



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Online violence Against Women Journalists:

A Global Snapshot of Incidence and Impacts

Authors: Julie Posetti, Nermin Aboulez, Kalina Bontcheva, Jackie Harrison, and Silvio Waisbord



1 Introduction

This report presents a snapshot of the first substantial findings from a global survey about [online violence](#)¹ against women journalists conducted by UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) in late 2020. Over 900 validated participants from 125 countries completed the survey in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. The findings shared here reflect the input of the 714 respondents identifying as women.²

Reporting to the UN General Assembly on ‘The Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity’ in 2017, the Secretary General wrote: “Women who cover topics such as politics, law, economics, sport, women’s rights, gender and feminism are particularly likely to become targets of *online violence*. While men journalists are also subject to abuse online, abuse directed against women journalists tends to be more severe.” ([A/72/290](#)). The two key impacts identified by the Secretary General - women journalists’ [disproportionately severe experience](#) of online violence and the correlation between certain subjects and heightened attacks - are underscored by the research presented in this report.

Online violence has since become a new frontline in journalism safety - a particularly dangerous trend for women journalists. The psychological, physical, and digital safety and security impacts associated with this [escalating freedom of expression crisis](#) are overlapping, converging and frequently inseparable. The phenomenon [can be defined](#) as a combination of: often brutal, prolific online harassment and abuse, including targeted attacks that frequently involve threats of physical and/or sexual violence; digital privacy and security breaches that can expose identifying information and exacerbate offline safety threats facing women journalists and their sources; and coordinated disinformation campaigns leveraging [misogyny and other forms of hate speech](#). The perpetrators range from misogynistic mobs seeking to silence women, through to State-linked disinformation networks aiming to undercut press freedom and chill critical journalism via orchestrated attacks.

Online attacks on women journalists appear to be [increasing exponentially](#), particularly in the context of the ‘[shadow pandemic](#)’ of violence against women during COVID-19. As this report demonstrates, online violence is also moving offline - with potentially deadly consequences. This makes the need to combat the problem even more urgent.

Another point highlighted by our research: most women journalists [do not report or make public](#) the online attacks they experience, in line with low levels of reporting when it comes to violence against women more broadly. As our respondents also demonstrated, many media employers still appear reluctant to take online violence seriously, in alignment with the evident failure of the internet communications companies - whose platforms and apps facilitate much of the harassment, intimidation, and abuse targeting women journalists - to take effective action to address this freedom of expression and gender equality crisis.

The aim of this report is to highlight key findings at the global level to guide action designed to improve responses to online violence. Thirteen infographics and 31 key findings are therefore shared here to illuminate not only the challenges faced by women journalists dealing with prolific and sustained attacks online, but also obstacles encountered by news industry managers attempting to address the problem, along with civil society organisations seeking to advocate and support efforts to counter online violence, and States wanting to develop policies and regulatory frameworks to better protect women journalists.

¹ Online violence is a term that has been adopted by the UN Secretary General, UN Women, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women et al to describe digital threats/threats in online environments against women journalists. See a definition of the term below.

² From an original sample of 1210 self-selecting international survey respondents, 901 were accepted as valid detailed analysis. The statistics presented in the demographics graph are therefore expressed as a percentage of the 901 responses. All other statistics represent a gender-disaggregated analysis of the 714 women-identifying respondents unless otherwise indicated. Not all questions were compulsory, many allowed ‘select all relevant answers’ (meaning the data will not necessarily add up to 100% for each question), and all data is rounded off to the nearest whole number. The survey is not generalisable, and the respondents’ data are not validated through triangulation methodologies. Respondents to the survey comprise journalists and media workers with a broad range of job descriptions. The descriptor ‘journalist’ is used throughout this report generically to refer to respondents. For further details, see the methodology section at the end of the report.

Top 12 findings at a glance

- **73%** of women respondents said they had experienced online violence.³
- Threats of physical (**25%**) and sexual violence (**18%**) plagued the women journalists surveyed. And these threats radiated - **13%** said they had received threats of violence against those close to them.
- **20%** of women respondents said they had been attacked or abused offline in connection with online violence they had experienced.⁴
- **13%** increased their physical security in response to online violence and **4%** said that they had missed work due to concerns about the attacks jumping offline.
- The mental health impacts of online violence were the most frequently identified (**26%**) consequence. **12%** of respondents said they had sought medical or psychological help due to the effects of online violence.
- The story theme most often identified in association with increased attacks was gender (**47%**), followed by politics and elections (**44%**), and human rights and social policy (**31%**).
- **41%** of the respondents to this survey said they had been targeted in online attacks that appeared to be linked to orchestrated disinformation campaigns.
- Political actors are the second most frequently noted sources (**37%**) of attacks and abuse after, anonymous or unknown attackers (**57%**), according to the women respondents.

³ Expressed as a percentage of the 625 women journalists who responded to the question..

⁴ Expressed as a percentage of the 596 women journalists who responded to the question.

