Female Journalists in New Media

Experiences, challenges and a gendered approach

DRF

About

Digital Rights Foundation (DRF) is a registered research-based advocacy non-governmental organization in Pakistan. Founded in 2012, DRF focuses on ICTs to support human rights, inclusiveness, democratic processes, and digital governance. DRF works on issues of online free speech, privacy, data protection, surveillance, and online violence against women. DRF opposes any and all sorts of online censorship and violations of human rights both on ground and online.

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Executive Summary

This report aims to understand how gendered, online harassment of female journalists translates in the physical world. Instead of using quantitative data, the report takes a qualitative approach to understand the issues that female journalists face in the new media. These issues include trivialisation of gendered issues by male editors and colleagues; lack of support or validation for harassment by media houses; callous attitudes that reinforce the notion that if women cannot handle the "heat", they should not be on social media; and lastly women are excluded from Press Clubs across Pakistan because of their gender. The negative impact online harassment might have on the career of female journalists is oftennot acknowledged—thus this report seeks to highlight the issues faced by female journalists in online spaces and the impact that it has on their career.

After setting the ground by explaining gendered harassment and its impacts on women's careers and democracy, the report cites specific examples and problems faced by female journalists in Pakistan. It ends with recommendations to the state, media houses, civil society and press clubs of Pakistan.

1. Introduction

The International Federation of Journalists has ranked Pakistan as one of the most dangerous country for journalists, in the world.[1] These threats exist online as well as offline. Often there is a direct connection between the two, meaning that journalists are often threatened online but the fear carries into the offline world.

While significant research has been conducted on the risks and experiences of journalists as a whole, not enough attention has been paid to the gendered experience of journalists. No one can discount the fact that male journalists in Pakistan experience threats and intimidation, online and offline but the variety of trolling and threats they experience are very different from the ones female journalists experience. Hence, the aim of this research is two pronged: to highlight the challenges and risks female journalists face in Pakistan, and to provide recommendations about overcoming these challenges. This report seeks to build on prior research conducted by Digital Rights Foundation on issues of gendered harassment.[2]

Women's harassment online has roots in the specific way women have been discriminated against in history – often their "honour" is put on the line and threatened, or their appearance is vilified. A study titled "Why Women aren't Welcome on the Internet" explains that "the harassment targeted at men is not because they are men, as is clearly more frequently the case with women. It is defining because a lot of harassment is an effort to put women, because they are women, back in their place."[3] It is crucial to understand gendered online harassment as something that happens to women on the basis of their gender, thus it can be categorized as a form of gender-based harassment.[4] The report also points out that online harassment is not just unpleasant and it cannot simply be ignored since it has real-world impacts: "It's often about men asserting dominance, silencing, and frequently, scaring and punishing them. This type of harassment also includes rape and death threats."[5]

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[1] Bureau report, "No one convicted as 26 journalists killed in Pakistan", The Nation. Nov 2, 2018

[2] Zahid and Khan, "Surveillance of Female Journalists in Pakistan", Digital Rights Foundation, 2017 and Javaid, Maham, "Digital Insecurity of Journalists", Digital Rights Foundation, 2018.

[3] Chemaly, Soraya, "There's No Comparing Male and Female Harassment Online". Time Magazine. September 9, 2014.

Online violence and abuse against female journalists is an extension of offline violence and abuse against women, according to Amnesty International.[6] Online harassment occurs on a spectrum of violence; "It can include direct and indirect threats of violence, such as physical or sexual threats. In some instances, such threats can quickly spill over into the offline world." [7]

An interesting finding of the interviews conducted by the report is that the problems faced and demands made by female journalists in Pakistan are extremely similar to those made by female journalist across the world, which speaks to the similarities in the shared experience of women on the basis of their gender. In a 2018 global report published by the Center of Media Engagement,[8] the author concludes that "the women in our study really wanted more support from the editors and supervisors. They wanted to be believed. They wanted their news organizations to take action — from deleting comments quickly to training journalists on how to deal with the abuse. Many of the women we interviewed felt unsupported or even afraid to complain about the problems to their supervisors. That suggests that newsroom leaders need to change the culture at their organizations to deal with this issue." This, in essence, is the gist of what the reporters we interviewed wanted.

2. Methodology and limitations

The report was written based on information from primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included qualitative, in-depth interviews of ten female journalists from Pakistan. The interviews provided the basis for "Challenges female reporters face due to online gendered harassment" – if several reporters had highlighted the same challenge, we conducted secondary research around it, to see if the problem was regional or global. Secondary research was important to gather statistics and facts about online harassment faced by female journalists.

