

Attacks and Harassment

The Impact on
Female Journalists
and Their Reporting

TROLLBUSTERS

IWF INTERNATIONAL
WOMEN'S MEDIA
FOUNDATION

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Female Journalists
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This survey was conducted by the International Women's Media Foundation and Troll-Busters.com with financial support from the Craig Newmark Philanthropies. IRB for survey/interviews through Ohio University. FM3 was engaged to assist with survey distribution and data analysis.

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This report provides a clear examination into the professional dangers of being a female journalist in the news media today. Against a global backdrop that has changed significantly in the past five years both politically and digitally, this report provides an update to the 2014 report “Violence and Harassment Against Women in the News Media: A Global Picture” published by the International Women’s Media Foundation and the International News Safety Institute. This new report describes how different actors are using physical and social media strategies against women journalists and media workers to intimidate, sow disinformation, discredit the journalist and the news media, and create significant professional harm. This hostile environment is a direct attack on freedom of expression worldwide with the intent to silence women’s voices and the stories they tell.

Survey respondents stated that online attacks have become more visible and coordinated in the past five years, particularly with a rise of nationalism around the world and the use of digital networks to thwart political processes. Extremists, online manipulators and antagonists use online channels and the media itself to amplify their messages. Whether government-sponsored attacks in the Ukraine, so-called alt-right extremists in the United States, or the use of bots and fake accounts, online attacks against journalists have become more sophisticated in nature, more insidious in their damage to the news enterprise and more dangerous for journalists, both online and off.

This report is based on the findings of a global survey on violence, attacks and online abuse against women journalists and media workers. The survey was launched in January 2018 and was distributed to a global sample of media workers through March 2018. This report is also informed by semi-structured interviews conducted from June 2017 to March 2018 with 25 women journalists at all levels of media – from journalism students to management.

The 597 women journalists and media workers who completed our survey work in a variety of media environments online and off, in cultures outside their countries of origin or domestically, on topics ranging from politics to the environment. They are visible and public on social media, most often using real names and their personal accounts to distribute content to users online. They are using platforms such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and others to find sources, distribute content and engage with users online as a daily part of their work routines.

Nearly 2 out of 3 respondents said they'd been threatened or harassed online at least once – slightly more than reported physical threats or harassment. Of those, approximately 40 percent said they avoided reporting certain stories as a result of online harassment.

This report uncovers that for women journalists and media workers, physical, sexual and online abuse is a part of their daily work lives. Freelancers felt particularly vulnerable after online attacks and expressed frustration that they didn't have anyone to whom they felt they could report their abuses. As for the effects, respondents report both short- and long-term emotional and psychological effects. Many respondents reported discomfort after the incidents, difficulty concentrating, or avoidance of people or places that reminded them of the incidents.

Respondents reported professional consequences as well. Many journalists report having either abandoned their pursuit of specific stories or having difficulties with their sources as a result of the threats and abuse. Younger journalists with fewer years in the profession were also targeted; some considered leaving the profession entirely.

In this new report, we describe the short- and long-term emotional and professional impact of online threats that affect freedom of expression worldwide and free speech and the free press in the United States. We describe how these online activities manifest and detail new types of online threats. Finally, this report details recommendations including responses by newsroom management and others to help better support freedom of expression and the work of women journalists and media workers worldwide.

Methodology

The survey findings in this report were collected from an online survey in English distributed between January 2018 and March 2018. We received 701 responses from people identifying as media workers; 597 respondents self-identified as women and 93 as men. This survey represents a global sample of women journalists and media workers, however as the survey instrument was distributed in English, the results are limited and may not accurately detail local conditions for journalists for whom English is not their primary language.

This survey was conducted jointly by the International Women's Media Foundation and Troll-Busters.com, with funding from the Craig Newmark Philanthropies. Dr. Michelle Ferrier, founder of Troll-Busters.com was the principal research investigator. The survey was distributed by the IWMF, Troll-Busters.com and FM3, a polling firm, using a snowball sample of members of professional journalism organizations, through databases of the IWMF, academic and professional networks on Facebook and Twitter and other media channels.

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 on their answers. Respondents were offered the opportunity to speak with us by email or directly if desired.

Dr. Michelle Ferrier also conducted qualitative interviews with several survey respondents, resulting in the case studies presented throughout this report. Interviews were conducted from June 2017 through March 2018 under Ohio University IRB #17-X-15.

The following results refer only to our female respondents, as the purpose of the study is to observe trends among women media workers. Please note that a snowball sample was used for the survey distribution, and therefore the results may not be generalizable to the full population of media professionals. 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 to our English language instrument. 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 that may be applicable in other situations and with other persons. It is these responses that inform the important recommendations in this report.

Percentages

Percentages throughout the report have been rounded to the nearest decimal point.

About International Women's Media Foundation

The IWMF works to unleash the power of female journalists to transform the global news media. IWMF fellows and grantees – both freelance and staff journalists – become experts in reporting in underserved regions, generate must-read stories, align with top outlets, and bring critical issues affecting women and others to light. It is the only organization that provides safety training, byline opportunities, and emergency support tailored to female journalists and photographers around the world.

The IWMF also recognizes female journalists and photographers whose courage sets them apart. The organization researches the factors that allow journalism to remain dominated by men – while advocating for inclusive practices that help propel women and minorities into leadership.

About Troll-Busters.com and Dr. Michelle Ferrier

Dr. Michelle Ferrier is the founder of Troll-Busters.com, a service for women journalists who are targets of online harassment. She is the 2017 SXSW Dewey Winburne community service award recipient for her work with TrollBusters. She received funding from the Knight Prototype Fund of the Knight Foundation in 2015 to develop TrollBusters.

She holds a Ph.D. in Texts and Technology from the University of Central Florida and a master's in journalism from the University of Memphis with research interests in strategic social media, digital identity and reputation management, online communities, hyperlocal online news and media entrepreneurship. She is a digital content and systems architect and has developed user interfaces and technologies for storytelling, engagement, community and social media. She also is an early adopter of online education technologies and online education. As an educator, she has taught new courses in digital innovation and entrepreneurship, strategic social media, virtual environments and human-centered design.



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Journalists and other media workers face a range of digital and physical threats that threaten freedom of expression. Violence continues to plague journalists around the globe, including murder and assault, online harassment in the form of rape and death threats and other types of intimidation, increased surveillance, impersonation and other digital threats. The online environment has been weaponized and uses speed and distributed networks to mount sophisticated attacks that amplify misogyny, sexism, racism, homophobia, religious and other hate speech. Imposter accounts and fake tweets sow misinformation. As cultural producers and cultural amplifiers, journalists are part of a larger power struggle over hateful ideologies, violent misogyny, and false narratives. Both online and off, the world has become much more dangerous for journalists in the past five years.

“Being exposed to hate speech is a daily part of my job because of the nature of the reader comment protocols on our company website, which enable haters to comment anonymously, either about me or to make racist comments about others. There are so many of these comments that I can’t flag them all.”

Social media use has also become much more integral to journalistic practices. Journalists are using social media and other digital tools for social sourcing, creating and distributing content, engaging with users, broadcasting live and other journalistic uses. With the increased use of social media for distribution and community engagement, individual journalists are put at risk on a daily basis physically and online. Not only are they being required to use social channels as part of their work, they are also using social channels that blend personal and professional identities, exposing them to threats 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from domestic and international sources.

For women journalists and media workers, gender-based attacks continue to be a persistent part of the daily routine of women journalists. Online attacks frequently reference body, personal features or family and personal relationships. Many of the threats women journalists receive on Twitter, Facebook and online backchannels are sexist in nature, designed to intimidate or shame the journalist. Comments challenge the intellectual rigor and professional credentials of women. Women are sent visual

content and memes that are violent or sexist in nature through email and backchannels. They are stalked online and may have personal images or information disclosed that threatens their physical safety. These attacks seek to discredit women journalists and media workers, damage their reputations, and ultimately silence them. Perpetrators of these physical and online threats operate for the most part with impunity, leaving individual journalists to navigate how best to respond.

We are able to categorize these threats into three areas:

Direct harassment refers to things that people do directly to one another. Examples include: being called offensive names, being threatened physically, and being stalked.

Invasion of privacy refers to harms done to the victim through the unauthorized access to and exposure or spreading of information beyond the owner's control. Experiences include: being hacked, having information about or images of persons exposed online without their permission, being impersonated, being monitored, and being tracked online.

Denial of access occurs when someone uses the features of the technology or platform to harm the victim, usually by preventing access to essential digital tools or platforms. Examples include: sending a very large number of unwanted messages, rendering the account unusable; misuse of reporting tools so that the person is blocked from using a platform; and technical attacks that overwhelm a device, site, server or platform and prevent access to it.

The #MeToo and Time's Up movement in the United States placed gender, sexual harassment, and online abuse on a global stage, and highlighted the silence that pervades media organizations and management that turns a deaf ear to survivors' reports. One of the conclusions of this research is that online and offline abuse is often underestimated by media management and minimized by authorities and others who are best positioned to provide support. Half of our respondents had reported a recent online incident to management. Of those who did report to management, one-third said they were not satisfied with management's response. Others did not report incidents for fear of retribution or other professional consequences such as being denied certain stories. Despite growing evidence of online violence and physical attacks against women journalists, many media organizations do not have formal policies or protocols in place to protect their employees.

"I feel like I was penalized for being attacked. And in terms of harassment – same thing. Think it contributed to bias [conscious or unconscious] in giving me future assignments. And when I was harassed by a colleague I was told by management to 'get a beer' with him."

In Canada, organizations are held vicariously liable for online threats hurled at online brand managers. The online environment is seen as an extension of the physical work environment and organizations can be held responsible. Media management everywhere must learn better practices for responding to such threats and acts against those they employ – whether in full-time or freelance capacities.

Women journalists and media workers experience significant short- and long-term consequences from these abuses. Our interviews with women journalists show that these persistent attacks do change their behaviors and how they conduct themselves professionally. They may close social media accounts or self-censor the topics or words they use. They may begin to second guess their work or put themselves in excessive risk to get the extra details or quotes to make a story. They may terminate lines of inquiry, burn relationships with sources or avoid triggering spaces. There are also some journalists who must relocate in exile and even leave the profession.

This report details how respondents perceive their safety, the effects on their news gathering and the long-term effects on the news enterprise. We describe the types of threats and the ways in which media workers responded to these threats. We detail the short- and long-term effects of online violence on the emotional and psychological well-being of journalists. In addition, we detail the significant silencing within newsrooms and media organizations about online abuse and provide specific suggestions from journalists themselves to their colleagues and their supervisors.

The threats identified in this survey show that these women journalists feel as if they are on their own when it comes to dealing with online harassment. Professional culture and behaviors reinforce a culture of silence. Women wage a war on two fronts – online and in real life. They fight against attackers and to preserve their reputations online and to get support from management, colleagues and others. They may engage in risky behaviors to prove themselves to their male colleagues. Freelance journalists continue to be the most vulnerable group as they risk their livelihood and financial

stability, and they do not have the support of assigning editors or someone else to whom they can report the abuse. Many of our respondents reported being taken off of assignments or receiving professional backlash for reporting physical and online attacks to their supervisors or managers. This report highlights that the professional threats to job and security are not just perceived...they are very real for these women.

“As a freelancer, management of these issues is very difficult because there is no supervisor. I’m currently dealing with a sexual harassment issue that I reported in October, and nobody did anything. Now 40+ women from every single country in Latin America and South America have come forward online to share their stories. Nobody listened to me or a bunch of other women in October. Literally there have to be huge numbers of us for anyone to care at all.”

We make the case for a more nuanced approach to addressing online threats, and to examine solutions in the newsrooms, on media platforms, and on social media that address the systematic silencing of women journalists.