- Facebook was rated the least safe of the top five platforms/apps used by women participants, with nearly double the number of respondents saying it was “very unsafe” compared to Twitter. It also attracted disproportionately higher rates of incident-reporting among the respondents (**39%** compared to Twitter’s **26%**).
- Only **25%** of the respondents reported incidents of online violence to their employers, and the top responses they said they received were: no response (**10%**) and advice like “grow a thicker skin” or “toughen up” (**9%**), while **2%** said they were asked what they did to provoke the attack.
- The women journalists surveyed most frequently indicated (**30%**) that they respond to the online violence they experience by self-censoring on social media. **20%** described how they withdrew from all online interaction and **18%** avoided audience engagement specifically.
- Employment and productivity impacts (with implications for gender diversity in and through the news media) reported by the women respondents included making themselves less visible (**38%**), missing work (**11%**), quitting their jobs (**4%**), and even abandoning journalism altogether (**2%**).

The survey in focus in this report is part of a broader UNESCO-commissioned collaborative study examining the incidence, impacts and responses to online violence against women journalists in 15 countries. The research has a particular emphasis on [intersectional experiences](#) and previously understudied countries. The ultimate purpose of the project is to identify more effective methods to counter this insidious threat to press freedom, journalists’ safety, and women’s active participation in journalism.

The Diverse Demographic Picture

901 respondents
125 countries

Top 10 countries represented



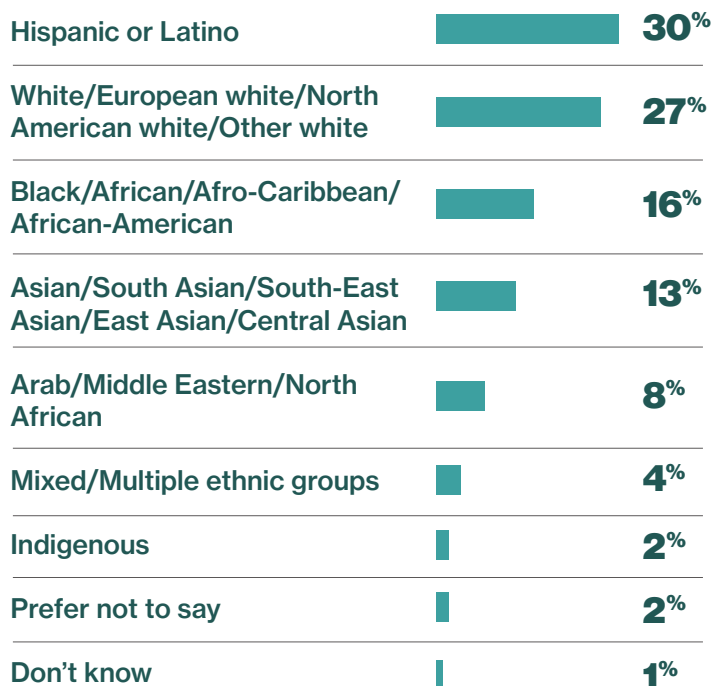
- _____ Mexico
- _____ Argentina
- _____ Brazil
- _____ Belgium
- _____ France
- _____ Spain
- _____ The Philippines
- _____ India
- _____ U.S.A
- _____ Nigeria

Gender identity

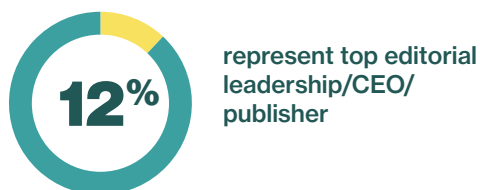
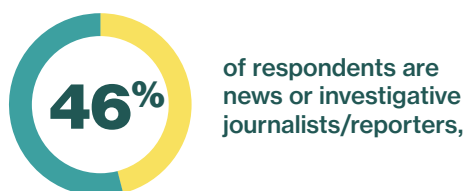
1% transgender or non-binary



Race/Ethnicity:



Professional profile



Age



The statistics presented in this graph are expressed as a percentage of the 901 total valid responses identified for analysis. The data pertaining to race/ethnicity does not add up to 100% because the respondents were permitted to identify multiple racial identities if they selected 'mixed/multiple ethnic groups'.

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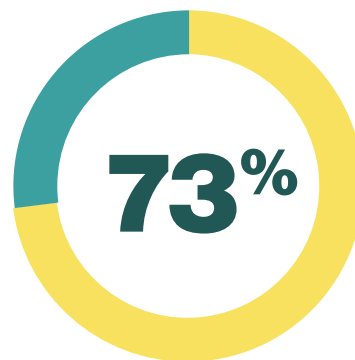
Prevalence of online violence against women journalists

OVERVIEW

Online attacks against women journalists have been a [pernicious problem](#) for many years. Now, these appear to be increasing dramatically and uncontrollably around the world, as amplified by our respondents. In 2014, a UNESCO-supported [survey of nearly 1000 women journalists](#) conducted by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and the International News Safety Institute (INSI) found that 23% of women respondents (n=921) had experienced 'intimidation, threats or abuse' online in relation to their work. An International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) [survey](#) (n=400 women) in 2017 found that 44% of women participants had experienced online abuse. [Another survey](#) conducted by IWMF in 2018, (n=597 women), found that 63% of women respondents had been harassed or abused online at least once. Barely two years later, this UNESCO-ICFJ survey records that 73% (n=625) of women journalists asked if they had experienced online violence said: "Yes". Although these surveys cannot be directly compared, viewed collectively, the pattern suggests that gendered online violence against women journalists has worsened significantly over the past decade. The COVID-19 pandemic also appears to be exacerbating the crisis. Another [recent global survey](#) conducted by ICFJ in partnership with Columbia University for the Journalism and the Pandemic Project found that, when asked to rate the incidence of online harassment during the pandemic, 16% of women journalists who responded to the question (n=490) said that it was "much worse" than before COVID. This was a finding echoed by a [recent study](#) supported by UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC), which found 63% of more than 100 East African women journalists surveyed thought online violence had increased in the context of COVID-19.