Due to time limitations, this report does not attempt to represent problems faced by all journalists across the country – it is specifically trying to understand the challenges female reporters face online and how these online fears are translated offline. The report does not claim that these ten female journalists interviewed represent the experiences of all female journalists in Pakistan; the aim of this report is not to make generalizable inferences, but to try to understand their specific experiences. The collection of primary data was not quantitative. Rather, the focus was on trying to understand exactly what fears female journalists have, how they deal with them and how the State and media houses can work with them to improve the situation.

3. Building context for gendered online harassment

The gendered angle

The issue of gendered harassment of journalists is not a problem specific to Pakistan. Female journalists, across the world, face similar problems. A report titled "Trolls and threats: Online harassment of female journalists" by Al Jazeera English explains that "while both men and women face harassment online, many female media professionals have to deal with the kind of hate comments men will never have to stomach - messages about their appearance, gender, and sexuality."[9] In a survey carried out in Finland in 2016, it was discovered that "while male and female journalists receive similar numbers of threats, the nature of the threats differs according to gender. 14 percent of the female journalists surveyed reported threats of sexual violence. No male journalist reported receiving such threats. Around five percent of both genders reported receiving death threats."[10]

In a famous example of gendered online trolling in Pakistan, we have the case of a Pakistani journalist - Asma Shirazi. She became a target of harsh online harassment after interviewing the former Prime Minister (PM) of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif. After the former PM and his daughter were arrested, Shirazi announced the interview on social media which led to a character assassination campaign against her online, she was called a '"whore", a "slut", a "traitor" and a "western agent". '[11] At the time Shirazi was trolled, the Pakistani chapter of the Coalition for Women in Journalism, an independent body formed to provide protection to women journalists, commented: "In some instances, we have documented trolls where faces of female journalists were copied on sexually explicit images, at times pornographic images. There have been several threats of 'murder' and 'rape', specifically targeting women journalists. Overall, we notice women journalists being demonized and humiliated with great intensity."[12]

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[4] Danielle Keats Citron, "Law's expressive value in combating cyber gender harassment", Michigan Law Review, 108(3), 2009, p. 373-415.

[5] Chemaly, Soraya, "There's No Comparing Male and Female Harassment Online". Time Magazine. September, 9, 2014.

[6] Pinto, Shiromi, "What is online violence and abuse against women?" Amnesty International. November 20, 2017

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ordway, Denise-Marie, "Study shows female journalists face 'rampant' online harassment". Journalist's Resource. Shorenstein Centre on Media, Politics and Public Policy. August 2, 2018.

Similarly, this report is not setting out to prove that male journalists do not face online harassment. The purpose of this report is to document the gendered harassment of female journalists. The questions we want to raise are whether female journalist face online harassment because of their gender, what that harassment looks like and the impact that it has.

One journalist explains that female journalists face more harassment because they are considered as "easy targets". The stereotype is that it is easier to harass and abuse women because they are non-confrontational. "Women are taught not to react to harassment because talking back will bring them a bad name," says a journalist. "Aadmi ka toh kuch nahi jaye ga, badnaami sirf aurat ki hoti hai. [In our society, men's honour is not lost over these minor incursions, the way women's honour is]". Notions of timidity are weaponised against women online to ensure that they do not respond to the harassment they face; and furthermore are even internalised by institutions that discourage women from speaking out, or making a "fuss".

> " men are not threatened with rape online, nor are they told that they deserve to be paraded naked, the way we are told, "

Another journalist explains that female journalists are shamed online not just for the stories they cover but also for the way they dress, the amount or lack of make-up they wear, their looks and their general personality. This kind of gendered harassment is not directed towards men. "I am not saying that men are not trolled online; what I am saying is that men are not threatened with rape online, nor are they told that they deserve to be paraded naked, the way we are told," she says.

One female journalist explains that as we operate in a patriarchal system, women automatically are more vulnerable as compared to men. A woman's presence online is usually sexualized in these spaces. Female journalists are targeted online on the basis of gender and the threats women journalists face are dominantly sexual.

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[9] Ressa, Ghose and Storm. "Trolls and threats: Online harassment of female journalists". Al Jazeera English, The Listening Post. Oct 6, 2018.

[10] Onali, Alma. "Female Journalists Face Online Vitriol Even in 'Land of Free Press'." International Press Institute, Helsingin Sanomat Foundation, 22 Aug. 2018.

[11] Javed, Beenish. "Online harassment against women journalists continue". DW News, Women Talk Online. July, 21, 2018.

[12] Ibid.

"It definitely effects my offline life as it builds a fear and insecurity based on gender," she says. Another journalist says, "I receive sexualized harassment online, and generally more criticism than my male equivalents."