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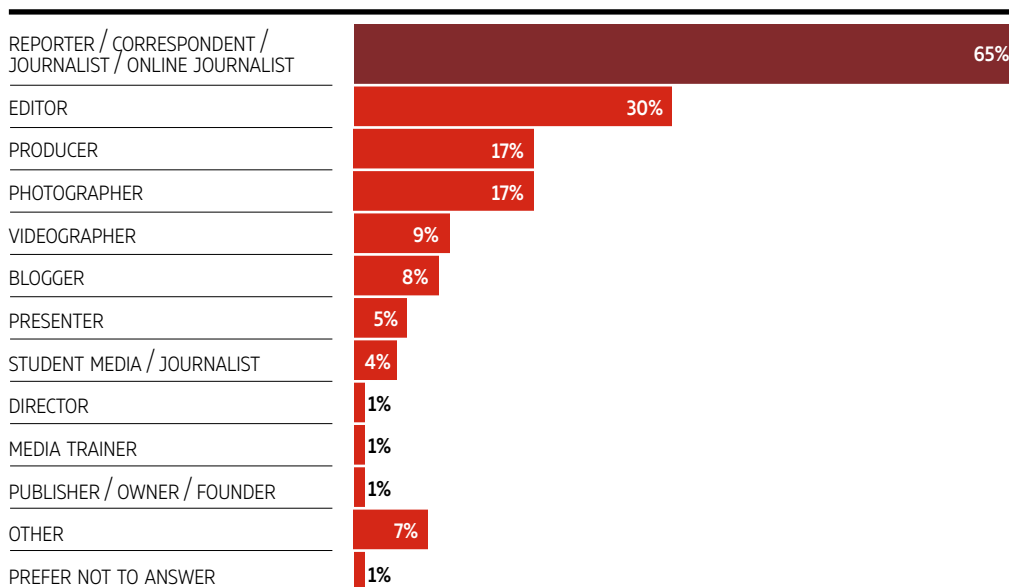
Conclusion

Job Role and Employment Status

Respondents' job roles were broken out into the following categories. Respondents were able to select all that apply. Most respondents call themselves reporter or journalist (65%). The "Other" category was selected by 7 percent of the respondents, who included publisher/owner, freelance/independent writer/photojournalist, and managing editor as responses. Nearly two-thirds of our respondents work as freelancers, some are fully self-employed while others freelance part-time, but also are employed by a media organization.

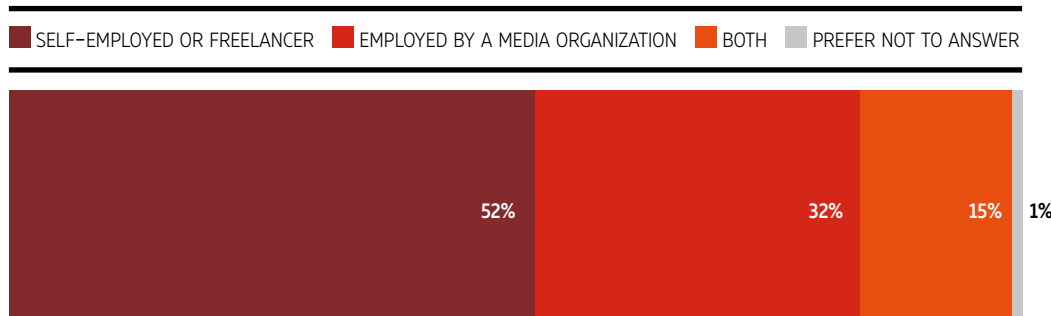
Most respondents call themselves reporters or journalists

What is your formal status as a journalist or media worker? (MULTIPLE RESPONSES ACCEPTED)



Half of respondents are freelancers or self-employed

Are you self-employed or a freelancer, are you currently employed by a media organization, or both?



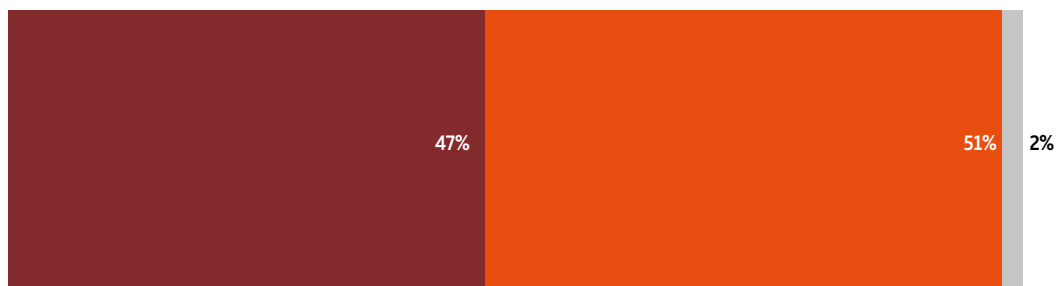
Nationality

Nearly half of the female respondents consider themselves U.S. citizens and live in the United States. A majority (59 percent) work outside the United States.

Respondents are nearly equally from the U.S. and abroad

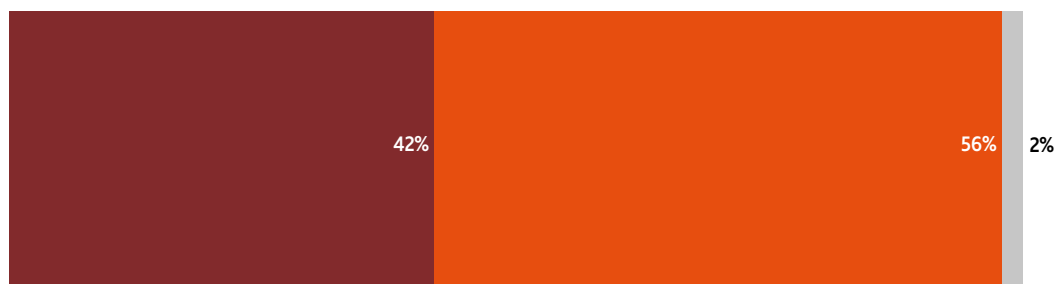
Do you consider yourself to be from the United States?

■ YES ■ NO ■ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER



Do you currently live in the United States or abroad?

■ UNITED STATES ■ ABROAD ■ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER



A majority work in countries outside of the United States

In which country do you do most of your work?

■ UNITED STATES ■ OTHER COUNTRIES ■ PREFER NOT TO ANSWER



Most respondents derive more than 75% of their income from their work in the media field

How much of your income is derived from your work in the journalism or media field?

LESS THAN 10% 10% TO 25% 26% TO 50% 51% TO 75% 76% OR MORE PREFER NOT TO ANSWER



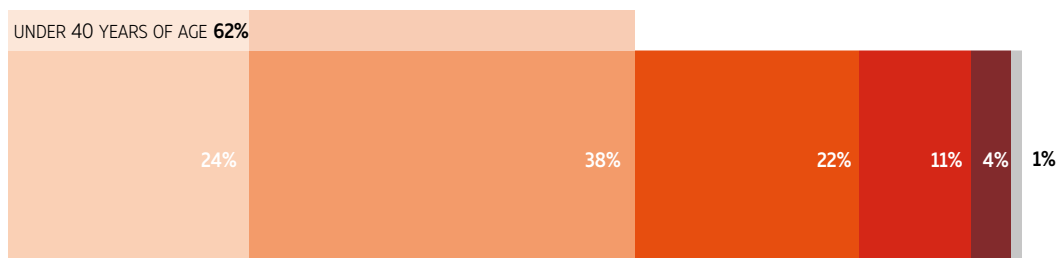
Age

More than 60 percent of our respondents were under the age of 40 and described themselves as Caucasian. The age and ethnic distributions were as follows:

Most respondents are under 40 and identify themselves as white

Which category below indicates your age?

18 TO 29 30 TO 39 40 TO 49 50 TO 59 60 TO 69 PREFER NOT TO ANSWER



With what race or ethnic group do you identify?

ANGLO, CAUCASIAN, OR WHITE HISPANIC OR LATINO ASIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER
NATIVE AMERICAN BLACK OR AFRICAN-AMERICAN OTHER PREFER NOT TO ANSWER

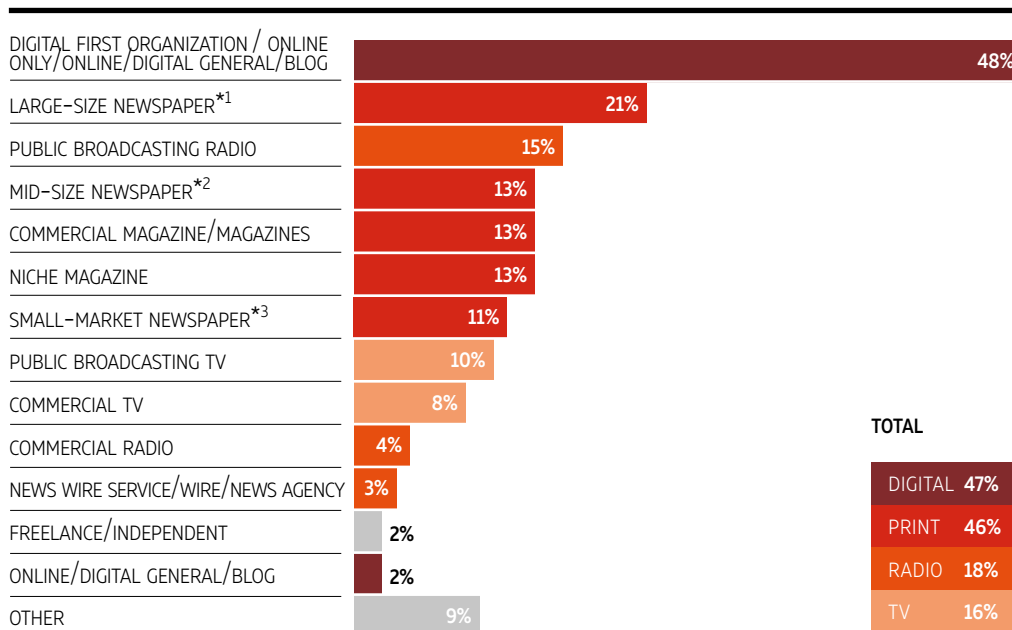


Type of Media and Time in Profession

Half (50%) of our respondents work for digital first and online-focused

Nearly half of respondents work in online journalism

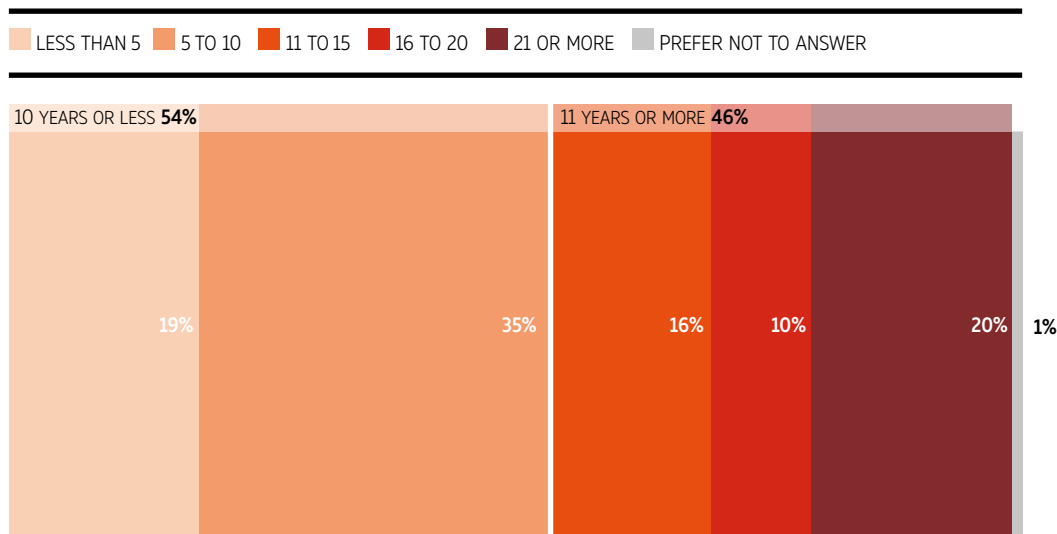
In which area of the media do you work? (MULTIPLE RESPONSES ACCEPTED)