KEY FINDING #1:

73% of women respondents said they had experienced online violence in connection with their work in the field of journalism



of women respondents had experienced online violence in the course of their work

*Expressed as a percentage of the 625 women journalists who responded to this question.

3

Types and sources of online violence

OVERVIEW

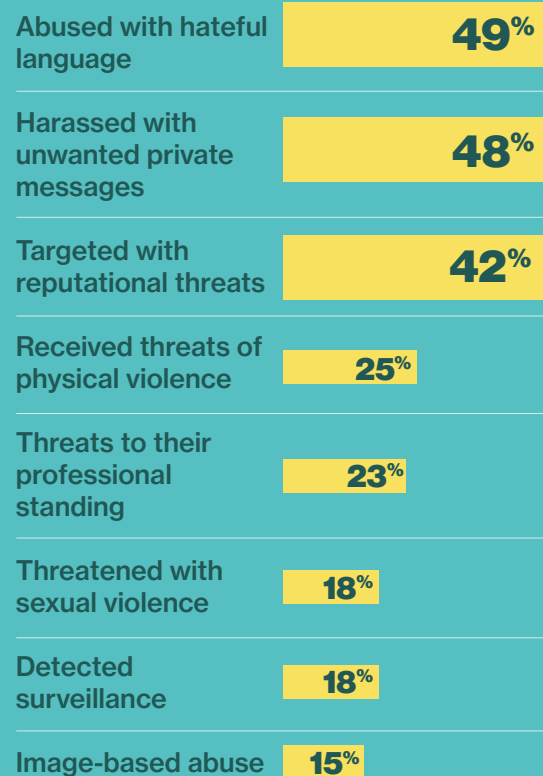
The women journalists surveyed by ICFJ and UNESCO said they had been subjected to a wide range of online violence, including threats of sexual assault and physical violence, abusive language, harassing private messages, threats to damage their professional or personal reputations, digital security attacks, misrepresentation via manipulated images, and financial threats. These methods of attack are growing more sophisticated and evolving with technology such as Artificial Intelligence. They are also increasingly networked and associated with [orchestrated attacks](#) fuelled by [disinformation tactics](#) designed to silence journalists. In fact, many women journalists who participated in this survey said that they had been targeted as part of an organised digital disinformation campaign. This points to the need for responses to online violence to grow equally in technological sophistication and collaborative coordination.

The [impacts of populist politics](#), often associated with the demonisation of journalists and journalism, and misogynistic narratives, is also in evidence as a trigger for online violence against women journalists. Gender was the story theme most frequently associated with heightened harassment, while politics and elections followed close behind. Similarly, the sources of online violence identified by the women journalists surveyed highlight the problem of political attacks on journalists and independent journalism, with political actors among the top rated sources of attacks and abuse identified by the respondents.

KEY FINDING #2:

Threats of physical (25%) and sexual violence (18%) plagued the women journalists surveyed. But the threats reported were not limited to the women themselves - 13% said they had received threats of violence against those close to them.

What type of online threats had women respondents experienced?



This question invited participants to select all relevant answers.

KEY FINDING #3:

Digital security attacks against the women respondents surveyed included surveillance (18%), hacking (14%), doxing (8%), and spoofing (7%)⁵. This is a significant set of findings that not only indicate increased susceptibility to physical violence for the women involved (because of the public identification of personal details and movement, including physical addresses), but also [increased threats for their sources](#), especially at-risk confidential sources.

KEY FINDING #4:

15% of women respondents reported experiencing image-based abuse (e.g: manipulated photos or video, stolen images, explicit images shared publicly without permission), while 4% said they had been victims of 'deep fakes' (i.e. manipulated videos, often associated with fake porn, designed to damage reputations), and 4% reported 'shallow fakes' (i.e. decontextualized videos or images, such as the misrepresentation of a crime scene) as a technique used to target them.

KEY FINDING #5:

Almost half (48%) of the women reported being harassed with unwanted private messages, highlighting the fact that much online violence targeting women journalists occurs in the shadows of the internet, away from public view.

KEY FINDING #6:

The most commonly reported (49%) online threat experienced by the women surveyed came in the form of abuse laced with hateful language designed to offend them.

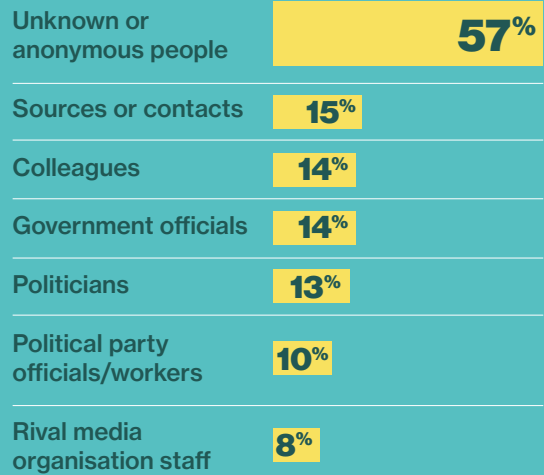
KEY FINDING #7:

Professional and reputational threats made up a significant proportion of incidents reported by the women surveyed. 42% had been targeted with reputational threats (e.g. threats designed to cause people to question their ethics or morality), while 23% identified professional threats (e.g. false allegations about misconduct drawn to the attention of their employer).