In a more regional example, "Indian journalist, Dhanya Rajendran, was vilified online just for panning a movie on Twitter. The editor-in-chief of the digital news platform The News Minute was called a prostitute, asked to upload nude videos of herself and accused, in graphic terms, of performing sex acts with her supporters. The trolling lasted for three days and drew more than 30,000 tweets."[13] In another, a Swedish broadcaster, Alexandra Pascalidou was called a "dirty whore," a "Greek parasite" (a reference to her ethic heritage), a "stupid psycho," "ugly liar" and "biased hater." She was threatened with gang rape and sexual torture in hideous detail.[14]

" Their freedom becomes our prison "

Trolling women online is a form of silencing them. One journalist explains that "we are judged by the comments that our haters give us. And we cannot argue back because we are constantly told not to engage." Pascalidou testified before a European Commission about the impact of gender-based trolling and she told the Commission that "[The perpetrators'] goal is our silence….It is censorship hidden behind the veil of freedom of speech. Their freedom becomes our prison."

Lastly, contrary to popular opinion, a 2014 study on Twitter abuse targeting celebrities[15] found that "journalism is the only category where women received more abuse than men, with female journalists receiving roughly three times as much abuse as their male counterparts." Most importantly, the thing this report is considering is not the quantity of trolling and threats, but the gendered nature of it.

How does online harassment become offline harassment ?

There is a common misconception that online threats are meaningless and should simply be ignored. "A recent study by Trollbusters and the International Women's Media Foundation found that around 40 percent of the female journalists they interviewed had stopped writing about stories they knew would be lightning rods for attacks."[16] That means that there are serious and direct offline impacts of online threats In the above mentioned Trollbusters report, around 30 percent of female journalists indicated that they had thought about leaving journalism because of online abuse.
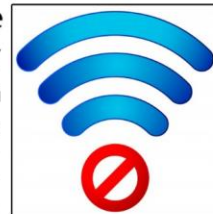
Sagarika Ghose, consulting editor at The Times of India, told a newspaper that "harassment on the web has the potential to seep offline as well". Ghose said: "The threats can be online and then go offline. My colleague and good friend, Gauri Lankesh, was actually shot in September 2017. Now, the reason why I take these Facebook and Twitter threats seriously is because, you know, this is exactly what happened to Gauri. She faced social media threats, and she never used to take it seriously but the fact is she was killed." [17]

> I was afraid my online stalkers would also stalk me in these events.

Many people do not understand why women are so afraid or bothered by online harassment. We asked women, who have experienced online harassment, if the fear carries over to their lives offline and in the majority of instances they said that it does. One journalist explained that "stalking and harassment online, made me fear going to social events. I was afraid my online stalkers would also stalk me in these events."

In a report supported by the Harvard Berkman Klein Centre, the distinction between the "online" and "offline" world is declared artificial. The report explains that "any separation between these dimensions of our lives could still be made today, any "online" harassment will always have a "real world" effect. That the medium used for the harassment is digital, does not mean that actual fear and anxiety do not follow from it. This is underlined by UN Human Rights Council Resolution L.13 on the promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet, which affirms that "the same rights that people have offline must also be protected online, in particular freedom of expression". Similarly, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media issued recommendations in 2015, stating that "online abuse must be dealt with in the broader context of gender discrimination and violence against women to ensure that the same rights that people have offline must be protected online."" [18]

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[13] Ricchiardi, Sherry. "How newsrooms can fight online harassment targeting female journalists". Journalist Safety. International Centre for Journalists, IJNet. September 5. 2017

[14] Chen, Gina Masullo; et al. "'You Really Have to Have a Thick Skin': A Cross-Cultural Perspective on How Online Harassment Influences Female Journalists," Journalism, April 7, 2018.

[15] "Male Celebrities Receive More Abuse on Twitter than Women." Demos, 24 Aug. 2014.

[16] Ressa, Ghose and Storm. "Trolls and threats: Online harassment of female journalists". Al Jazeera English, The Listening Post. Oct 6, 2018.

Examples of Harassment

A report supported by the Berkman Klein Centre, states that online harassment covers a "broad range of actions, including threats of (sexual) violence, the spreading of falsehoods about a person asserted as facts, the posting of sensitive information online (home address, personal phone number, social security numbers), technological attacks such as falsely shutting down social media accounts, (sexist, racist) insults, and swatting." [19]

Following are some examples of online harassment faced by female journalists in Pakistan. This list, which was created from the primary interviews we conducted, does not claim to be holistic, it is merely highlighting a few varied incidents of online harassment and some that translated from online to offline harassment.

1. Unsolicited Contact:

"I reported about the militarization of Swat Valley. Following these stories, someone found my phone number, and demanded to know my address. They wanted a meeting so I could be educated about the current political scenario and the dynamics of the Swat Valley." It must be noted here that it is easy to think that she could just refuse the meeting, have the harassers' number blocked and get back to her work; but it is not as simple as that. These calls are intimidating and cause one to live in fear. Furthermore, prescriptions such as blocking do not take into account the fact that harassers often use multiple accounts and identities.