* CIRCULATION: 1. 200,000 + 2. 50,000-200,000 3. - 50,000

Respondents are both new and long-term media professionals

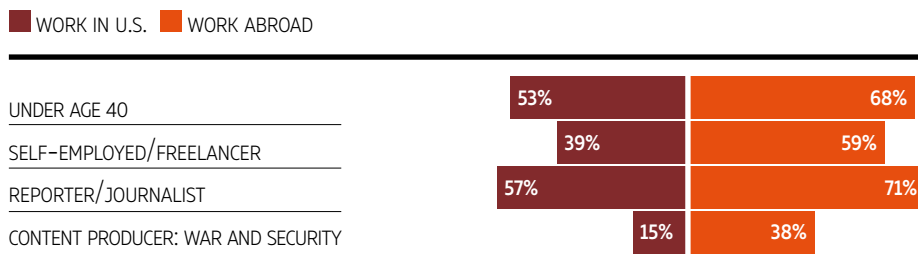
How long have you worked in the journalism or media field? (IN YEARS)



Attacks and Harassment

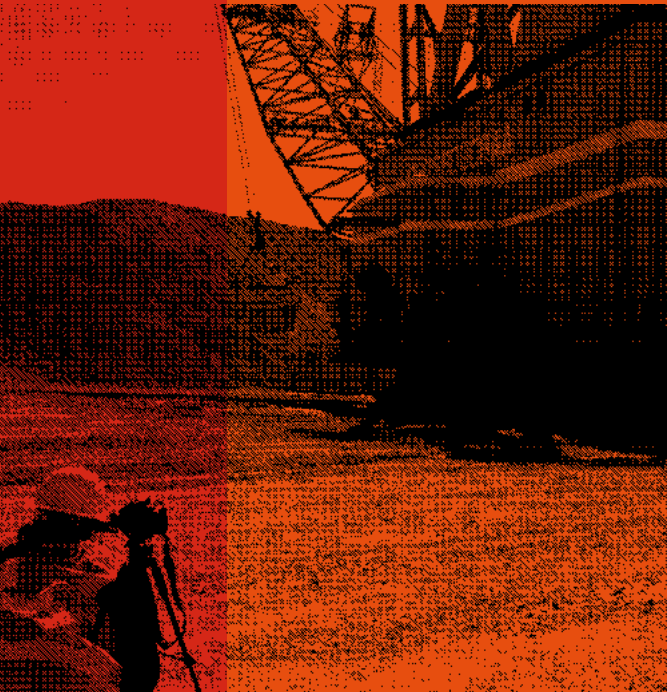
The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting

Notable demographic/ content differences



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This report expands on recent research about specific examples of physical and online violence against women by focusing on the frequency and severity of the attacks and by looking at how journalists, their managers and others respond to these threats. By defining the scope and characteristics of these attacks, we identify points of leverage for individual journalists, media management, social media platforms, law enforcement and others to respond to the hostile environment in appropriate and timely ways.

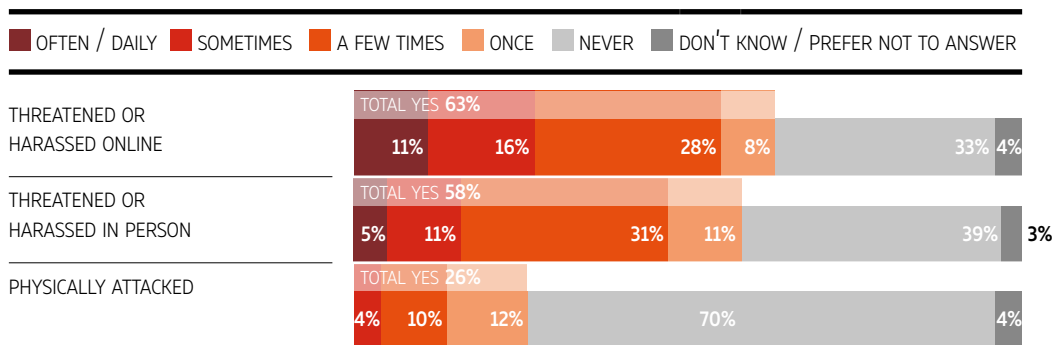
Our report found that large numbers of respondents have been threatened, harassed or physically attacked as a result of the work they do in the journalism or media field:

- 63 percent** indicated they had been threatened or harassed online
- 58 percent** indicated they had been threatened or harassed in person
- 26 percent** indicated they had been physically attacked

One in 10 respondents has experienced a death threat in the past year.

Large numbers of respondents have been threatened, harassed or physically attacked

Please indicate if you have experienced each of the following as a result of the work you do in the journalism or media field.

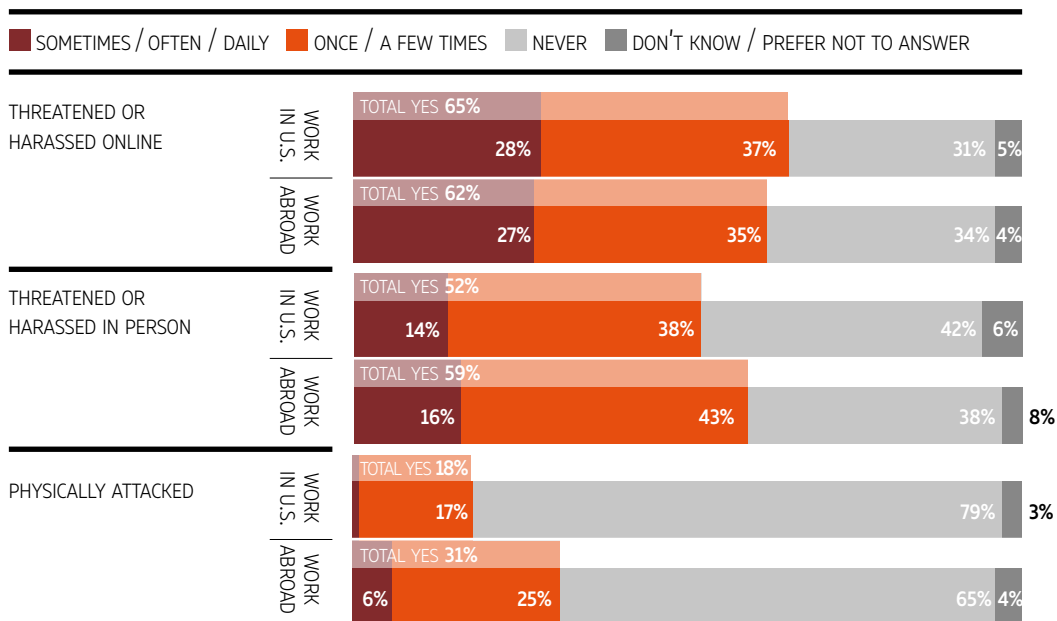


The risks to women journalists and media workers that work outside of the United States are high. Thirty-one percent of those working outside the United States have experienced physical attacks, compared to U.S. journalists at 18 percent. **Nearly two-thirds of women respondents say they have been threatened or harassed online at least once.** More than half of the respondents indicated they had been threatened in person and more

than once. Across both physical and online activity, women journalists and media workers are persistently threatened and attacked.

Those working abroad are more likely to have experienced a physical attack than U.S.-based women journalists

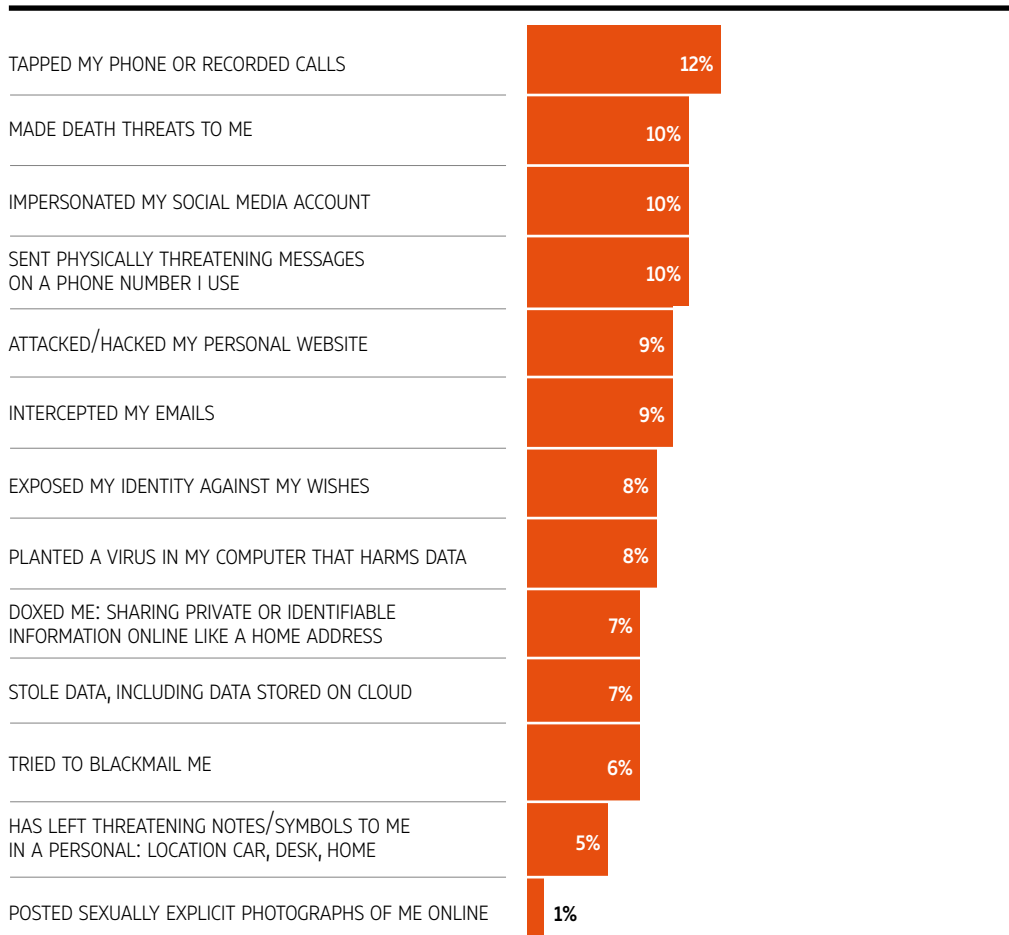
Please indicate if you have experienced each of the following as a result of the work you do in the journalism or media field.



Our report looks at a variety of different threats that women journalists indicate they have experienced. In the past year, 52 percent of these respondents have personally experienced the following threats and 83 percent indicate they've received multiple types of threats in the past year.

Respondents experience a wide variety of threats; 1 in 10 reported receiving death threats.

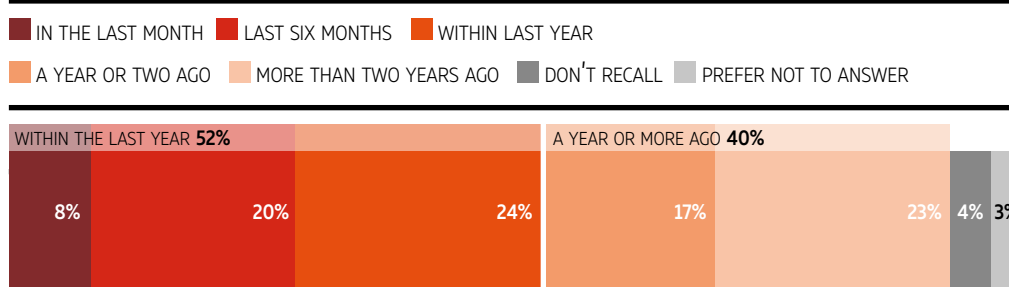
As a journalist or media worker, have you, personally, experienced each of the following in the past year?



