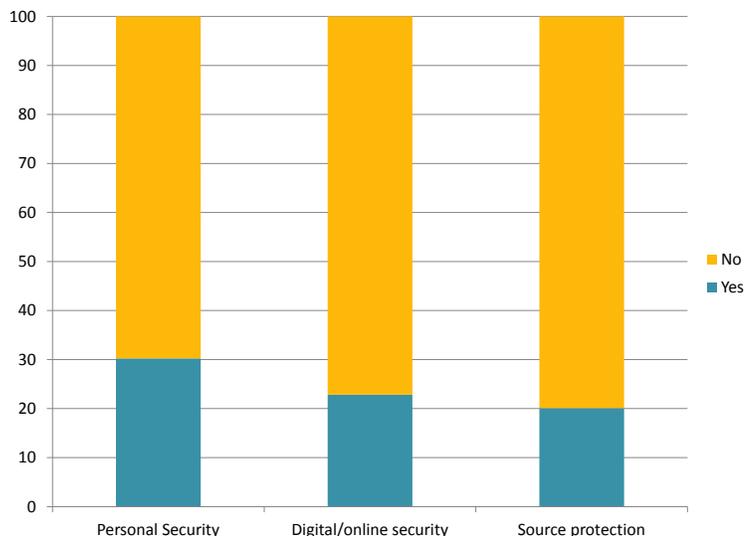
A number of respondents said their emails or websites had been hacked. One Pakistani journalist said her email was hacked and subsequently published on several blogs.

Many respondents reported suspicions that they were being hacked or surveilled but were unable to find out for certain. Some said that the rising prevalence of surveillance has made them cautious about how they convey information. A journalist from Sri Lanka said, “I have been constantly observed by the state apparatus and the military. I have been followed and threatened in different ways and my communication is scrutinized. As a result, I no longer drive and hardly travel alone. I have enhanced my security on all my social networking sites and email accounts.”

She went on to say that in spite of added preventive practices, she feels “insecure.”

PREPAREDNESS, PREVENTION AND PROTECTION

Does your organization provide training and/or resources for any any of the following?



When asked does your organisation take any measures to protect your personal security?” more than two-thirds of respondents 69.8% (309 of 443) said “no.”

The 30.3% (134 of 443) respondents who did receive some preparation cited security training, equipment (such as flak jackets), bodyguards, fixers and drivers as among the resources provided when working in the field or travelling. Guards, chaperones during late hours and pepper spray were among those things provided for security at the office.

Respondents were asked if their organisations provided training and/or resources for digital/online security. Of 451 respondents, more than three-quarters (77.2%/348) said “no,” while 22.8% (103) said “yes.” Similarly, 79.9% (354 of 443) respondents said their organisations did not provide training and/or resources for source protection, while 20.1% (89 of 443) said they did.

There were 173 respondents to a qualitative question about ideal measures to protect personal security. Across nations and levels of experience, several recommendations were repeatedly emphasized.

The most often suggested preventive measures were:

- Physical security/self-defence training
- Check-in protocols
- Secure transport to/from assignments
- Equipment (flak jackets fit for women, gas masks, pepper spray/small weapons/other deterrents)
- Flexible work hours so assignments do not extend late at night
- First-aid training
- Male fixers/drivers (vetted by news organisations)

- Interoffice security drills
- Trauma counselling
- Digital security training

Other recommendations included setting up safe houses for journalists routinely reporting in hostile environments, assistance with temporary relocation and secure phone lines for reporting incidents. Several respondents voiced concern that their news organisations ill prepare journalists, both men and women, to mitigate risk related to their work.

But some respondents said their organisations facilitated hostile environment or first aid training as well as anti-harassment and workplace behaviour seminars.

Other respondents said their employers instruct them about check-in procedures or other protective measures. A respondent from Cameroon said “[They are] Schooling us on how to stay safe on the field. Taking our emergency contacts and asking us to keep emergency contact [numbers] safe and accessible at all times.”

Freelance media workers are sometimes at additional risk doing their jobs, as they have none of the institutional resources or support afforded employees of a news organisation. Several freelance journalists said they are unable to afford the training and equipment that would help keep them safe.