KEY FINDING #8:

9% of respondents reported being targeted by financial threats (e.g. attempts to extort money or assets; threats to expose spending behaviours; hacking into bank accounts; misrepresentation to financial institutions).

Who were the top identified sources of online violence directed at the women respondents?



This question invited participants to select all relevant answers.

KEY FINDING #9:

People identified by the women surveyed as 'unknown' or 'anonymous' constituted the highest rated category of sources of online violence (57%). The right to privacy is essential to the protection of confidential sources, and [anonymity and encryption](#) are enablers for these rights and protections. However, the proliferation of anonymous and pseudonymous 'troll' accounts complicates the process of investigating the perpetrators of online violence against women journalists and efforts to hold them to account, with a lack of transparency and limited responsiveness by internet communications companies compounding this problem.

KEY FINDING #10:

The role of political actors as top sources and primary perpetrators (37%) of online violence against women journalists is an alarming trend confirmed by this survey.

KEY FINDING #11:

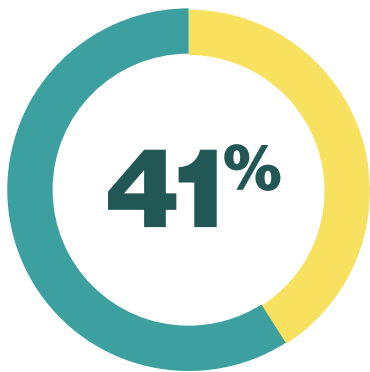
15% of the women journalists in the sample named their sources and contacts as top perpetrators of the online violence. This is a pattern that reflects their exposure to [offline violence](#). Whether delivered virtually or physically, violence against women journalists perpetrated by sources or contacts is sometimes used as a method to silence their critical reporting.

⁵ Doxing involves the malicious act of someone publishing another's private details, like home address and phone number publicly. Spoofing is the act of imposters appropriating and misrepresenting another's identity online.

KEY FINDING #12:

Colleagues were identified by 14% of the women surveyed as top sources of online violence they had been subjected to, while 8% reported that staff of rival news organisations were regularly attacking them.

How many respondents reported being subjected to online violence perceived to have been part of an orchestrated disinformation campaign?



KEY FINDING #13:

Women journalists frequently find themselves in the crosshairs of digital disinformation campaigns which [leverage misogyny](#) and other forms of hate speech to chill critical reporting. 41% percent of the women respondents to this survey said they had been targeted in online attacks that appeared to be linked to orchestrated disinformation campaigns.

KEY FINDING #14:

Nearly half (47%) of the women survey respondents identified reporting or commentating on gender issues (e.g. feminism, male-on-female-violence, reproductive rights including abortion, transgender issues) as a top trigger for online attacks, highlighting the function of misogyny in online violence against women journalists.

KEY FINDING #15:

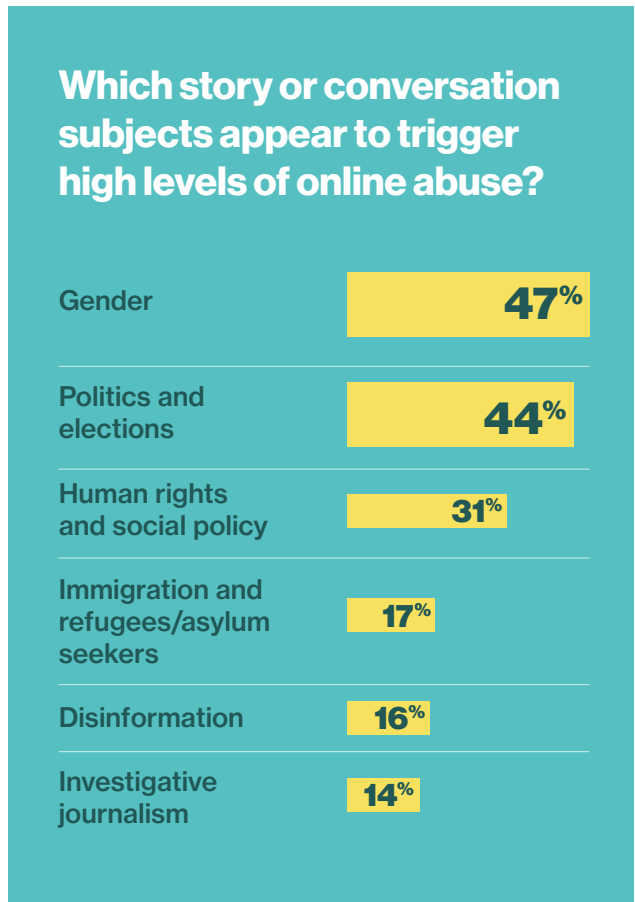
The second most likely theme to trigger online abuse against the women journalists surveyed was politics and elections (44%), underscoring the role of political attacks on the press in exacerbating journalism safety threats.

KEY FINDING #16:

Human rights and social policy issues were the next most frequently identified (31%) category of triggers for high levels of abuse, while immigration issues were selected by 17% of respondents.