Most women respondents have experienced an offense within the past year

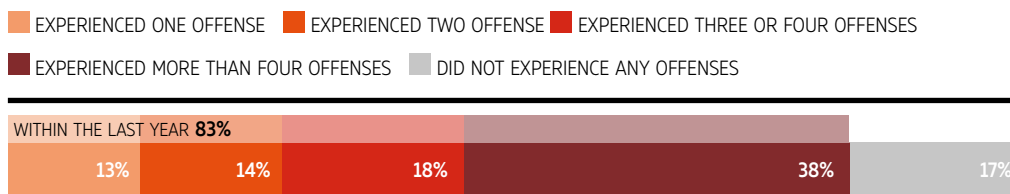
Did your most recent experience with being threatened, harassed or attacked occur...

(ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED OR ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE, N=451)



Seven in 10 women experienced more than one type of harassment, threat, or attack in the past year

As a journalist or media worker, have you, personally, experienced each of the following in the past year?



The majority of respondents say that in the past five years they have seen a rise in all types of threats – both physical and online.

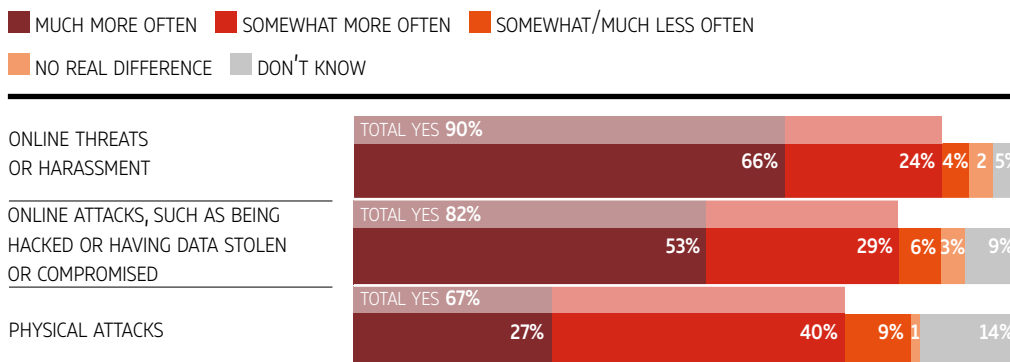
Sixty-seven percent of respondents say that journalists and media workers face physical attacks more often in the last five years.

Ninety percent indicate that online threats have increased over the past five years, with 82 percent indicating that digital attacks are on the rise, including such activities as having social accounts hacked or data stolen or compromised.

More than half of the respondents say they are concerned about their safety while doing their work. Sixty-eight percent of women say they are concerned about their online safety; 53 percent indicate a concern with their physical safety.

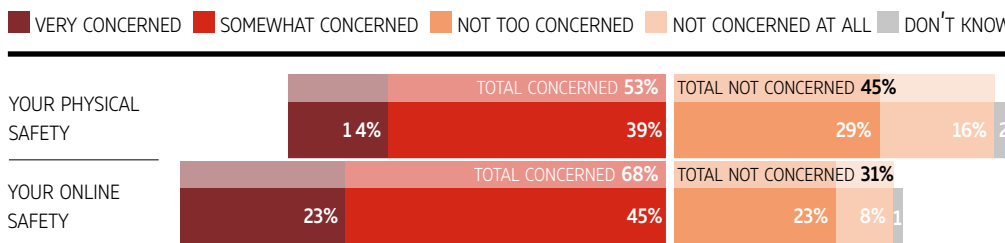
The vast majority see a rise in online threats/attacks; high numbers feel this way about physical attacks as well

Would you say journalists and media workers face each of the following much more often, somewhat more often, somewhat less often, much less often, or is there no real difference in the last five years?



Respondents are concerned about their physical, and more so, online safety

As a member of the journalism or media field, how concerned are you about _____ in fulfilling the duties of your job?

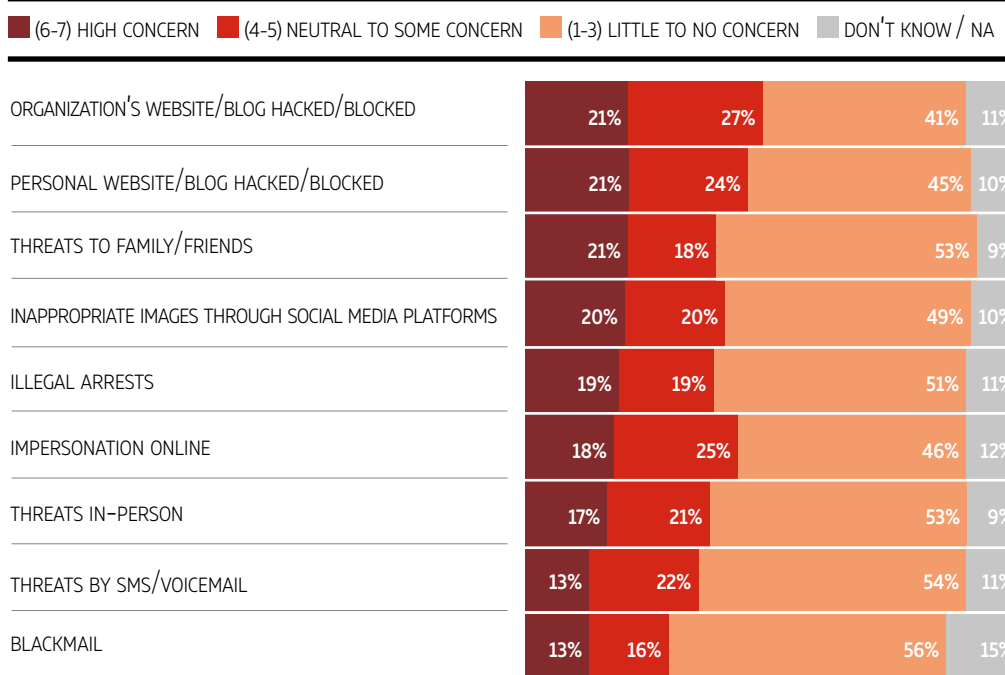


Respondents express high concern for other types of threats to equipment, websites, and other threats:

- Organization’s website/blog hacked/blocked
- Personal website/blog hacked/blocked

Respondents most concerned with being hacked/blocked and threats to family and friends

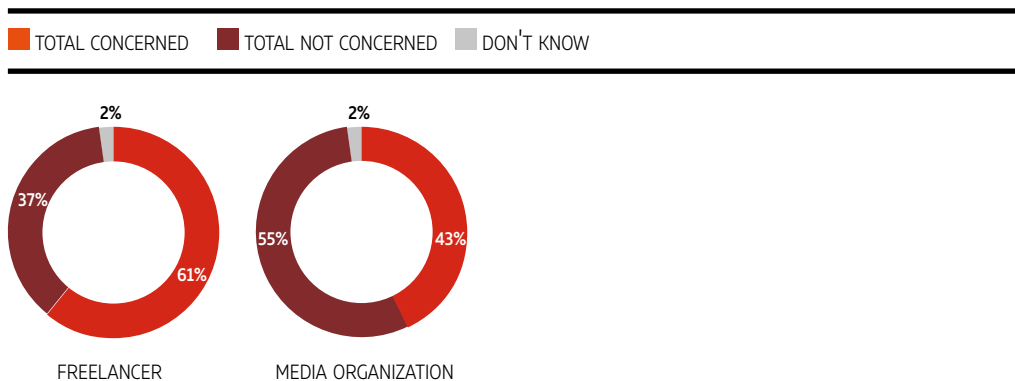
Please indicate how concerned you are personally with each of the following as a result of the work you do as a journalist or media worker. (RATED ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 7 WHERE A "1" = NOT CONCERNED AND "7" = EXTREMELY CONCERNED)



Our international sample included 57 percent women journalists who are full- or part-time freelance or contract media workers. Freelance workers are more concerned about their physical safety than their counterparts who are employed by media organizations. Sixty-one percent of freelancers indicated they are concerned with their physical safety. This group of self-employed journalists is most vulnerable to threats because they may not have institutional or peer supports and are working on their own online or in the field. Those who have already experienced some type of physical or online attack remain hypervigilant.

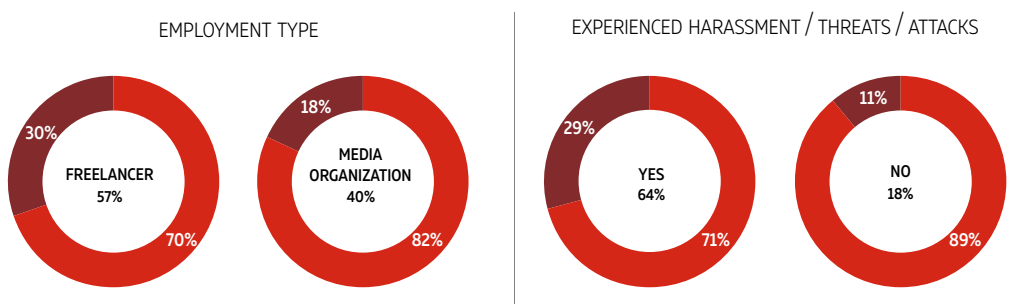
Freelancers express more concern about their physical safety

As a member of the journalism or media field, how concerned are you about your physical safety in fulfilling the duties of your job? (BY EMPLOYMENT TYPE)



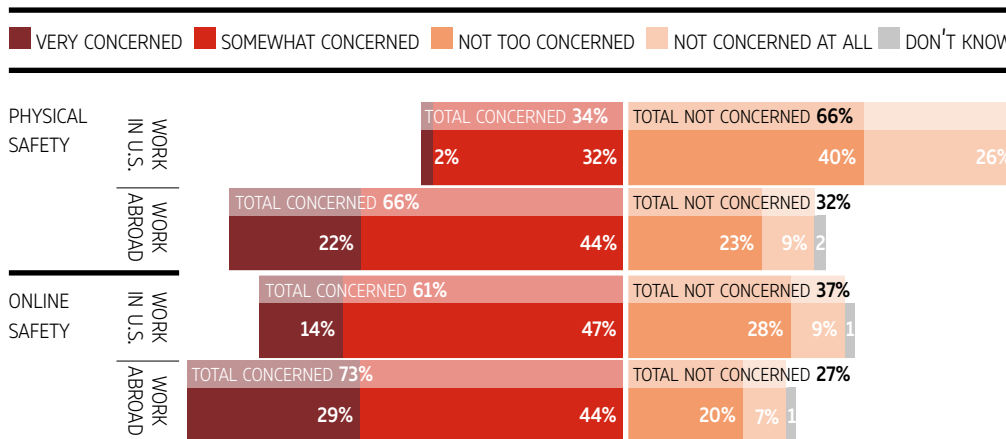
Freelancers and those who have faced harassment / threats / attacks feel less safe

SAFE / MOSTLY SAFE SOMEWHAT / NOT SAFE



U.S.-based women journalists are less concerned about their physical and online safety than those working abroad

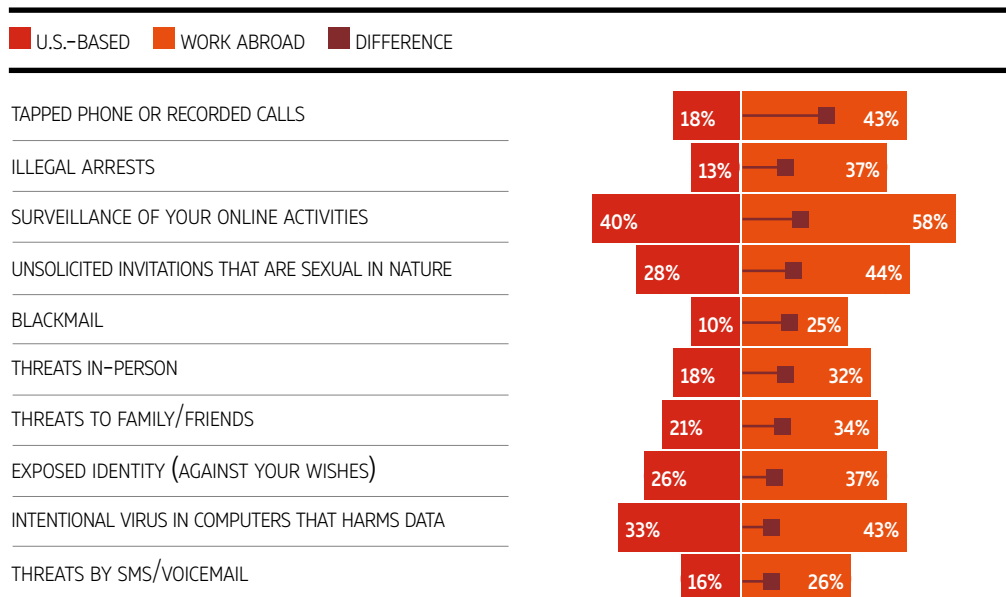
As a member of the journalism or media field, how concerned are you about your physical / online safety in fulfilling the duties of your job?