Emotional Support and Counselling

About one-third of respondents (31.2%/132 of 423) said their organisations provide “emotional support or professional counselling/therapy in the case of any work-related harassment or violence.” The remaining 68.8% (291 of 423) said no such resources were made available to them.

Respondents cited counselling hotlines, employee assistance programs, or therapeutic services built into human resources departments as among those resources available. Some women said there were limitations on those services provided, as with a journalist from India who said her employer provides access to a therapy group that is constantly overbooked “and sometimes it is difficult to get an appointment.”

Some respondents said their organisations set up peer support groups for dealing with trauma. Others noted the formation of informal peer support groups when other counselling was not available.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations bring together a selection of suggestions from respondents, expert advice from women journalists, and tips from INSI's publication *No Woman's Land – On the Frontlines with Female Reporters*. All content in this section had been reviewed by security and risk management consultant Caroline Neil, who has worked with journalists for 15 years and currently leads INSI's safety training. It is meant as advice and may not be appropriate to all situations in which the journalist finds herself, but should be regarded as providing a starting point for safety considerations.

Preparation

All journalists are inexperienced at some stage in their careers, but inexperience should not equal insecurity. Journalists must ensure they are well-prepared to understand and mitigate the risks they may face in the course of their work.

Such preparation includes considering whether or not reporting a story might compromise a journalist's safety. If a story requires travel to a new environment, the journalist should research the location, language, culture and customs in advance and make informed decisions about how she will conduct her work. When appropriate, she should establish local contacts vetted by her news organisation, colleagues, or other reliable sources in advance of her departure.

Journalists should be clear about their travel arrangements and schedules, even when field reporting locally. They should leave contact details with a trusted person and have the appropriate documents with them, including relevant permits, press passes and insurance.

They should carry out a risk assessment, have the appropriate training and equipment when possible and ensure they have a contingency plan to get out of trouble if the situation deteriorates.

INSI safety trainer and consultant Caroline Neil says if you “fail to prepare, you prepare to fail.”

Cultural Norms and Clothing

For women journalists, an awareness of cultural norms and practices is particularly important. They should respect the local dress code and err on the conservative side. It is often a good idea to take a scarf, which can be used for many things but is particularly useful in Muslim countries as a head covering.

A journalist should be aware of how her contacts and sources might perceive her and avoid courting cultural misconceptions. She should think about limiting or avoiding alcohol consumption when it could be considered taboo for her to drink.

She should be conscious that some types of conversation will be considered inappropriate, and that eye contact in some cultures can sometimes be construed as flirting.

Any situation can present risk. As one foreign correspondent put it, “men in powerful positions staying in your hotel can be even more threatening than border guards in a conflict zone.”

There are clothing considerations that may help women journalists stay safe. They might consider wearing wedding rings, carrying photos of male relatives, or inventing a husband and children to fend off unwanted attention. In addition to this, loose-fitting clothing may be more appropriate in conservative countries as well as shirts that cover the hips and thighs. They should consider flat, sturdy shoes that are easy to run in.

Situational Awareness and Emotional Response

Once on a story, journalists need to have an awareness of their environment. Part of a journalist's job is to notice details, but often a reporter becomes so involved in covering a story that she fails to take stock of her surroundings and mitigate potential threats. In many cases, situational awareness and observation can make all the difference between safety and danger. "Trust your instincts – they are almost always right. The dodgy dirt road, the guy behind you in the street, the free Wi-Fi connection – if it feels like it's not a good idea, it rarely is," said one Southern Africa-based correspondent.

When a journalist is reporting from a location that might be risky, she should pay close attention to her surroundings and ask herself questions such as "what are my exit routes?", "are there any people or events that seem out of the ordinary?", and "who might present a threat?"

Situational awareness varies depending on where a journalist is working: outside or inside, during the day or night. A journalist may need to think about where her exits are, and how to hide, defend or protect herself, while being aware that some structures and environments may themselves pose an additional threat or danger.

A journalist should also understand that reactions to threat and danger can vary. She should know her reactions in crisis situations and be able to channel them into behaviour that can help rather than harm her.

Logistical Precautions and Staying Safe

Journalists should be aware of their personal security when travelling, staying in hotels or using other forms of accommodation.