KEY FINDING #17:

Reporting on disinformation is an emerging trigger for online attacks - it was a theme identified by 16% of the women surveyed, while 14% said investigative journalism prompts high levels of online abuse. This reflects the intertwining functions of forensic reporting and combating disinformation, along with efforts to chill attempts to hold perpetrators of online abuse to account.



This question invited participants to select all relevant answers.

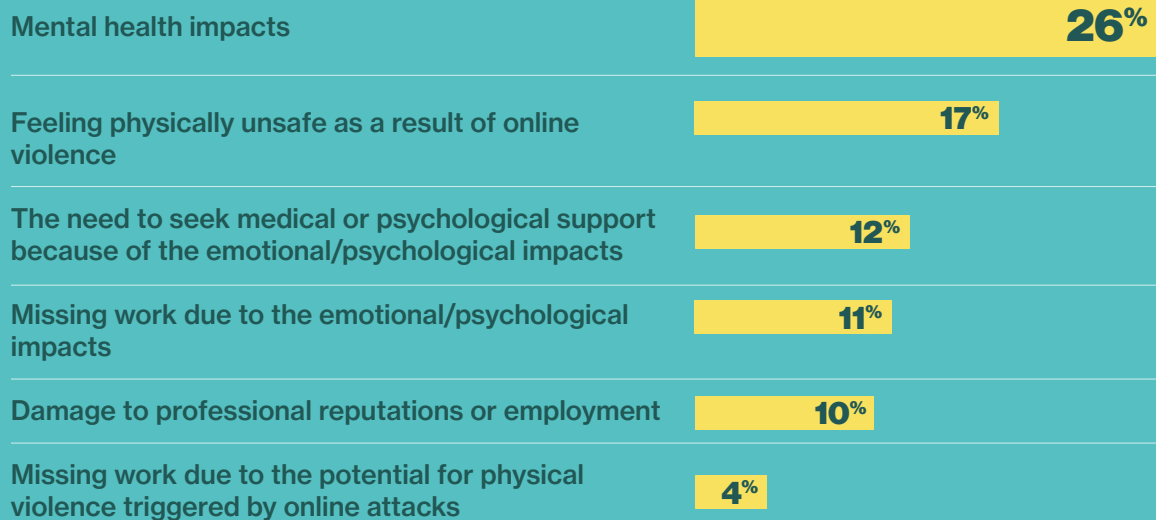
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Impacts of online violence against women

OVERVIEW

online violence against women journalists causes significant psychological harm - particularly when it is prolific and sustained. In fact, mental health effects were the impacts most frequently identified by the women journalists surveyed, with a substantial number saying they had sought medical or psychological help or took time off work to recover. However, online violence isn't contained within the digital world. It spills offline, causing physical harm as well as psychological injury. The impacts include increasing offline safety risks through targeted attacks that trigger mob reactions and digital security breaches. Our respondents described feeling physically unsafe due to online attacks, with some increasing their physical security in response, and others missing work due to concerns about online attacks jumping offline. The third most dominant theme emerging from the survey data in terms of the impacts of online violence against women journalists is the professional toll it takes, with significant implications for diversity in and through the news media, not just for individual women's careers. Finally, there is the problem that some women are clearly being silenced and retreating from view in response to being targeted.

What are the most significant impacts of online violence experienced by the women respondents?



This question invited participants to select all relevant answers

KEY FINDING #18:

The mental health impacts of online violence against the women journalists participating in this survey were the most frequently identified (26%) consequences of being targeted. These psychological effects also directly affected their capacity for work, with 11% indicating that they had taken days off work as a result. And 12% had sought medical or psychological assistance in response.

KEY FINDING #19:

17% percent of the women respondents indicated that they had felt physically unsafe as a result of online attacks, while 4 percent reported missing work due to the risk of the online violence they had experienced leading to physical attacks.



of women journalists said they had been attacked offline in connection with online violence that they had experienced⁶

KEY FINDING #20:

20% of the women journalists responding to a question about links between online violence and offline impacts reported experiencing abuse and attacks in the physical world that they believed were associated with online attacks. This finding is particularly disturbing given the emerging correlation between online attacks and the [murder of journalists with impunity](#).

KEY FINDING #21:

Women journalists experience significant professional impacts as a result of online violence. On top of missing work, one in ten (10%) of those participating in this survey said their professional reputations or employment had been affected.

KEY FINDING 22:

Despite the high incidence of online attacks identified by the women respondents, only a quarter (25%) reported incidents to their employer. And only 3% asked to be reassigned to other duties. This likely indicates that: a) Women journalists who are frequently structurally disempowered and disadvantaged in newsrooms remain reluctant to draw their employers' attention to the impacts of online violence; and b) It is only the more extreme instances of online violence that cause women journalists to escalate such safety concerns within their workplaces.

KEY FINDING 23:

The threat of offline violence caused 13% of women respondents to increase their physical security, highlighting their sense of vulnerability and their awareness of the potential 'real world' consequences of digital attacks.