Geography plays a key factor across all of the threats we identified in the survey. Respondents outside of the United States consistently rank these threats higher than their U.S. counterparts. [See graphic.]

Women working abroad are more likely to be concerned about every potential threat tested

PROPORTION EXPRESSING CONCERN BASED ON A SCORE OF 5 OR GREATER ON A 7-POINT SCALE, WHERE "1" INDICATES NOT AT ALL CONCERNED AND "7" INDICATES EXTREMELY CONCERNED. ITEMS WITH LARGEST DIFFERENCE SHOWN





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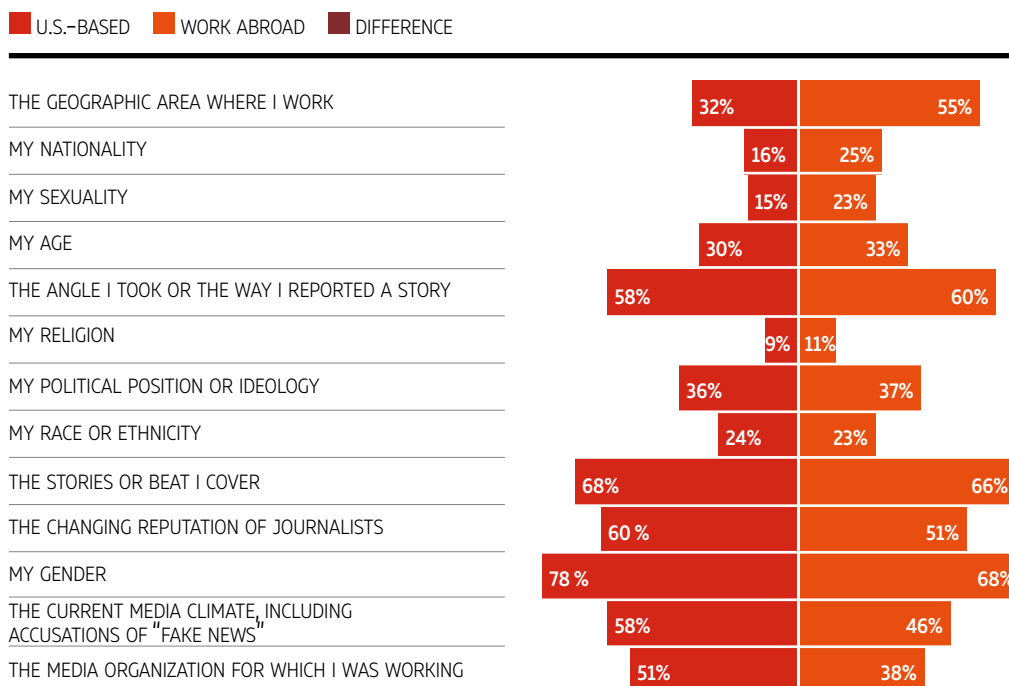
In addition to the types of harassment journalists experience, the survey explored contributing factors as well as the effects these incidents can have on reporters and their careers.

Gender plays a significant role. 78 percent of U.S.-based women journalists indicated that gender was a contributing factor to their attacks and threats. Among women who work abroad, 68 percent indicated that gender was the main factor in their attacks – both online and off. Respondents cited other contributing factors as well, including the stories or beat they cover, the angle or approach they took to reporting a story, and the changing reputation of journalists.

Survey respondents also reported significant effects from the current press climate in the U.S. Sixty percent of U.S.-based journalists cited the changing reputation of journalists as a key factor versus 51 percent of those who work abroad. Fifty-eight percent of U.S.-based respondents also said that the current U.S. attacks on journalists and claims of “fake news” have also been a contributing factor to their attacks, compared to 46 percent of their colleagues who work abroad. Around half of our respondents (51 percent) indicated that their association with a particular media organization put them at risk.

U.S.-based women are more likely to believe their gender, media organization and climate contributed to being attacked, threatened or harassed

Please indicate if you believe each of the following factors contributed to you being attacked, threatened, or harassed. ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED OR ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE, N=451



Case Study Sexual Assault "Part of the Job" Online and Off

THE FOLLOWING CASE STUDY INCLUDES PROFANITY. THE JOURNALIST SHARED THE LANGUAGE USED BY THEIR ATTACKER VERBATIM.

Carrie (not her real name) is an online writer for a major national online media organization. She's new to the profession, just completing her third year on her second job out of school. But through whisper networks and social supports, Carrie is learning that being a woman in media comes with a side of sexism, served up to women across media organizations.

"I got this weird email last week at work...with a disturbing subject "You're My Fucking Slut," Carrie said. "I opened it and there was a link to an image of a nude woman with the words SATAN with my email address inserted into the image."

Carrie found that a former co-worker – at another media organization – had received the same email. "I made a screen shot of the email and sent it to my

manager saying it was troubling. Nothing was done.

"I ignore it a lot – I don't have another way to deal with it," Carrie said. "I won't go on camera for anything because of the Facebook commenters when I'm using Facebook Live."

Carrie gets sexually suggestive images and solicitations via messages on Facebook, in emails and on Twitter. It still happens regularly. And there are veiled threats as well from men.

"They don't directly threaten...they are insinuating they want you to die."

She got attacked on Twitter for her appearance, where the attackers dug up old photos and used them to body shame her. Carrie has learned not to look at the Facebook comments. "It's a cesspool. It's not monitored properly and I get a lot of fat, body shaming and slut shaming comments."

Carrie has written stories and commentary around a variety of topics, but has discovered that no matter the issue, she gets attacked. "I felt the reporting was fine. The threats were attacking me as a person," Carrie said. "It's men always and I usually notice on Facebook that it's almost always white men."

The attacks are embarrassing and shameful. "I was feeling pretty depressed. I felt really alone," Carrie said. "I didn't want to write things that would bring on the attacks again."

And the harassment spills over into her physical world as she interviews subjects for her stories. "I've had sources be inappropriate, sources PM'ing me with sexual solicitations and proposals of marriage. I need these people and so I can't tell them to fuck off," Carrie said.

Like other women journalists, Carrie says management must be much more supportive of the women and journalists of color that receive this online harassment to a greater extent. And journalism schools need more discussion in the classroom to prepare journalists for the online world.

"It's a part of my personal life. We can't get off of these things (social media). I'm so sick of people spewing this hate...when I'm not even supposed to be working."

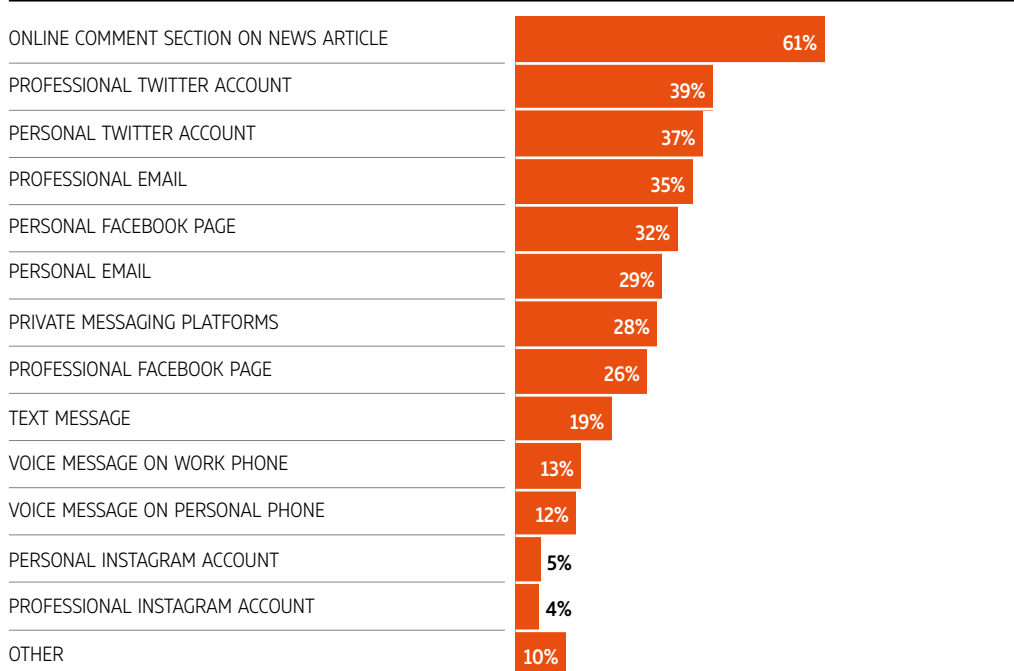
Attacks can manifest in a variety of ways online. While social media attacks on Twitter or Facebook are more visual and swift, other technological

attacks can disrupt the professional lives of these journalists. Online threats tend to occur most in the online comment sections on news articles (61 percent), followed by professional Twitter accounts (39 percent) and personal Twitter accounts (37 percent).

Online threats/harassment occurred most in online comment sections but also personal accounts

Did the online threats or harassment you experienced occur on any of the following platforms?

ASKED ONLY OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED OR HARASSED ONLINE, N=377



Case Study New Tools Expose Journalists in Real Time

Media organizations are being inventive in using new social tools to report and engage audiences. However, while tools like Facebook Live allow for broadcasting direct to audiences, the technology exposes journalists to real-time harassment that leaves them at risk.

Ask Mary (not her real name), a breaking news reporter for a print and online publication. She covered vigils, marches and political content and because of her beat, she believes, she was subjected to a lot of harassment. She used to use Facebook Live to bring social media users into the unfolding action.

But as a one-person team covering the event, she couldn't respond and do her work at the same time. Emotions were high at the vigil and Mary's heart rate was already racing.

"At this particular vigil, the tweets came at me quickly. I didn't have time to engage as I was live at the time, observing, shooting and trying to report. "I sent out a Beyonce gif saying "Boi, bye!"

Mary became annoyed. Then frustrated. "If the person was a subscriber or a reader, I didn't know how to respond. I was flustered."

But the attacks turned personal.

"A lot of my harassment was directed at me personally and my reputation. The harassers questioned the validity of my work," Mary said.

And the harassment was "incessant." One Twitter user berated and belittled Mary with more than 50 tweets in a 24-hour period.

"My response was to engage him more, refuting him with facts," Mary said. But she was always unsure how to appropriately respond. "I would talk to my editors about stuff like this and ask if it was OK to respond and how I should respond."

Mary said she once muted a Twitter user, after she had posted video of a beating on Twitter. Twitter users came after her, trying to get her account taken down.

"We embed tweets into stories and copy them into the newspaper...we put them into the articles as embedded tweets," she said. "Users don't understand how the internet works and they came after me to take the tweet down," Carrie said. "I can't...the tweet is out there."

Mary says she's changed how she works as a result of the attacks. "I'm doing my work differently now. I'm more practiced – when I'm on the scene, I dig in and focus in front of me seeing what's happening in real space. I'm not just looking through my phone camera."