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[17] Ressa, Ghose and Storm. "Trolls and threats: Online harassment of female journalists". Al Jazeera English, The Listening Post. Oct 6, 2018.

[18] Reventlow, Nani Jansen. "Online harassment of women journalists and international law: not "just" a gender issue, but a threat to democracy". Berkman Klein Centre Collection. Nov 16, 2017.

[19] Ibid

2. Invasion of Privacy:

"I wrote a story about an alleged militant. One of my male colleagues was so insecure about the strength of my story that he gave away my contact number to the alleged militant, saying that I had misquoted him. The fact that my personal number was out, given away by my own colleague really shocked me. It was a very difficult time for me since I was living alone, and the alleged militant started calling me from different numbers. This person could have reached my home or hurt me. I spent the night at a relative's home as going home was not an option."

> **The fact that my personal number was out, given away by my own colleague really shocked me**

3. Mass Trolling:

"I tweeted about the heavy presence of a political party at a religious party's protest camp at Stargate, Karachi and was heavily trolled online. I blocked the abusers and the dust settled after that. Since then, I do not tweet a lot about political happenings and only use twitter to post my stories. I am often trolled and insulted on social media, especially when I do a story that does not portray Pakistan positively. I now feel anxious before such a story is published online. "

4. Threats of Sexual Violence:

"Once when I wrote a story about rape, I was trolled online by people saying that I must be raped for writing the article. As a result, I decided to not write about this topic again. It was not only awful but scary as well. Despite it being an online threat, I felt it in my bones. It was hard for me to accept that people own such mind-sets. Eventually this led to self-censorship. I gradually reduced my time online and started self-censoring what I posted. Back then, I was not aware of the facilities I could reach out to for help."

> **I gradually reduced my time online and started self-censoring what I posted**

5. Unsolicited Contact by Sources:

"I have felt unsafe on a few occasions especially when the sources at times sent me private messages around or after midnight. I have found a solution to this by making it very clear early on to everyone to not send me direct messages after 9 pm." However, not all sources follows these boundaries.

7. Misinformation Campaigns:

"When I was fighting a harassment case I was trolled, abused and maligned online. There were so many fake accounts spreading lies about me. I was stressed but it never got to my head. Thankfully, nothing made me think to stop raising issues regarding sensitive topics and to stop fighting for the causes."

8. Personal and Political Attacks:

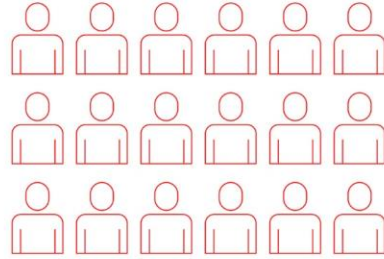"On social media, if I criticise one party, the other blames me for being a paid journalist or if I highlight a taboo I am blamed for being against Islam. If I post anything about women's rights, people abuse me and make personal attacks.

If I highlight a taboo I am blamed for being against Islam

How journalists' self-censorship affects the public

The fact that female journalists face harassment, which propels them towards self-censorship, not only creates a barrier in their career progression, but it is also a deterrent to the smooth functioning of democracy in a country. It also prevents the public of information that they deserve to have. If journalists are afraid of covering certain topics, news about those topics would not reach the public. Given that female voices in news media are already few and far in between, self-censorship by female journalists deprives the public of different perspectives of critical issues.

One report, supported by the Berkman Klein Centre, explains that "Online harassment of women journalists hinders the free press from operating as it should, which negatively affects the democratic process. Silencing journalists stifles the free flow of information and our ability to exercise our democratic rights; a pluralistic media landscape needs to include women's voices. Silencing women journalists therefore constitutes an attack on democracy itself. States should address the issue with the gravity it deserves and live up to their international obligations to put in place domestic legal systems capable of responding adequately to these attacks."   It is important to highlight the democratic implications of gendered harassment, as harassers often enjoy impunity under the grab of freedom of expression—this perspective flips are argument in the favour of women, online harassment impedes the right to freedom of expression of half of the world's population.

For instance, when journalists were asked if they had internalised self-censorship out of fear of backlash by the public or the state, one said: "I do not think I want to write anything about blasphemy." Another says that she does not write about particularly sensitive social issues because it does not seem like it is worth the risk. It may be pertinent to add here that writing about sensitive issues in Pakistan have also proven dangerous for even the male journalists, but it should be considered that the risks for women writing about socially and culturally sensitive beats is doubly dangerous. When women report on violence of any kind, they often receive threats of further violence online.