KEY FINDING 24:

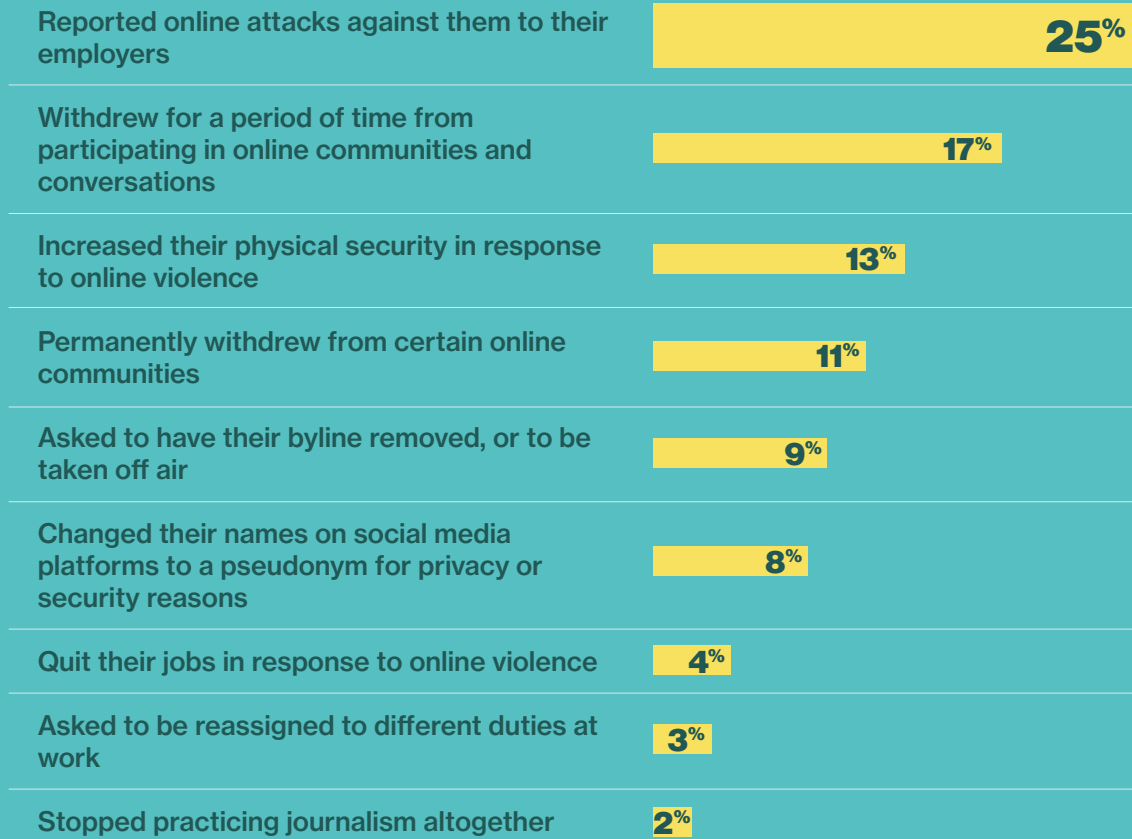
Many women journalists surveyed reacted to online attacks by making themselves less visible. 18% said they withdrew for a period of time from participating in online conversations and communities, while 11% permanently withdrew from certain online communities. Eight percent retreated behind pseudonyms for privacy and security reasons. While these might be strategic defensive moves, there are professional impacts of such acts of withdrawal, as indicated by the 9% of respondents who had asked to be taken off air or have their bylines removed and the 8% who retreated behind pseudonyms online after being attacked. But there are also significant gender equality and freedom of expression implications associated with the silencing of women journalists, or decreasing their visibility, with impacts on media diversity and [gender representation in the news](#). Women journalists should be seen and heard.

KEY FINDING 25:

Employment impacts of online violence were severe for a portion of the women surveyed. 4% of respondents said they had quit their jobs as a result, while 2% indicated that they had left journalism for good as a direct consequence of the online attacks they had endured. While these numbers might appear small, this is a significant indicator of the perniciousness of the problem.

⁶ Expressed as a percentage of the 596 women journalists who responded to the specific question

How did women respondents react to the online violence they experienced?



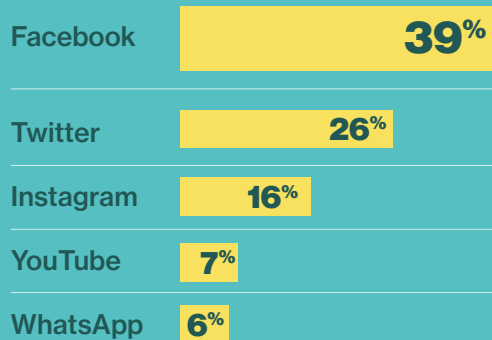
This question invited participants to select all relevant answers.

5 Vectors of online violence against women journalists

OVERVIEW

The role of internet communications companies as vectors for online attacks against women journalists cannot be underestimated in the era of digital journalism, networked disinformation, toxic online communities, and populist political actors who weaponise social media and leverage misogyny as tools to demonise them. The top five platforms or apps according to usage were : Facebook; Twitter; WhatsApp; YouTube; and Instagram. However, Facebook attracted disproportionately higher rates of formal complaints relating to online violence among the respondents, and it was also identified as the least safe of these high-use platforms. There is [increasing pressure](#) on these companies to respond swiftly and effectively to online violence targeting women journalists, as both a press freedom problem and a journalism safety issue. This involves the companies acknowledging that they have created the environment for '[platform capture](#)', and accepting international human rights laws and norms that require the same rights and protections afforded to women in journalism offline to be [replicated online](#). But, most importantly, it requires investment in effective, collaborative solutions to the online violence crisis that make a material difference to the lived experience of women journalists in these digital communities operated by rich and powerful companies, which have the capacity to do much more to protect the journalists whom they have courted as users.