Mary is also careful about the hashtags she uses, so she doesn't alert coordinated attacks from trolls monitoring certain social issues. She shares her location data AFTER the events. She takes explicit threats directly to management, especially if something comes to her desk at the newspaper.

"I grew up on the Internet. I have to use my real name...I have to be in these spaces."

Short- and Long-Term Impacts of Physical and Online Attacks

Women reporters have a long tradition of bringing diverse perspectives to journalism, but cultural norms and gender-based discrimination have deep roots. However, there is also a long history of violence against women's bodies and particularly those that challenge cultural norms. Gendered threats and threats of sexual violence, racialized threats, hate speech, public shaming, and death threats are used to shame and silence women for contributing. Women journalists around the globe do their work against this cultural backdrop.

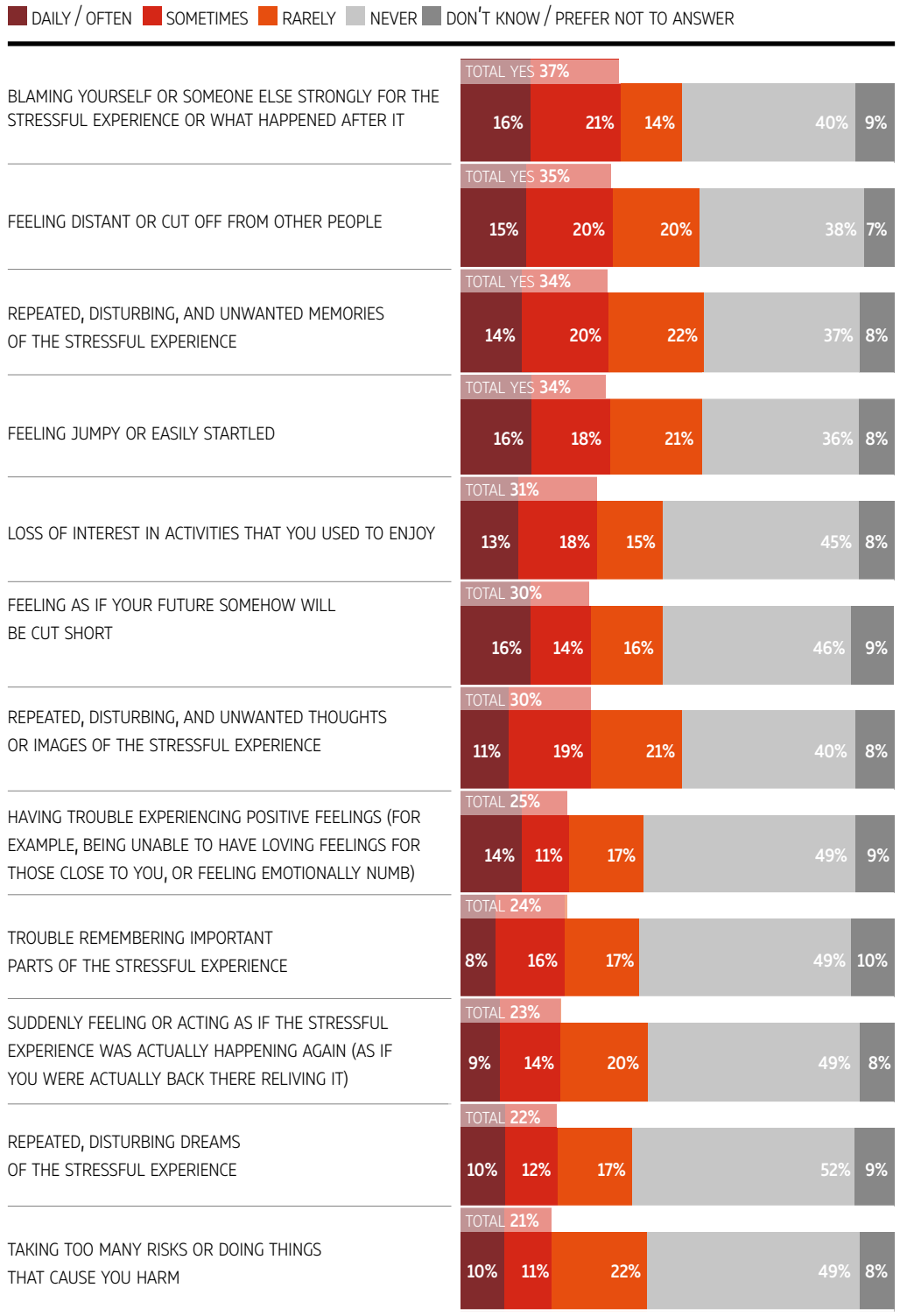
For women journalists, physical and online attacks may result in emotional stress and long-term psychological trauma. Victims may need to change their daily routines, job location, their home or even leave their countries in order to protect themselves. According to our respondents, both online and physical threats and attacks have increased in the past five years. These women have reason to fear for their safety in performing their work in a variety of different journalism roles, settings and geographies.

"It seems when things like this happen, the persons who are the victims report it, and while management helps them, management seems annoyed, and individuals can tell they are now a burden because of what happened to them, which they have no control over."

Similar to other survivors of trauma, following physical or online threats and attacks, our respondents say they experience a range of immediate and long-term consequences that affect their ability to do their work:

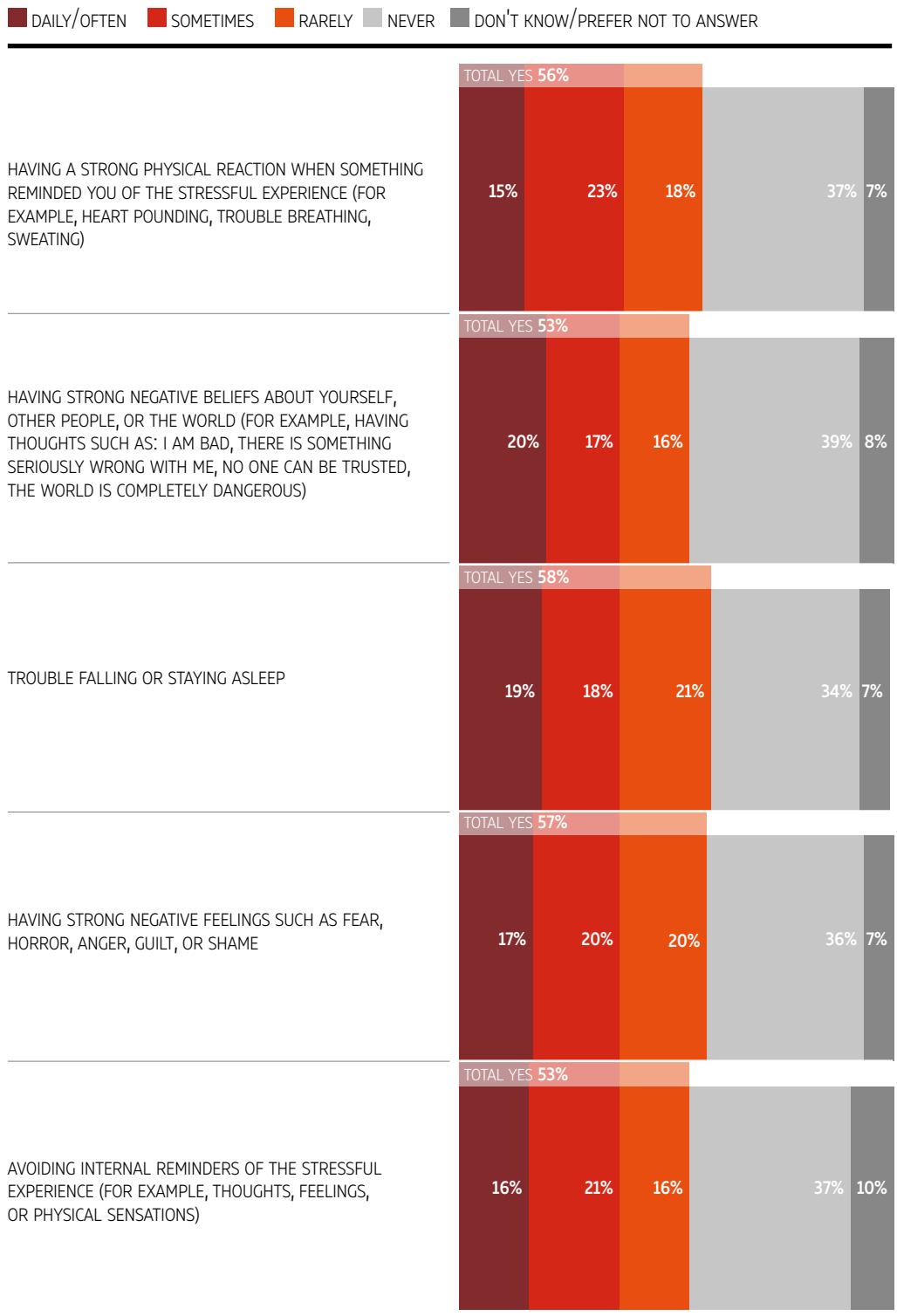
Emotional impacts of threats and attacks

ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED, OR ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE, N=451



High numbers also have physical reactions or negative feelings and beliefs as a result

ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED, OR ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE, N=451

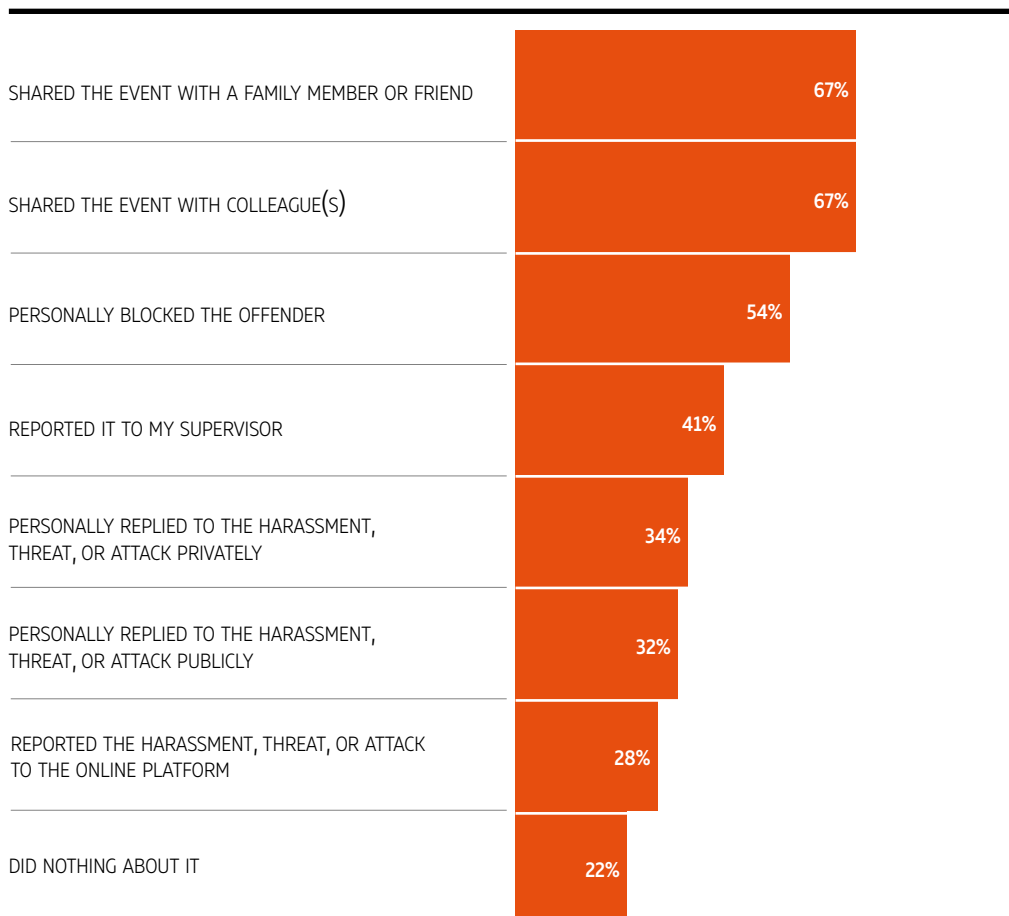


Short-Term Impact: Professional “Code of Silence”

These attacks put women journalists at risk professionally. We asked our respondents how they react when attacked or threatened in person or online. As professionals who are dedicated to the truth, almost 80 percent of respondents who experienced online harassment reported it to someone else and/or addressed it. **More than two-thirds shared the event with a family member, friend or colleague (67%).** More than 50 percent used blocking tools to block the offenders. Nearly one-third reported threats and attacks to social media platforms. Others personally replied to the harassment, either publicly (28%) or privately (34%).

