

HOSTILE BYTES

A study of online violence
against women journalists



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Note of Thanks

The research team extends a word of thanks to all the respondents, who took time out to respond to a comprehensive and intense questionnaire. We are thankful to the group of expert informants, who gave interviews and shared their knowledge and expertise of the field, including Amber Rahim Shamsi, Benazir Shah, Gharidah Farooqi, Iffat Hasan Rizvi, Mehmam Sarfaraz, Noreen Zebra, Ramsa Jahangir, Sabat Zakaria and Tanzeela Mazhar.

We are especially thankful to Tanzeela Mazhar, who connected us to a network of women journalists through her WhatsApp group and other women journalists networks.

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Executive Summary

This research seeks to understand the extent of online harassment that women journalists face, its impact on the mental health, professional advancement and personal lives of women journalists. It also seeks to understand online violence through a gendered perspective and explored the coping strategies employed by women journalists. The research is based on quantitative data collected through an online survey, taken by 110 practicing women journalists from across Pakistan, and qualitative data collated from nine women journalists who are frequent users of social media.

Overall, the research findings indicate that a significant majority of women journalists do not only face online violence, but it also has a direct impact on their personal and professional life. There was a clear consensus among respondents that women journalists face harassment in a different and more personal way than their male counterparts, and that women journalists who are vocal online remain more vulnerable.

The major findings of the study are,

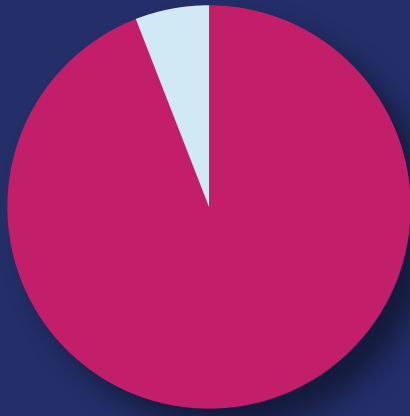


9 out of 10 respondents said that online violence has a significant impact on the mental health of women journalists.



9 out of **10**

respondents also said that online violence has an impact on the family and friends of women journalists. 59 out of 110 respondents said that personal lives and character of women journalists are targeted very frequently and frequently collectively.



9 out of 10 respondents said that online violence or the fear of it has an impact on professional choices made by women journalists.



8 out
of
10

women journalists said that they have self-censored in order to counter online violence. The respondents also said that they also refrained from sharing their personal and professional opinions online due to fear of online violence. 84 women said they did not share their professional opinion online, while 83 said they refrained from sharing their personal opinions.



The number of women who reported harassment, hate speech and trolling as forms of online violence they experienced were high but there were also a significant number of women who reported more serious and criminal offences. Out of the 110 respondents, **4** out of 10 said that their fake accounts had been created.



3 out
of
10



respondents said they were victims of serious crimes like blackmail and incitement to violence.

84 respondents said that they have reported to social media platforms to counter online violence targeted at them;

26 respondents said that they have never reported to the social media platforms.

Only **3** people have reported online violence to both social media companies and law enforcement agencies.



Reporting to social media platforms to counter online violence

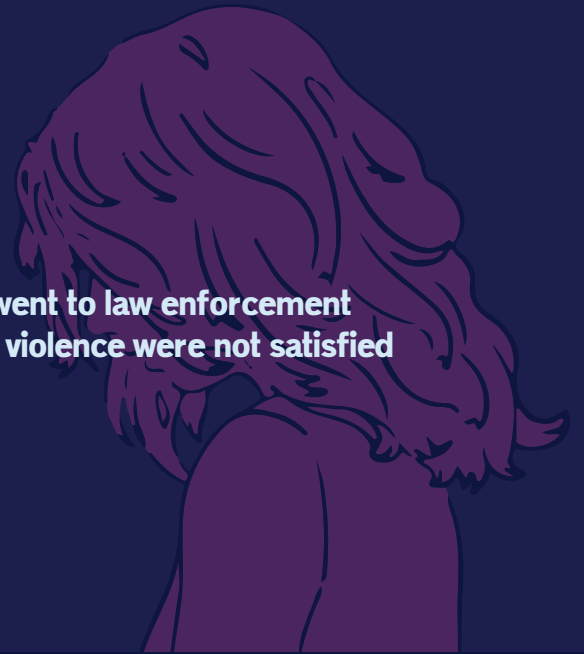
Almost **41%** of the respondents were somewhat satisfied with the response, and **30%** were not satisfied. Only **6%** were very satisfied with the response they got.



68% of the respondents said that they have never approached law enforcement agencies to report online violence even though most of them have experienced some form of it.

