**Organisation: Freedom House**

**Website:** [**https://freedomhouse.org/**](https://freedomhouse.org/)

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**Question 1:**

The main threats and obstacles faced by female journalists include gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and online trolling, which are detailed below. Female journalists also in some cases are restricted in where they can physically travel or who they can interview, based on cultural norms that segregate genders from engagement (though male journalists also face similar challenges when reporting). Furthermore, in some parts of the world, like China, female journalists operate in a system with a very real glass ceiling where their advancement is limited specifically because of their gender.

*Gender-Based Violence*

Gender-based violence (GBV) against female journalists falls mainly into three categories: targeted reprisal attacks on a specific journalist, attacks while covering public events, and attacks while held in detention or captivity. Documentation of GBV continues to be difficult, as the subject is very sensitive, globally there is a lack of successful prosecution of violators of GBV, and in many cases cultural stigma silences survivors from documenting attacks. Journalists have also been reluctant to report instances of sexual assault out of fear of professional backlash, such as receiving fewer assignments if their supervisors knew about an attack while on the job.

Following the 2011 mob assault against Lara Logan while she was reporting from Tahrir Square after the fall of Hosni Mubarak and the 2011 sexual assault against Caroline Sinz, Reporters Sans Frontieres (RSF) issued a statement calling on media outlets not to send female journalists to cover crisis zones. RSF withdrew its statement shortly after it was published and journalists pushed back against their recommendation, based on its proposal for gendered discrimination in a field that was already disproportionately male. However, the statement is tied directly with the reasoning provided by many female journalists on why they are silent about GBV while on assignment. It is unclear whether gender plays a greater role now in determining assignments than before in light of the increased documentation of GBV against female journalists.

Security trainings have been on offer for journalists, but very few are tailored for women. Those that do exist are run by military trainers and there are numerous reports of harassment of female journalists by their trainers. Significant improvement is needed in the security training and prevention space to improve the working conditions for female journalists so they are able to address specific threats they face as women while working.

*Sexual Harassment*

Female journalists experience sexual harassment both in the workplace and while on assignment. The reporting of cases of sexual harassment while on assignment is low in some regions because of the perceived work culture and the fear of being viewed as less able to do their job effectively. The power dynamics within the office structure would imply that documenting or reporting harassment by one’s editor or supervisor could result in professional backlash.

*Online Trolling*

Female journalists and bloggers are generally trolled online in a more severe fashion than their male counterparts, with the comments often making threats of gender-based violence, including rape. Male journalists and bloggers are often trolled based on the content of their reporting while female journalists are attacked based on their gender. One study found that female journalists are three times more likely to be trolled on Twitter than male journalists and that journalism was the only field in their study where women received more threats than men.

The impact of trolling has a chilling effect on female journalists, particularly given the lack of effective protection mechanisms to provide them with legal or punitive recourse. Many female journalists have been so inundated with harassment and threats online that they have shut down their digital accounts, self-censoring themselves for their protection, and physical and mental well-being. There are severe gaps in the knowledge of law enforcement personnel with regards to the international standards of human rights, making it difficult for women who are trolled to seek effective protection mechanisms from their local police force.

Some efforts have been advanced to provide protections for women journalists from online trolls, like the creation of the Women’s Reporting Point by the European Centre for Press and Media (ECPMF), which in partnership with the European Federation of Journalists provides a way for female journalists to report threats via an encrypted messaging system, which will be received by trained staff at ECPMF who will provide the journalist with support, avenues for recourse and keep the case confidential. However, there is little data on the overall efficacy of this program or whether it is a model that can be successfully replicated in other regions.

*Gaps/Spaces for further research*

* Effective protection mechanisms, particularly with regards to online trolling to be preventative rather than reactive to physical violence
* Research/data collection into whether this is a relationship between the documentation of GBV in the field and assignment of women journalists to more fragile/crisis zones
* Violence against female journalists by restrictive regimes (for example, in case of Egypt, cases of abuse/detention known because the journalists were foreign – what happened to the Egyptian journalists covering the events or who were detained? Another example is the targeted harassment and detention of Khadija Ismayilova – how is her treatment different than a foreign journalist who covers corruption in Azerbaijan?)
* Research/Data collection on harassment on assignment/limitations of sexual harassment laws in the workplace and potential impact on female journalists’ reporting/documentation of cases

**Question 2:**

Freedom House publishes an annual report on press freedom in 199 countries and territories, *Freedom of the Press*. The report is an expert-based analysis that uses 23 [indicators](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press-2016-methodology) to produce a series of scores and narrative reports. None of these indicators is solely about the safety of women journalists, but some include these issues. The indicators most relevant are B6 and B7, which address (respectively), violence and harassment against journalists while carrying out their work, and extra-legal violence and harassment, including online. Unfortunately, we do not disaggregate our results at this time.