

Making sense of the multi-dimensional impacts of online violence on journalists

Section: 1.2

Mapping Threats for Media Professionals

There are a number of legal, physical, professional and mental health-related impacts that journalists are confronted with regards to online spaces.

We have seen examples of journalists being threatened with physical violence and/or legal consequences by powerful stakeholders in case they are critical of the said stakeholders in their work shared online or in the opinions they voice in the digital world.

Just recently, five journalists were convicted by Turkey for simply reporting on the death of an intelligence agent.

(“Turkey convicts 5 journalists under national security law”, Committee to Protect Journalists, September 10, 2020
cpj.org/2020/09/turkey-convicts-5-journalists-under-national-security-law/)



Journalists face a number of threats both in physical and online spaces

Intersectional Threats for Journalists

In the United States and Canada, in a survey by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CJP), %85 of female and gender non-conforming journalists believed that journalism had become less safe in past five years.

Lucy Westcott, "The threats follow us home': Survey details risks for female journalists in U.S. Canada", CJP, 4 September 2019

cpj.org/09/2019/canada-usa-female-journalist-safety-online-harassment-survey/

In Amnesty International's 2018 report titled 'Toxic Twitter - Women's Experiences of Violence and Abuse on Twitter', it was found that online violence was a common place experience for women on the platform.

"Toxic Twitter - Women's Experiences of Violence and Abuse on Twitter", Amnesty International, 2018

www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/03/2018/online-violence-against-women-chapter3-/#topanchor

State-based Violence Against Journalists

In Kosovo, journalist Ermal Panduri has received death threats for criticising the country's president.

"Kosovo journalist Ermal Panduri receives death threats following criticism of president", Committee to Protect Journalists, September 10, 2020
cpj.org/2020/09/kosovo-journalist-ermal-panduri-receives-death-threats-following-criticism-of-president/

These threats lead to self-censorship for many journalists and impedes media freedoms. Studies have found that the impact of online attacks on journalists has a negative effect on journalists across the world both professionally (often leading to scaling back online engagement) and personally (impact on mental health).

"Kosovo journalist Ermal Panduri receives death threats following criticism of president", Committee to Protect Journalists, September 10, 2020
cpj.org/2020/09/kosovo-journalist-ermal-panduri-receives-death-threats-following-criticism-of-president/; Michelle Ferrier, "Attacks and Harassment", International Women's Media Foundation and Troll-Busters.com, 2019,
www.iwmmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Attacks-and-Harassment.pdf

Similarly, media practitioners are threatened with professional consequences both within and outside of the organisations they work in.

Online violence is a common place experience for **women journalists** and they are often attacked on the basis of their gender



Impact of Attacks on Journalists

Journalists' mental wellbeing is greatly affected by the threats they receive in the online world. Meanwhile, the impact of online violence on the mental well-being of journalists who operate in the war-torn regions of the country is even worse as they face threats from at least more than one entity.

("Psychological safety: Online harassment and how to protect your mental health", Committee to Protect Journalists, September 4, 2019, [cpj.org/2019/09/psychological-safety-online-harassment-emotional-health-journalists/](https://www.cpj.org/2019/09/psychological-safety-online-harassment-emotional-health-journalists/))

A study on Iranian journalists found that 78.1% journalists reported having had to stop work on a story because of intimidation, assault or torture while 61.4% reported having been placed under surveillance by the state at some point.

(Anthony Feinstein, Saul Feinstein, Maziar Behari & Bennis Pavisian, "The psychological wellbeing of Iranian journalists: a descriptive study", Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine Open, December 2016 www.researchgate.net/publication/311340708 **The psychological wellbeing of Iranian journalists a descriptive study.**)

Over a third of these journalists reported depressive symptomatology that fell in the moderate to severe range.

When journalists are attacked or threatened it is a freedom of speech issue because they are being targeted as members of the press in order to silence them.



Wellbeing of Iranian Journalists

The percentage of journalists subjected to specific threats were as follows: arrest (41.2%); torture (19.3%); intimidation (defined as threat in the absence of torture, assault or arrest) (61.4%); assault (10.5%) and family threatened because of work done by a journalist (53.1%).

Eighty nine (78.1%) journalists had had to stop work on a story because of intimidation, assault or torture while 70 journalists (61.4%) reported having been placed under surveillance by the state at some point.

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Conclusion

- Journalists all around the world are at risk.

- The threats journalists face are intersectional; these threats are often on the basis of one's gender identity, race, etc.

- Attacks on journalists are an attack on free speech.

- Online and offline threats to journalists can have a detrimental impact on their mental well-being.

In the **next** section we will be exploring the gendered impact of online threats on female journalists