According to interviews conducted for this report, female journalists censor themselves in two ways: one is in choosing the kind of stories they write and the other is by choosing to censor themselves on social media. One journalist, who feels more protected by her media house says that she does not censor her work, but she does censor her views online. Another journalist explains she is "always

past has curtailed freedom of expression. "I am always very mindful of trolls when I say something on social media," she says. Another says "I have self-censored on social media a lot over time. I still struggle to express myself freely after being trolled massively."

This, however, self-censorship is not representative of all female journalists. Many say that they would never imagine self-censoring their published stories because their professionalism is very important to them. One journalist says, "I do not censor my stories and send the quotes verbatim, exactly the way they were said to me."

Others follow a middle ground where they will bravely report facts in their published stories, without self-censorship, but they will silence themselves on social media.

4. Challenges female reporters face due to online gendered harassment

Following are five problems that female journalists in Pakistan describe as gendered problems in their career. It is important to note that given the limited dataset, these issues are by no means holistic or generalizable.
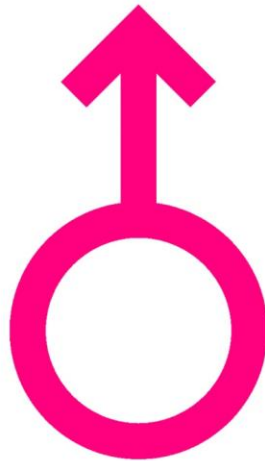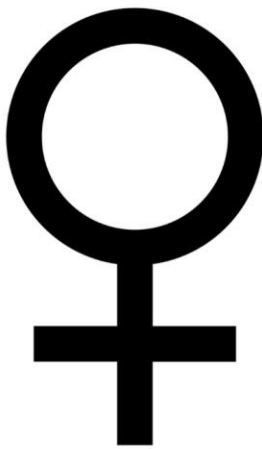
Reventlow, Nani Jansen. "Online harassment of women journalists and international law: not "just" a gender issue, but a threat to democracy". Berkman Klein Center Collection. Nov 16, 2017.

1. Erasure of gender based harassment by the male gatekeepers of the media industry

Globally, journalism is still considered as a male dominant profession. In Pakistan, while recent years have shown an increase in female reporters and editors, the profession is largely dominated by men. Within reporting, there is an unofficial division, where male reporters are expected to cover topics such as politics and terrorism and the women are expected to stick to "soft topics" like culture and social issues. The moment a female reporter crosses over to the male side and reports on "hard" news, she becomes a target of trolling, such as the example given above about Asma Shirazi. The journalists we interviewed, explained that one of the reasons for this prevalent attitude is that the newsroom of the media industry are still controlled by the old guard of male reporters and editors.

> The moment a female reporter crosses over to the male side and reports on "hard" news, she becomes a target of trolling

According to the interviews conducted for this survey, often when female journalists bring up the fact that the are experiencing gender-based harassment, they are dismissed by their own colleagues who believe that male and female journalists have it equally bad. One journalist believes that this happens because "the media industry is dominated by men from a certain generation. They bring their old values to the newsroom and are quick to dismiss any opinion that suggests otherwise."

Another journalist says that while she has always been grateful to have editors who were once reporters, her workplace was completely transformed when she began working under a female editor who had once been a reporter. "She completely understood the challenges I face as a reporter and guided me. My male editors had never experienced gendered harassment so they could not understand it," she says. However, this begs the questions why male editors cannot develop empathy and imagination. Is it so impossible for them to place themselves in the shoes of female reporters? It also speaks to the importance of having more women in editorial positions.

On the other hand, a journalist who works for an international media house in Pakistan says that in her "organisation, people are generally more aware about such issues; there is culture of equality, in letter and spirit." She explains that

whenever she has spoken to her colleagues about gendered harassment, they have verbally supported her. Another says that her male colleagues mostly support her but sometimes she has to spell it out to them why a certain kind of harassment threatens her.

There are still others who believe "that both men and women who do not experience this sort of trolling really do not understand how hurtful and hard it can be to deal with". Until, more women are present in newsroom, the media industry in itself is not going to bother understanding the issues related to gendered harassment – they will keep thinking that these concerns are unimportant.

2. When journalists feel threatened, there is no support from the authorities

Safety and protection of every citizen lies with the State and given how integral media is to freedom of expression, that responsibility is even more acute for journalists. However, from the interviews conducted, the major takeaway is that female journalists feel that the authorities and the institutions working to ensure that journalists carry out their work under safe conditions, do not recognize their problems. "One reason for this may be because we do not speak up," according to one of the female journalists.