When using transport, they should avoid unlicensed cars and taxis and always use reputable or recommended companies or drivers, ensuring they book taxis from hotels or airports, or in advance of travel. On buses at night they should avoid the back, consider placing themselves closer to the driver, and they should avoid empty carriages on trains and deserted stations at night. Female journalists should only take public transport at night if absolutely necessary.

Hotels should be found beforehand where possible; journalists might consider staying in a higher standard of hotel and avoid staying on the ground floor or in rooms with balconies, which are more easily broken into from outside. They should always ensure the windows and doors lock, keep them locked and never open the door to strangers. If they suspect they are being followed, they should stay in busy places and avoid walking in deserted corridors or taking lifts.

If it isn't possible to lock the door of the hotel room, journalists should consider barricading it with luggage or furniture, but ensure they can escape the room in a hurry if they need to. A number of additional security measures can be used if required, including door wedges and door alarms to keep intruders from entering the room. Journalists should have a plan if someone does gain entry and consider having a legal form of self-defence near to them, such as a small can of hairspray. They should ensure they have thought about how they will use it and to what purpose. Always have a plan!

Communications and Networks

Journalists should develop check-in protocols with someone they trust – be that a colleague, friend or family member. When a journalist is travelling, she should have an established time for checking in, with a clear contingency plan should she fail to make contact with her point person.

She should write her contacts down (in case her phone or computer are stolen/damaged) and store them in multiple places, giving a copy to the person with whom she is going to keep contact. She should be careful of sharing contact details, plans and accommodation details with people she doesn't know. She should also ensure that her online profile does not compromise her safety or that of those around her, and she should be especially careful with photographs, Facebook and Twitter updates and geo-locator facilities on phones and computers.

A journalist should consider carrying a basic phone that nobody would want to steal and have it pre-programmed with emergency numbers on speed dial.

Drivers, fixers and other team members should be vetted. Establishing passwords or security protocols is a good precaution when making initial contact with a driver or fixer, such as being picked up at the airport.

Where possible, a journalist should cultivate relationships with local women and follow their lead. "If I am in a situation and there are no other women present, that's usually a good sign for me that I need to be extra vigilant about my safety," said one U.S.-based journalist.

Health and First Aid

Journalists should travel with a first-aid kit at all times and know how to use it.

In many high-risk environments, emergency services may be unavailable or ill equipped to handle serious injury. Journalists may be accountable for their own treatment and that of their colleagues. As well as first-aid kits, which should include items to treat trauma, journalists should also consider travelling with relevant medications, including antibiotics; personal hygiene products, such as sanitary towels or tampons and wet wipes; and other survival equipment, such as water purifying tablets, oral rehydration solution and extra bottled water.

Different Landscapes and Changing Needs

The understanding that there cannot be a “one size fits all” approach to safety training and risk mitigation is gaining traction in the news industry. While there is no disputing the need for training and support, it must be tailored to the needs of the journalists and the environments in which they work. It should also be realistic in terms of available resources in the host country.

Sexual Assault Preparedness

by Frank Smyth, Global Journalist Security

Defending oneself against sexual assault begins with situational awareness to avoid potential attacks. Journalists must be vigilant and learn to spot the signs of danger before they materialize into an attack. Attacks may come from individuals, groups or mobs, often without warning. For example, if a journalist notices that some people in a crowd are paying undue attention to her, it is time to move.

Journalists in hostile environments should work in teams as much as possible. Prior to beginning coverage, they should discuss with whom they will team up and where they will head for safety. Exit routes should always be planned in advance. Journalists may wish to learn and practice skills to deter potential or active attackers. The focus should be on deescalating an altercation, giving the journalist the time and opportunity to avoid confrontation and move away. Deterrence may involve simple hand and body manoeuvres that redirect an assailant while providing an opportunity to move aside and away. Such skills require practice, but even simple techniques can be effective under duress.

Harassment, Attack and Sexual Violence – If It Happens

Female journalists should make it clear they will not tolerate inappropriate touching or comments from support staff, colleagues and sources. If they are alone and being harassed, it may help to have a cover story, such as saying “I’m waiting for my husband – or colleague – to arrive” and if possible they should consider moving to join a mixed sex group, even if they are strangers.

If a journalist suspects she is being followed, she should go to a busy place such as a hotel or a shop, and if possible and appropriate, consider informing somebody in authority about her suspicions.