Number of women respondents who reported online violence to these companies



Only the 5 most frequently used social media sites and apps are presented here. This question allowed participants to 'select all relevant answers'. Facebook owns Instagram and WhatsApp.

KEY FINDING #26:

Facebook was the platform or app most heavily used by respondents (77%), followed by Twitter (74%), WhatsApp (57%), YouTube (49%) and Instagram (46%). But it was also disproportionately identified as the platform to which respondents most frequently reported online attacks (39%), with Twitter attracting complaints at the rate of 26%. However, considering the role of Facebook and Twitter as major vectors of online attacks against women journalists, the fact that just over a third of respondents had formally reported the problem to Facebook, and around a quarter to Twitter, probably reflects both a sense of futility frequently associated with such efforts, and the general reluctance of the women surveyed to escalate these issues externally. Despite the [courageous activism](#) of many high profile women journalists who are [fighting back](#) against online attacks, the internet communications companies have failed to deliver effective solutions to date.

KEY FINDING #27:

Facebook is perceived to be the least safe among the social media platforms or apps most frequently used by the women respondents, with 12% rating the network "very unsafe". Twitter was rated "very unsafe" by 7 percent of respondents, while WhatsApp, YouTube and Instagram were identified as "very unsafe" by 4 percent.

6

Responses to online violence against women journalists

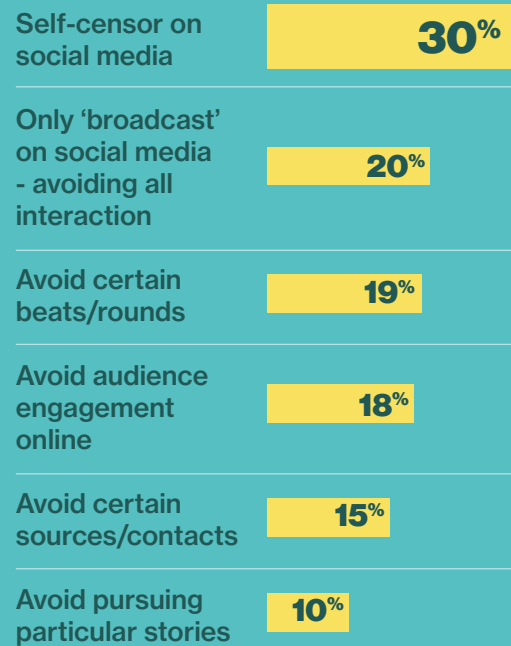
OVERVIEW

There is a pattern of victim-blaming associated with online violence against women journalists, which seeks to make the targets responsible for the violent and toxic behaviour of others, paralleling the sort of treatment women still often encounter in the context of sexual assault or domestic violence. This is reflected in the “mute, block, report, delete” mantra of internet communications companies struggling to deal with the problem structurally, and it is also evident within law enforcement and judicial contexts, as well as within news organisations. A quarter of the respondents told us that they had complained to their employers about online attacks. But the responses that they reported receiving most frequently were very unhelpful. They were: no response at all, or gender-insensitive advice like “[grow a thicker skin](#)” and “toughen up”. Some women also reported being asked by their employers what they did to trigger the attack. The most frequently recorded response to online violence was [self-censorship](#), followed by withdrawal from all social media interaction, and avoidance of audience engagement. This pattern of responding through avoidance was also evident in impacts on their reporting practice, affecting the stories and sources pursued, which can also be understood as a form of self-censorship that chills reporting.

KEY FINDING #28:

Many women journalists self-censor in response to online violence. Nearly a third (30%) of our survey respondents said they self-censor on social media as a result of being targeted, while 20% said they avoid all interaction online, and 18% said they specifically avoided engaging with audiences. Such acts could be considered defensive measures designed to preserve their safety, but they also demonstrate the effectiveness of online attack tactics - designed to chill critical reporting, silence women, and muzzle truth-telling.

How does the level of online violence experienced by women respondents affect their journalism practice and audience engagement?



This question invited participants to select all relevant answers.

KEY FINDING #29:

Avoidance emerged from the data as a key form of response to online violence among the women respondents. Apart from the avoidance of audience engagement mentioned above, 19% said they avoided certain beats/rounds; 15% avoid certain sources or contacts and 10% avoided pursuing particular stories because of the abuse they had experienced online. This can also be understood as a form of self-censorship.

KEY FINDING #30:

While one in four (25%) of the women journalists surveyed reported online attacks to their employers, the top rated responses they received illustrated the enduring failures within many news organisations to respond appropriately or effectively to the crisis. The most common response (10%) received was that no action was taken; the next most frequently identified response (9%) was advice such as “grow a thicker skin”, or “toughen up”. This reflects a continuing failure to take the crisis of gendered online violence seriously as a journalism safety issue, and to act accordingly. Disturbingly, two percent of the women respondents also said their employers asked them what they did to provoke the treatment they received.