Women face a double-edged sword because of their gender and profession. While there has been much talk about the challenges that journalists face in their field and the level of threats and intimidation they receive, not much focus has been given to the gendered threats that female journalists face. One journalist says, "The message that has been given out to the public at large due to the neglect of the authorities is that anyone can get away with threatening or harassing us online." She believes that the perpetrators responsible for giving threats online should be punished so that an example can be set for the rest of them. This way the trolls would think twice before harassing women journalists on social media.

Another issue highlighted by one of the interviewees is that the institutions are not well equipped to handle the volume of cybercrime cases. She mentions that she went to report her case but nothing was done about it and now it has been over a year.

The National Response Center for Cyber Crime (NR3C) is grossly under-resourced and needs more technical resources to be able to keep up with the amount of cases.

During the interviews, it was observed that there is a lack of trust between the authorities and the journalists and that trust can only be gained if the former acknowledge the issues that women journalists face in their field. There is also an absence of channels of communication and dialogue between the government and journalists.

The bill titled the Journalists Safety, Security and Protection Act, 2017, drawn up by the parliamentary committee, seeks to address the issues involved in the safety, security and protection of journalists through a multi-pronged effort with shared responsibility of all stakeholders. While there are many important provisions such as the Journalists Safety Fund, a council of representatives comprising journalist bodies, media safety experts and human rights activists but it does not take into account the issues that specifically female journalists face. While the efforts of the authorities to ensure safety of all journalists is commendable but they gendered approach to problems faced by journalists should also be taken into account. Furthermore, the bill does not cover digital security and online spaces.

3. To be, or not to be on social media

Across the world, reporters are encouraged and sometimes instructed to share their work on social media, and also to maintain social media presence. However, for women, audience engagement can have very dangerous and unpleasant consequences. A report titled "You really have to have a thick skin: A cross-cultural perspective on how online harassment influences female journalists" conducted by the Center for Media Engagement [21] explains that of the 75 female journalists interviewed for the study, 73 said they had experienced gendered harassment online, or harassment that focuses specifically on their gender or sexuality. In this particular report, the journalists being questioned were from across the world.
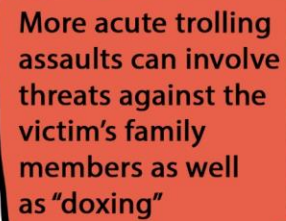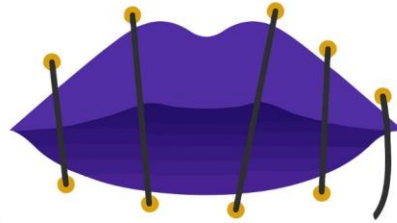
According to a report published by the University of Sussex, "Female journalists receive more online abuse and trolling attacks than their male counterparts. The attacks are focused not on the content or information reported, but on the

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[21] Ordway, Denise-Marie, "Study shows female journalists face 'rampant' online harassment". Journalist's Resource. Shorenstein Centre on Media, Politics and Public Policy. August 2, 2018.

journalists themselves. They frequently included sexual harassment and threats of violence, or in the case of Sri Lankan journalist Sonali Samarasinghe, attacks on the target's biological womanhood, with a troll stating that she "had no uterus." More acute trolling assaults can involve threats against the victim's family members as well as "doxing"—the release of personal information like a home address, which can put the journalist's physical safety at risk." [22]

> **More acute trolling assaults can involve threats against the victim's family members as well as "doxing"**

Due to the high prevalence of gendered harassment on Twitter, female journalists are often in two minds about maintaining a presence on the social media application. They are told that if they are on Twitter and tweet openly or regularly, then they are inviting trouble; and if they do not then they are holding back on their opinions and their freedom of expression is being curbed. Ofcourse there is a third variety of female journalists who simply do not want to be on social media because of non-gendered reasons.

One journalist explains that when she began her career, she was very active on twitter. She would tweet while reporting and then once her story was published, she would share it on several social mediums, but over time she has almost stopped tweeting because she experienced so much negative backlash for her stories. Most of the backlash was about her appearance. These personalized remarks have resulted in journalists retreating from social media, in a hyper-connected media landscape where maintaining an online presence has become an imperative.

Another says "Every story that I do, it goes out on social media and I am always prepared because I know that I would not get any good comments. I know majority of the comments would be hateful, impolite and judgemental. Initially I used to get upset and scared but now I understand that this happens no matter what you do. Often times people do not even read the story and they start hurling abuse at you. I have now stopped reading comments on my stories."

Essentially, social media has become a double-edged sword for female journalists. Being on it means that they have to be prepared for a vicious online onslaught that is less based on their work and more focused on their bodies, looks and sexuality. Not being on social media means that you do not promote your work as much as your male colleagues and lose out on the kind of coverage they have access to. Not sharing your work or your opinion on social media is also a form of

self-censorship that is damaging to journalists' careers as well as democracy and human rights. Lastly, social media companies themselves take almost no responsibility for dealing appropriately with this abuse. They should also be held accountable for coming up with mechanisms to deal with online harassment and abuse.