Most who experienced harassment/threat/attack took an action in response; 4 in 10 reported it to supervisor

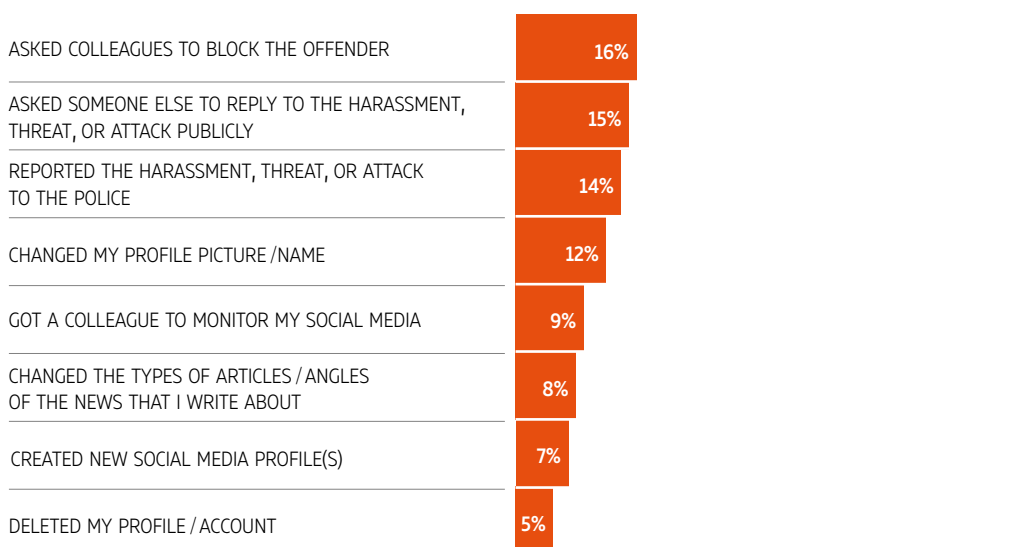
Did you respond to being harassed, threatened or attacked, whether online or in person, in the following ways? (ASKED ONLY OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED OR HARASSED ONLINE, N=377)



Across all types of harassment, responses such as reporting the incident to the police or deleting social media accounts were reported much more infrequently, by under 20 percent of these respondents.

Fewer turned to a colleague or someone else to take action for them or reported offense to police

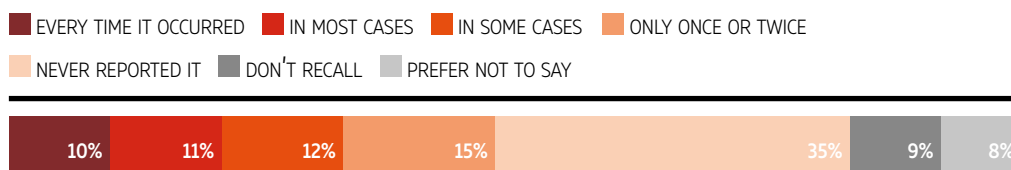
Did you respond to being harassed, threatened or attacked, whether online or in person, in the following ways? (ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED, OR ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE, N=451)



The survey asked those who experienced more than one incident – nearly 400 respondents – whether they had reported the incidents to management. Around 1 in 3 women, or 35 percent, did not.

1 in 3 who experienced an offense more than once never reported it to management*

Did you individually, or together with your supervisor, report being threatened, harassed, or physically attacked to management... (ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED, OR ATTACKED MORE THAN ONCE, N=394)



 Case Study**"Feedback" Brings Reporter to Her Knees**

"Every time I'm on TV, the feedback I get from viewers is...lewd," says Renata (not her real name), "...the tweets essentially suggest that I get knee pads and exercise oral sex on the president."

As a political reporter and a commentator on major networks like Fox and MSNBC, Renata said she regularly received body shaming and slut shaming when she appeared on TV. She would delete the emails or share the stories with her colleagues. She never mentioned the abuse to management...because she'd come to expect it as part of the job.

"You're going to get heat," Renata said. "I went into politics...it wasn't like writing up wedding vows."

Renata says she prepares herself before she goes on Twitter. About half of the abuse she receives is more gender-focused; the other half she says is mansplaining on a social scale. The backlash to her storytelling is persistent and distasteful. She urges management to be sensitive to the fact that this comes with the job...as a woman journalist.

"I kind of wish our management would be out front on TV, representing our brand and supporting us," Renata said.

Overall, Renata finds the harassment distracting and a constant erosion to her reputation. "How do you respond?" she asks. Every once in a while, she'll retweet or respond. "It's just another day on cable news," Renata says.

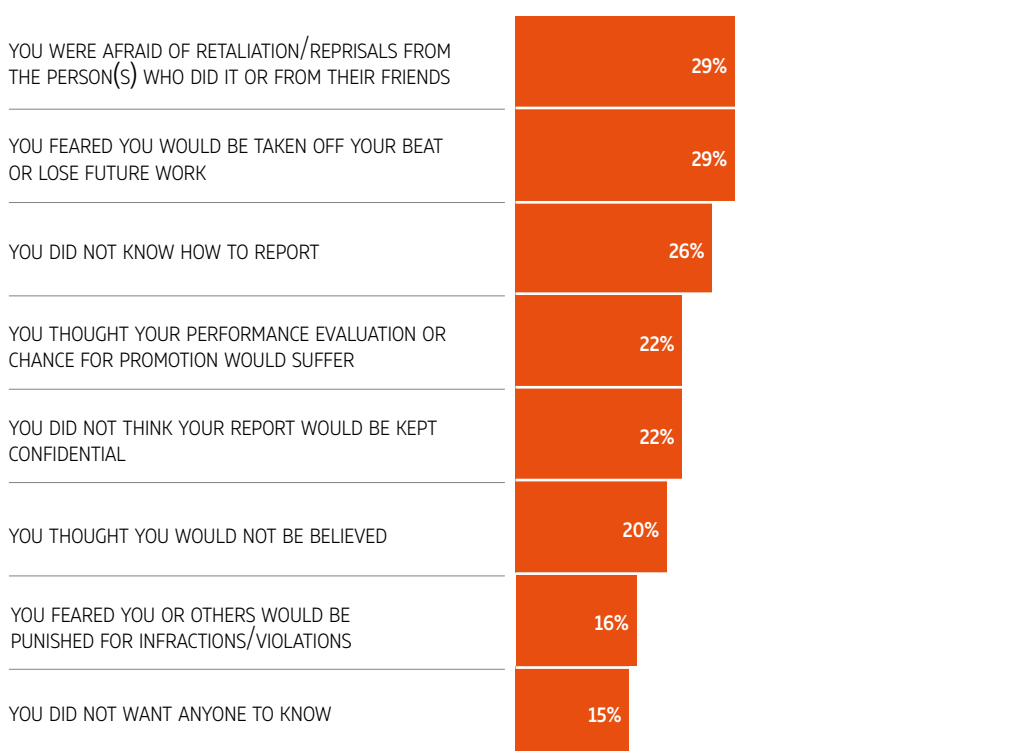
Respondents who didn't report their multiple incidents of abuse to management cited a fear of retribution or punishment. **Nearly one third (29 percent) indicated that they feared retaliation/reprisals from the persons who initiated the attack, and an equal number feared they would be taken off their beat or lose future work.**

"As a freelancer, I have not reported harassment/assault that I've experienced when working on stories because I am afraid of not getting support from editors far away or losing the gig or the possibility of covering a topic because they don't think it is safe for me to work it. Or sometimes, I think... What is the point?"

Notable numbers did not report in fear of retribution or punishment

Thinking about the experiences being attacked, threatened, or harassed that you did not report, please indicate if the following were reasons for not reporting the situation.

(ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED, OR ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE AND DID NOT REPORT AN OFFENSE TO MANAGEMENT, N=323)



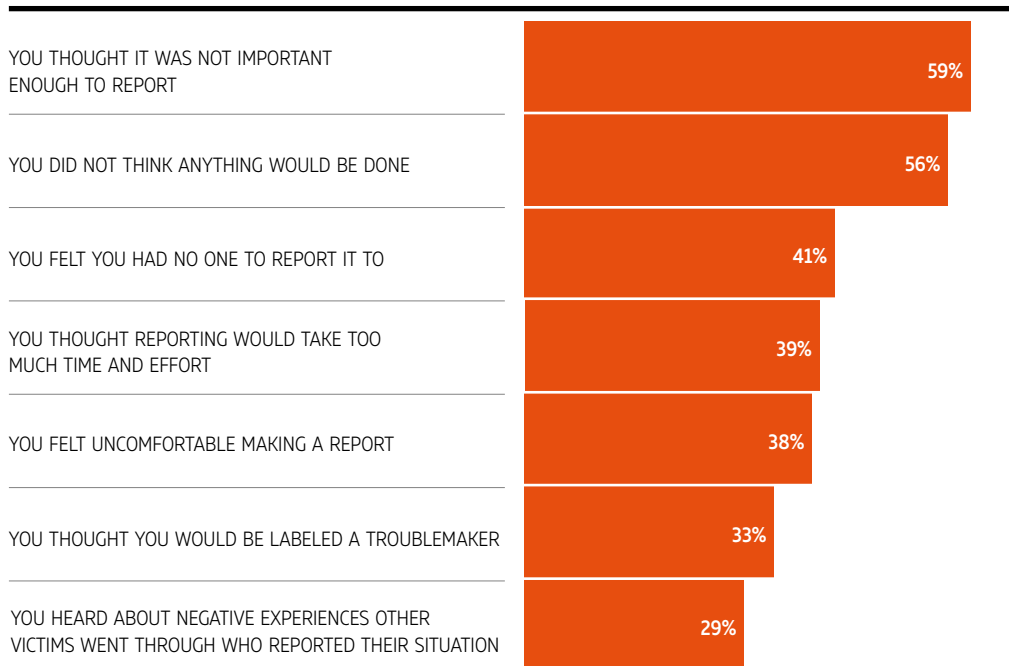
More than 50 percent (56 percent) indicated they didn't think anything would be done and that is why they did not report to management.

Twenty-six percent indicated they didn't know how to report the threats. More than a third said they felt uncomfortable making a report or they felt that they would be labeled a troublemaker. Another 29 percent indicated they had heard of negative experiences of others who had reported their threats to management.

Over half did not report an offense they deemed unimportant or felt would ignored

Thinking about the experiences being attacked, threatened, or harassed that you did not report, please indicate if the following were reasons for not reporting the situation.