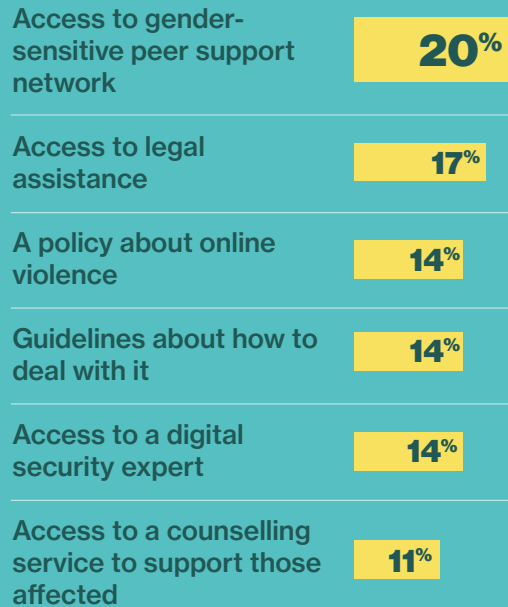


25% of women respondents said they had reported online violence to their employers

10% said their employers did nothing

9% said they were told to “grow a thicker skin” or “toughen up” because online violence is something journalists have to “put up with”

What systems do women respondents’ employers have in place for dealing with online violence?



This question invited participants to select all relevant answers.

KEY FINDING #31:

The respondents demonstrated the existence of a double impediment to effective action to deal with online violence experienced in the course of their employment: 1. Low levels of access to systems and support mechanisms for targeted journalists and 2. Low levels of awareness about the existence of measures, policies and guidelines addressing the problem. Despite evidence of serious mental health impacts, of the women journalists participating in this survey, only 11% said their employer provided access to a counselling service that could help, only 14% said their organisations had policies or guidelines addressing the problem of online violence, and the same small percentage said they were able to contact a digital security expert who could assist them, while just two out of ten (20%) respondents said they had access to a gender-sensitive peer support network.

7 Conclusion and Recommendations

This survey demonstrates that online violence against women journalists is a global phenomenon. A climate of impunity for online attacks raises questions that need to be further explored as impunity emboldens the perpetrators, demoralises the victim, [erodes the foundations of journalism](#), heightens journalism safety threats, and undermines freedom of expression. Based on these findings, [urgent action](#) is recommended to confront the problem of online violence against women journalists in more effective ways.

Preliminary recommendations arising from the first findings:

- States should ensure that laws and rights designed to protect women journalists offline are applied equally online, as urged by UN Resolutions that [call on States](#) to observe the particularities of online threats and harassment of women journalists through: *“Collecting and analysing concrete quantitative and qualitative data on online and offline attacks or violence against journalists, that are disaggregated by, among other factors, sex”* and *“...publicly and systematically condemning online and offline attacks, harassment and violence against journalists and media workers.”*
- Political actors should desist from mounting attacks (on and offline) against women journalists.
- Women journalists should not be blamed for the online violence they experience, nor should they be expected to bear the responsibility for managing or combating the problem alone.
- Women journalists should be encouraged and aided to report online violence to their employers and internet communications platforms.
- Internet communications companies should ensure that their online abuse and harassment reporting systems enable complaints from women journalists to be acted upon in a timely and effective manner in accordance with [international human rights frameworks](#) designed specifically to protect journalists.
- Internet communications companies should detail in their transparency reports the types and patterns of the reports they receive, and the actions they take in response.
- News organisations need to establish formal gender-sensitive procedures and systems for identifying, reporting and monitoring online violence against their staff.
- Journalists’ employers should be encouraged to provide online safety support (integrating psychological, digital security, physical security, and legal responses) to staff, along with targeted education and training.
- [Collaborative responses](#) involving civil society organisations, journalists’ networks and researchers are necessary to gain more granular knowledge about attacks, to develop collective responses to guard the safety of women journalists, and to offer adequate support.

A NOTE ON THE RESEARCH METHOD

This UNESCO-commissioned survey was fielded in five languages: Arabic, English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. The method adopted was ‘purposive sampling’, with ‘snowballing’ techniques used to generate responses within the international field of journalism. The results, therefore, are not generalisable, although it is legitimate to extrapolate many patterns that may well have wider applicability. To avoid illegitimate or inauthentic responses and ensure data integrity, the survey was distributed digitally via the closed networks of UNESCO and ICFJ, their research partners, civil society organisations focused on media development, journalism safety and gender equality, and groups of professional journalists. The survey ran from September 24th to November 13th, 2020. It garnered 1210 responses. After the removal of invalid responses, 901 participants remained. Their data was then subjected to quantitative analysis. For the purpose of this report, the data was disaggregated along gender lines and a subset of 714 respondents who identified as women was isolated for analysis. Ethical considerations resulted in many questions being made optional. Some questions also allowed the selection of multiple responses to enable the capture of a multiplicity of experiences. As a result, the number of responses varies between questions and the results will not necessarily add up to 100%. The University of Sheffield granted ethics clearance for the English language version of the survey. Translations into other languages were conducted by UNESCO and reviewed by ICFJ.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Julie Posetti is Global Director of Research at the International Center for Journalists ([ICFJ](#)). She is an award-winning journalist who is also academically affiliated with the University of Sheffield’s Centre for Freedom of the Media (CFOM) and the University of Oxford’s Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (RISJ).

Nermine Aboulez is a Research Associate at ICFJ and a PhD candidate at the University of Oregon.

Kalina Bontcheva is a Professor in Computer Science at the University of Sheffield and a member of the University’s Centre for Freedom of the Media (CFOM)

Jackie Harrison is Professor of Public Communication, UNESCO Chair on Media Freedom, Journalism Safety and the Issue of Impunity, and Chair of [CFOM](#) at the University of Sheffield.

Silvio Waisbord is Director and Professor in the School of Media and Public Affairs at George Washington University.

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