4. If their own media houses do not support them, why should anyone else?

It takes a powerful media organization to stand up to more powerful entities that have engulfed the country and these days, media houses have been especially weakened because of a financial crunch . One journalist says "media houses do not even report on the injustices or problems within or among other media outlets. The rivalry between media bosses turns into rivalries between media groups and there can be no solidarity across media groups because of this problem." She is referring to the fact that the media industry itself has no strength of its own to fall back on, especially in the context of huge cuts in advertisement revenue generated from government advertisements. Her point is that media houses do not support female journalists in dealing with online harassment because they are not strong enough to do anything about it.

However, another journalist disagrees. She says that media houses do not offer support to women because "they do not care; it is not part of our professional culture, they are not sensitized about the issues women face, its lack of awareness, mainly." Another says "I believe it is due to the lack of awareness and knowledge of digital security. Media outlets still rely on their conventional practices."

A journalist points out that the issues female journalists face from the male colleagues are only multiplied when it comes to media houses. "If our male editors do not understand the problems we face, how will they ever take those problems to their bosses on our behalf?" she asks. It is a pertinent question. She says when she tells her boss about threatening online harassment, he says that "Our times were worse." This leaves the conversation about online harassment in current times neither here, nor there, because the issue at hand is not about what journalists faced in the past, but the gendered harassment women are facing in Pakistan.

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[22] "Male Celebrities Receive More Abuse on Twitter than Women." Demos, 24 Aug. 2014.

[23] Ali, Umer, "The Pakistan Government's Financial Squeeze on Journalism". Columbia Journalism Review, December 20, 2018.

In Pakistan, there is an increasing trust deficit between media houses and their employees. Male employees also suffer the lack of payments, job insecurity, pay cuts and having to take the risk of doing dangerous reporting without requisite support. However, for female journalists, all these problems exist with the additional problem of gendered online and offline harassment, that their media houses are ignoring.

5. Is the Press Club anti-woman?

The one physical space where journalists from various organizations can meet together and discuss their issues is the Press Club but, at least in Lahore and Islamabad, women are completely excluded from these clubs. One female journalist describes her city's Press Club as a "sausage fest", indicating that it is not an inclusive or even safe environment for women. Another says that despite being a part of the Press Club for many years on paper, she only visits it when the male journalists invite her to vote for Press Club elections. A Lahore-based journalist says, "I used to enter the Lahore Press Club and get stared at as if I was a Martian. It is a very exclusionary space. I am a member but no way do I think that it has ever aided or supported me as much as my male colleagues. They truly felt like they belonged to a community."

An Islamabad-based journalist says, "Yes, I am a member of the Press Club but I hardly go there. It is a space for male journalists, not for women. I do not know why we do not have this practice of genuine women journalists participating in Press Club activities but that is how it is in Pakistan."

Journalists across the survey felt despondent about the club. Another said, "I have just got the Press Club membership and I have seen that they do instantly take up issues concerning safety of journalists as a community. I must admit though that I do not know how they would be able to help me out if such a situation arises, as even the news organizations that I have worked for only suggest keeping a "low profile" and everything will be alright."

One wonders how empowering it would be for female journalists to feel safe and welcome at the Press Clubs of their cities. After all, their very purpose of existence is so that journalists can offer support to each other and ensure collective solidarity. Women are deprived of this support system by being excluded from this space.

5. Recommendations

1. Media organisations:

- Media organizations should try to hire more women in positions of power. Having a female editor is a game changer for many reporters as female editors can better understand the issues other female reporters face. Apart from female editors, it is also important for media houses to install women as publishers of media houses as this will change the dynamic for female reporters.

- Media houses must install mental health counsellors. Most journalist suffer from trauma, depression and anxiety, because of the nature of their job. The gendered angle of this is that female reporters' mental health is triggered by online trolling and harassment. This requires urgent mental health care within the workplace.

- Media houses need to offer concrete support to their female employees when they are dealing with online trolling. Currently female reporters state that media houses do not have effective channels to even report online harassment. These channels must be created and then media houses must ensure that women's concerns about online harassment are heard and dealt with.

- Media houses should hold trainings about how female journalists should defend and protect themselves online when they are attacked. These trainings will help them amp up their digital security. A media house is only as safe and secure as its reporters, and if female reporters do not feel safe, they will not report accurately and honestly.

- Media houses should try to create peer-to-peer networks, so that colleagues can talk to each other about their issues in a non-judgemental, confidential space.

- For female journalists that are sent into the field, the challenges are very different from the ones male journalists face. Media houses should create security Whatsapp groups that are used for communication when they are travelling to the field. Journalists can provide a list of contacts, their schedule, and update them on their movements.