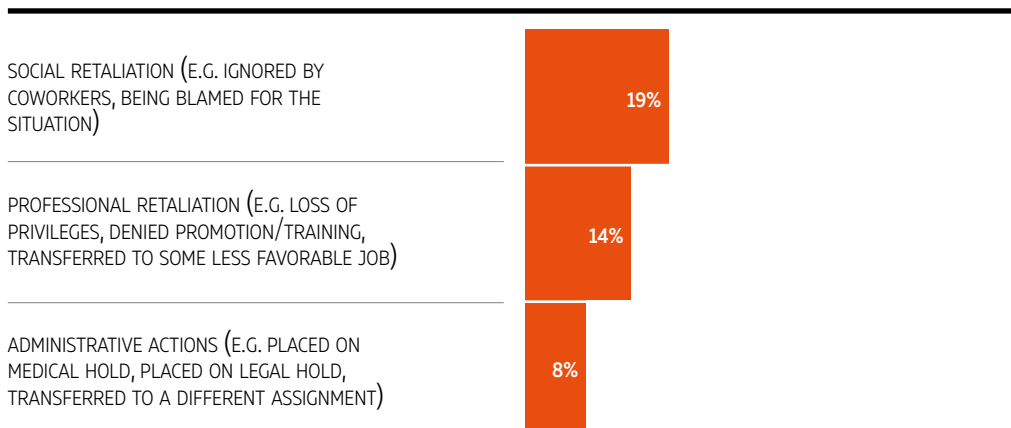
(ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED, OR ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE AND DID NOT REPORT AN OFFENSE TO MANAGEMENT, N=323)



While not widespread, some respondents reported retaliation in the workplace – 19 percent indicated they experienced social retaliation from coworkers, 14 percent reported professional retaliation where they were removed from their beat, lost privileges or were denied a promotion. However, a quarter of our respondents who did report to management received favorable outcomes. Twenty-six percent reported being very satisfied with management response; another one third indicated being somewhat satisfied (33%).

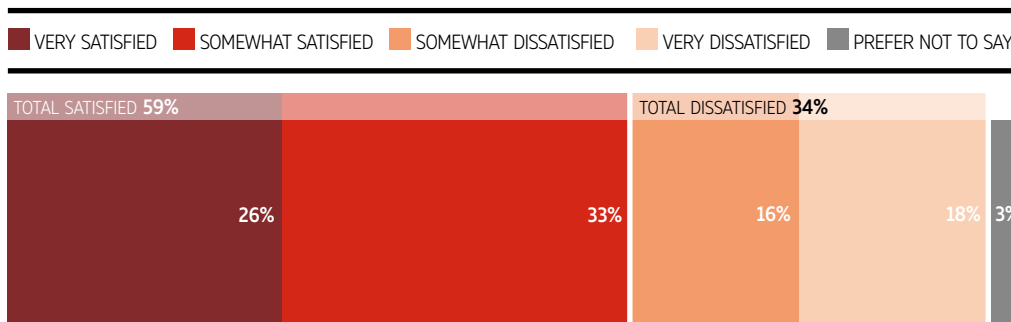
While not widespread, some respondents faced professional or social retaliation for reporting

As a result of discussing/reporting the situation, did you experience any of the following? (ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED, OR ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE AND REPORTED AN OFFENSE TO MANAGEMENT, N=207)



Of those who reported an offense, 59 percent were satisfied with management’s response

Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the response you received from management? (ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED, OR ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE AND REPORTED IT TO MANAGEMENT, N=207)



Attacks and Harassment

The Impact on Female Journalists and Their Reporting

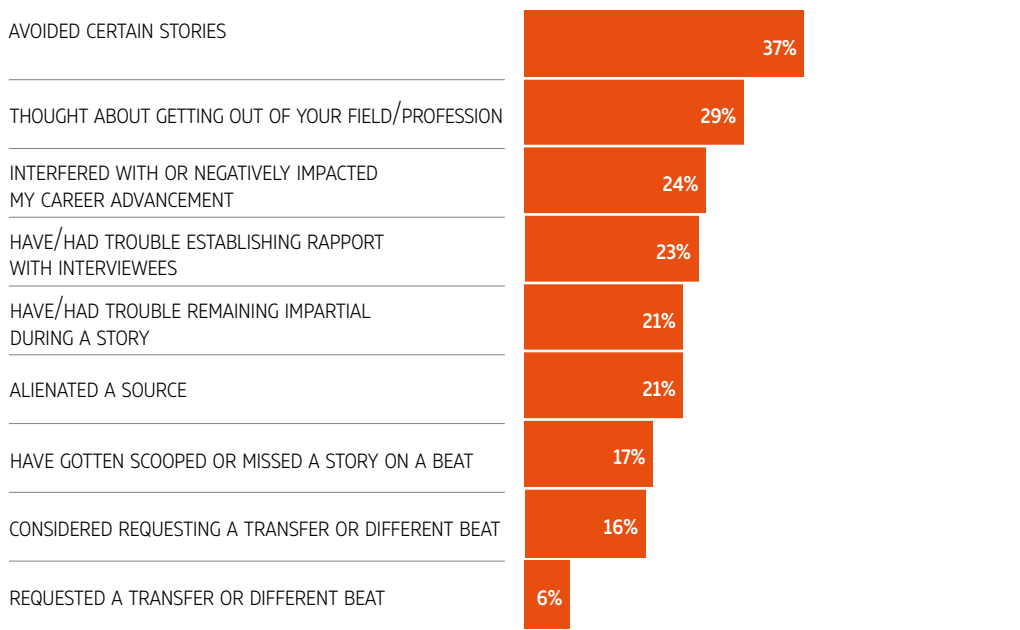
Long-Term Impact: Retention of Women in Journalism

For women journalists, these attacks serve a double blow – to their private lives and to their professional mobility. In our survey, **nearly 30 percent (29%) of all of our respondents indicated the threats and attacks they received made them think about getting out of the profession.** However, when we examine the data by age, early-career journalists (ages 18-29) are nearly twice as likely (36 percent) to have considered getting out the profession as did their older colleagues, ages 40 and older (18 percent).

24 percent indicated their career advancement had been negatively impacted. Clearly respondents engage in self-censorship when going about their work; 37 percent indicated they avoided certain stories and 23 percent indicated they had trouble establishing rapport with interviewees. These attacks have a chilling effect that affects news gathering and freedom of expression around the globe.

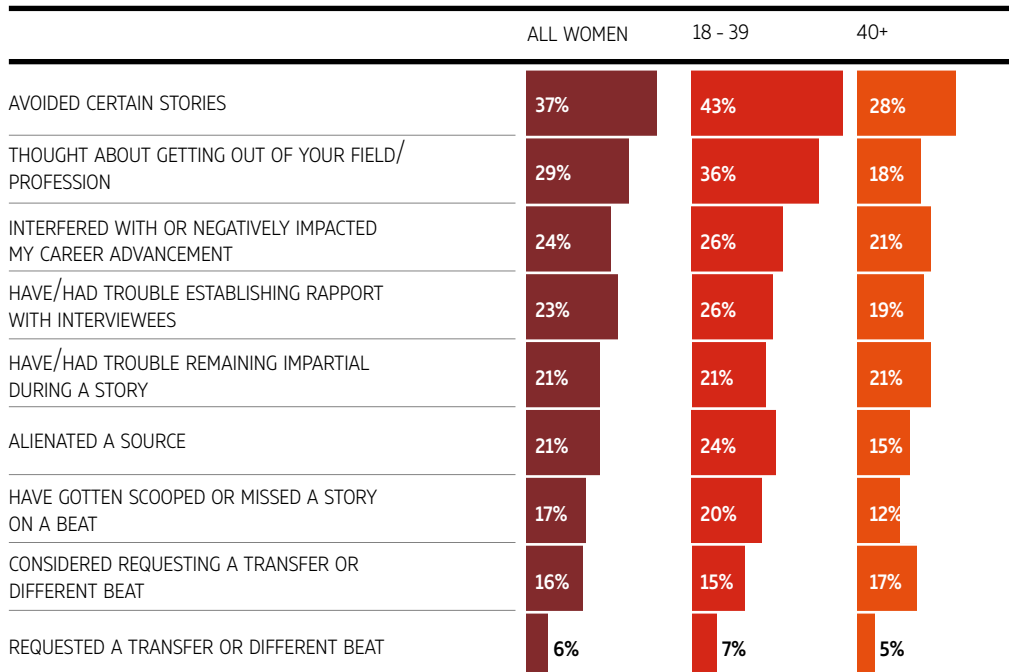
Notable numbers avoided certain stories and considered leaving field as a result of their experiences

As a result of being attacked, threatened, or harassed, please indicate whether or not you are experiencing or have experienced each of the following. (ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED, OR ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE, N=451)



Younger journalists/media workers more likely to say their experience made them think about leaving the field

(ASKED OF THOSE WHO SAID THEY HAVE BEEN THREATENED, HARASSED, OR ATTACKED AT LEAST ONCE, N=451)



Case Study

Racism and Threats of Violence on Continuous Parade

THE FOLLOWING CASE STUDY INCLUDES PROFANITY. THE JOURNALIST SHARED THE LANGUAGE USED BY THEIR ATTACKERS VERBATIM.

As a weekly columnist at a Southern daily newspaper, the racism came with her morning coffee. Ada (not her real name), shared stories of political collusion and structural racism in her town. But as Ada says "There wasn't a month that went by that I wasn't called a nigger or bitch." The attacks continued via email, in comments on her columns or through social media for 11 years.

The last one, the email that had her leave her job, came with an explicit threat. **"You really are a nigger bitch. I will rape you and throw you in the gutter,"** it said.

Ada was terrified. A victim of sexual assault, the threats triggered her past experiences and sent her to her bosses, shaking in fear. But her male bosses were dismissive. "You don't have to worry about the emails," they said. But the attacks were taking an emotional toll.

"No one wants to look like they are the problem," said Ada. The lack of management response left Ada feeling disrespected and unsupported. "This is emotional and economic violence," she said. "I didn't like who this was making me."

She became extra cautious. "I didn't know who this was. I began watching over my shoulder. I became paranoid and hypervigilant."

But the death threats kept coming. And despite repeated evidence shared with management over the years, Ada said she was made to feel she was overreacting. Management at her newspaper wanted to change her role and suggested she move to a reporter position.

Ada quit the newspaper. She said the newspaper management made her feel like she was the problem. Instead, Ada recommends management be clear in every way that you are a valuable member of the team.

"My reputation and my life were being threatened," Ada said. "I didn't feel as if my newspaper had my back."



Executive Summary

Introduction

Demographics of Respondents

Key Findings

Global Scale of Physical
and Online Threats

Key Findings

What are the effects?

Conclusion

This survey focuses on the complex problem and lasting harm of physical and online attacks against women journalists. While all journalists are under threat globally because of the work they do, women journalists face an added scrutiny and threat because of their gender. Misogynistic attacks and retribution are swift and coordinated. The fear of future harassment and attacks changes the behaviors and actions of women journalists. Women journalists who experience abuse report psychological health issues, self-censoring, and long-term concerns about their professional choices. They may close or avoid social media accounts. And the problem still lacks effective response when the activity is reported to management and law enforcement.

In several open-ended questions in our survey, we asked respondents to share how they might be better supported when they are under attack.

Overwhelmingly, these women suggest that organizations establish a protocol for educating and addressing harassment and that their claims be thoroughly investigated by management, law enforcement, social media platforms and others. However, there are no such mechanisms of support for freelancers, and many news organizations lack the expertise and resources to respond effectively.

The IWJMF and TrollBusters are working to provide practical resources for journalists to prepare for potential online threats and to respond appropriately should they occur. This will necessitate the collaboration of platforms, newsrooms, digital forensics and legal experts, digital security trainers and trauma specialists.

Resources for Journalists

[International Women's Media Foundation](#)

[A Culture of Safety Alliance for Freelance Journalists](#)

[TrollBusters: Online Pest Control for Women Journalists & Writers](#)

[Committee to Protect Journalists](#)

[International News Safety Institute](#)

[Identity Removal Guide \(for all social media\)](#)

[Google Idea's Project Shield](#)

[CloudFlare Project Galileo](#)

[HeartMob](#)

Recent Reports

OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality

Decision on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women (MC.DEC/7/14)

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence

UN General Assembly Resolution 20/8 on The Promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the internet

McKenzie, A.B. (2016). In Solidarity With 'The Pantyless Journalist': How Journalists In The Bahamas Stood Up To The Cyberbullies. In Mijatović, D. (Ed.). *New Challenges to Freedom of Expression: Countering Online Abuse of Female Journalists* (pp. 21-27) Vienna, Austria: Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

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