Journalists should consider carrying a whistle or a rape alarm in their hand or in an accessible part of their bag. But if flying, they should check beforehand if it can be carried on the airline.

Be aware that some everyday items – such as hairspray and spray deodorant – may be used as weapons and can deter an attacker.

If you are subjected to sexual assault or violence, seek medical help as quickly as possible. Be aware that you may go through a range of emotions, so consider seeking emotional support immediately.

Elana Newman, The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma

Studies show that most journalists cope well despite repeated exposure to work-related traumatic events such as trauma and harassment. Nevertheless, such experiences may also create personal and professional challenges.

It is helpful to understand one's reactions to any sort of violence or threat. Experienced journalists engage all sorts of survival mechanisms in a crisis – ranging from heart-pounding fight-or-flight responses to cool but hyper-alert vigilance. The challenge comes because those reactions, used to successfully cope with the situation while it was happening, may remain engaged afterward, when danger is no longer present. Understanding this can go a long way and help a journalist understand and feel more in control. For example, hyper-vigilance may have been a lifesaver when dealing with intimidation and surveillance, but in a safe environment can make a journalist feel jumpy or mistrustful. Understanding this pattern and learning to slow one's system down through exercise, relaxation, mindfulness and self-talk can all help with this transition.

People tend to fall into two extreme response modes after trauma – “approach” or “avoidance.” So in the aftermath of assault, a journalist may jump into work full force or become totally avoidant, or switch between the two. Finding the balance or the way back to one's previous work habits may take a bit of work and time.

In the aftermath of a sexual assault or other traumatic event, lining up a support network – whether friends, family or colleagues - is important, and using that network – even if you are experiencing alienation, mistrust, disappointment or anger – is critical. Journalists who can find solace and social support will tend to do better in the long run.

Journalists who experience sexualized violence may be more at risk for posttraumatic reactions, such as having intrusive memories and nightmares; avoiding reminders of the events; experiencing numbness, shock, trouble concentrating and trouble sleeping, feeling irritable and angry, and feeling jumpy and easily startled. Such symptoms are normal in the short term after an assault. Trying to make decisions – even small ones – and taking steps to feel as safe as possible can make one feel better. Exercise can help with the anger and trouble sleeping. During any period of readjustment, being kind to yourself is important. Monitor yourself to assess if you are feeling out of control, or using drugs or alcohol differently, or experiencing problems that you had previously overcome. If such changes persist over time, in a way that interferes with life, professional counselling from a qualified trauma therapist can make a big difference. Evidence suggests that in cases of sexual assault, an individual not feeling “back-on-track” 3 months after the event is unlikely to continue to heal on her own without some professional assistance.

Finally, it is important to recognize that although women are more likely to experience sexual violence and harassment, men do experience sexual forms of violence. Moreover, if journalists are like other groups, men are more likely to experience more forms and higher intensity of nonsexual violence. The Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma Research Division at the University of Tulsa is currently conducting a study examining overall working conditions and their impact on journalists and trauma-related news practice; one important aspect of the study examines harassment and general stressors on both men and women. Results should be available later this year.

A fact sheet about trauma exposure among journalists is available at <http://dartcenter.org/content/covering-trauma-impact-on-journalists>

Harassment, intimidation and violence happen – but that does not mean journalists and news organizations should accept them as inevitable, unpreventable or consequences of work-related duties that cannot be addressed.

INSI: What to Take in Your Grab Bag

It is advisable to carry a grab bag with you at all times when in hostile or challenging places. Backpacks are best as they are easy to carry on your front or back.

INSI advises keeping it basic. Here are some suggestions. Your bag's contents can have several variations. Your location and the security situation should dictate the equipment you have packed (the following list for instance does not include personal protective equipment, such as masks, goggles or flak jackets):

- Passes and other permits
- Passport and documents
- Local and foreign currency, credit cards
- Water and snacks
- Prescription and essential drugs
- Emergency contact numbers – hard copy
- Hat, sweater, jumper/jacket or sunhat and sunscreen, dependent on heat or cold
- Mobile phones and chargers with spare batteries or power source
- First-aid kit
- Torch with spare battery
- Wet wipes/toilet paper
- Compass/map
- Tracker



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