- Media houses should install security advisors for trips to the field.

2. Civil society organisations

- Civil Society organization can help in creating pressure groups to have more convictions under cyber/digital security laws.

- More safe spaces like Digital Journalists of Pakistan should be formed. Online spaces should be open and not reserved for men alone.

3. Law enforcement agencies

- Currently there is a trust deficit between the FIA and reporters. The onus of building trust lies on the FIA. The FIA should hold awareness campaigns and trainings in media houses to teach female reporters on how to protect themselves online.

- Moreover, the FIA should spread awareness about what laws are already in place for female reporters. They should teach reporters about the mechanisms and channels that can be used to approach the FIA. Many journalists say they are unaware of what laws are in place for their protection.

- By having the authority via PTA to block or disable accounts that harass just like they block and disable accounts of all the people who try to speak the truth.

- The FIA must be better staffed. Currently the staff that they do have do not understand the modern technology or how the internet works. They do understand that a court order can get social media websites to give out the harasser's information but they follow the case in a way most government offices work which gives ample time to the harasser to change tactics or ID. They still believe that in order to fight cybercrime cases they require 'equipment.'

4. Policy and legislative

- Proper legislation which can put a fine and punish a person found involved in harassment is needed. There are laws in place but they are not implemented. If the laws we already have at hand are implemented it would be enough to provide online safety to female journalists.

- It is important that the state gets rid of the loopholes in the digital security laws. The PECA needs to be updated and amended.

5. Press Club

- The Press Clubs of each city needs to step up and open the doors for female journalists. It is inconceivable that the Press Club can be a safe space of support for male journalists while continuing to exclude female journalists.

- The press clubs can also be a wonderful space to hold trainings for journalists. It is a wonderful physical space for the entire journalistic community to come together and share their problems and work towards solutions.

- The press club should discuss on a monthly basis about the problems female journalists face or the things men may not think are problematic. Monthly discussions will allow women to feel more comfortable about uncomfortable situations they might be dealing with.

- Call female journalists into press clubs and allow them to talk and tell male journalists to speak to female journalists. Dialogue is important. Men do not know nor do they want to see for themselves. Official gatherings must be made mandatory for a start.
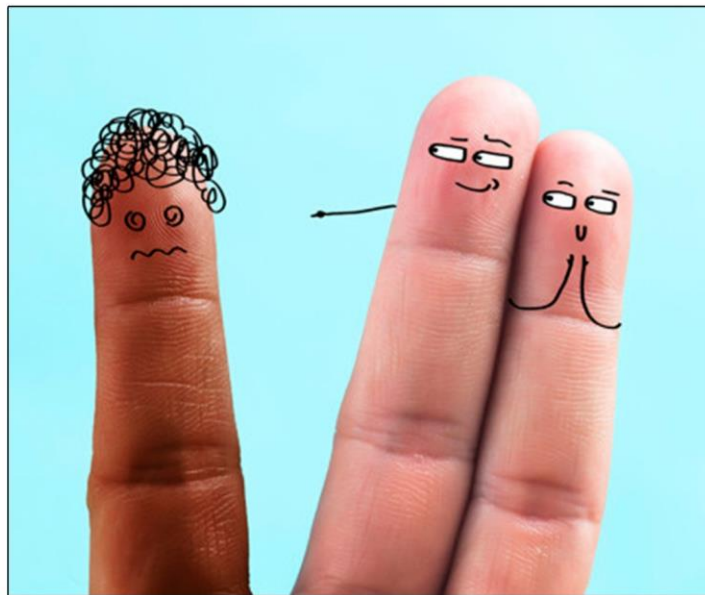
DIGITAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION'S HAMARA INTERNET APPLICATION

Digital Rights Foundation's one-of-a-kind application - "Hamara Internet" was developed to create awareness regarding cyber harassment and educate individuals regarding the law and the precautionary measures they can opt for in case they encounter cyber harassment. The application provides tips and tidbits for online safety to its users and also provides a directory for relevant personnel and contact information of LEAs and organizations such as the FIA, PTA, PCSW and any other relevant resources available for the public.

DIGITAL RIGHTS FOUNDATION'S CYBER HARASSMENT HELPLINE

Digital Rights Foundation's Cyber Harassment Helpline is Pakistan's first dedicated toll-free Helpline for victims of online harassment and violence. The Helpline provides a free, safe and confidential service. It provides legal advice, digital security support, psychological counselling and a referral system to victims of online harassment. It provides a judgement-free, private and gender-sensitive environment for all its callers. Journalists from across the country can reach out to our Helpline in case of any online harassment or violence.

CYBER HARASSMENT HELPLINE: 0800-39393, everyday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm

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