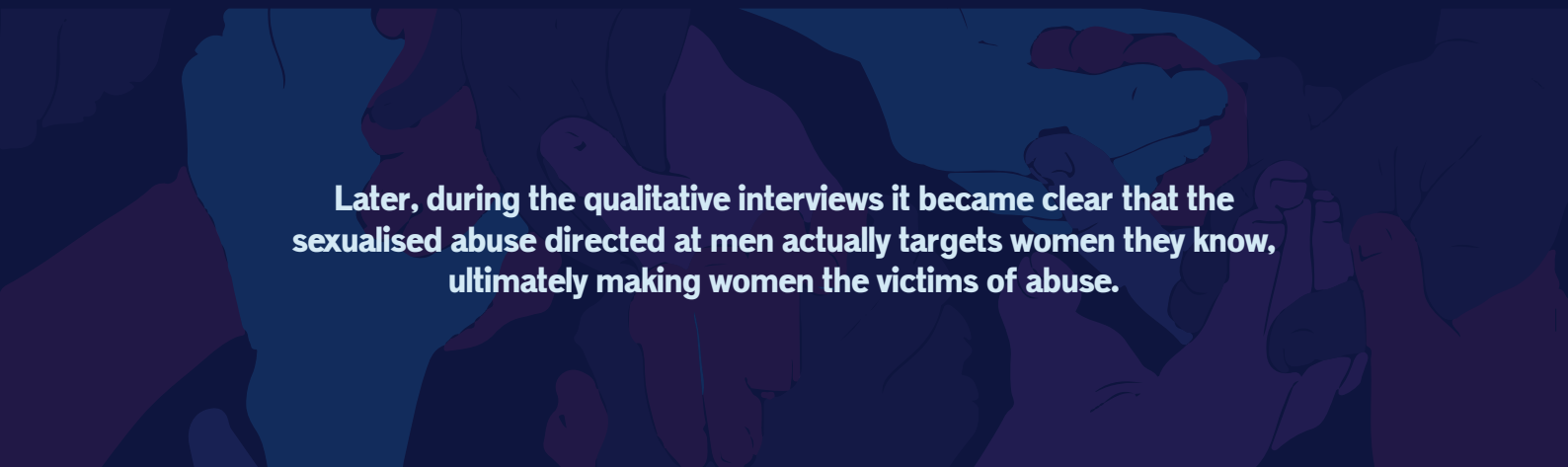
Half

of the respondents who went to law enforcement agencies to report online violence were not satisfied with the response.



58 respondents said that women journalists face sexualised abuses very frequently and frequently collectively, whereas only **5** respondents believed that men faced sexualised abuse very frequently and frequently.

Later, during the qualitative interviews it became clear that the sexualised abuse directed at men actually targets women they know, ultimately making women the victims of abuse.



Section 1

INTRODUCTION



Chapter 1

Literature Review

With constant attacks on journalists, their free expression,¹ their physical safety,² and their right to report, numerous reports suggest³ Pakistan is one of the most hostile countries for journalists. The 2019 World Press Freedom Index⁴ finds that Pakistan has dropped 3 ranks from its place in the previous year, pointing towards the seriousness of the crackdown on journalism.

The report states the increasing focus of regulation surrounding the internet, furthering the clampdown on freedom of the press. And while this repression doesn't discriminate among those who disagree with the state narrative, the consequential online abuse targets women journalists differently than men.

Online violence is increasingly being accepted as an extension or the cause of offline abuse, with its repercussions being psychological and physical. To put the impact of online violence in perspective, a 22-year-old student of the University of Jamshoro, Sindh, Naila Rind,⁵ committed suicide after being cyber harassed and blackmailed for three months. In the absence of any recourse available, Naila committed suicide in her hostel room. Police later found her photos and threatening messages on the phone of the accused man.

This is not an isolated incident, and is in fact a reality of women in a society like Pakistan where women are harassed and abused further when they share their experience of violence. Law enforcement authorities add to their misery by victim blaming and questioning their character and integrity.

Jac sm Kee, Manager Women's Rights Programme at the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) says,⁶ "Online violence against women is an overt expression of the gender discrimination and inequality that exists offline. Online, it becomes amplified."

This abuse amplifies when a woman is vocal, and it just so happens that women journalists' job demands them to be political and vocal, hence the target of violent ideologies and individuals.

However, there is limited research or reporting available on the gendered nature of violence that women journalists in Pakistan face. Women journalists are often persecuted because of their work.

- 01 Ikran Junaidi, NA committee asks NCHR to suggest changes in law on electronic crimes, Dawn, May 21, 2019 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1483558>
- 02 Mehreen Zahra-Malik, 'The New Normal' in Pakistan: a Journalist on the Run From Gunmen, The New York Times, January 11, 2018 <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/11/world/asia/pakistan-attack-journalists.html>
- 03 Reuters, Pakistan most dangerous country for journalists in 2014: report, Express Tribune, December 31, 2014 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/815075/pakistan-most-dangerous-country-for-journalists-in-2014-report/>
- 04 Reporters Without Borders, 2019 World Press Freedom Index, Pakistan, <https://rsf.org/en/pakistan>
- 05 Shazia Hasan, Footprints: Marvi's daughter, Dawn, January 6, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1306725/footprints-marvis-daughter>
- 06 Online violence: Just because it's virtual doesn't make it any less real, Global Fund for Women <https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/online-violence-just-because-its-virtual-doesnt-make-it-any-less-real/>

Constant surveillance, online attacks targeting their personal lives and attributes, and coordinated hate campaigns not only create obstacles in their work, but also pose serious threats to their safety.

The 2017 report by Digital Right Foundation titled ‘Surveillance of Female Journalists in Pakistan’⁷ found that the experience of surveillance for female journalists is gendered and is thus different from their male counterparts. While the research couldn’t find conclusive evidence of whether women face more surveillance, it states that the form that the surveillance takes is mostly sexualised threats, attacks on character and appearance.

In a study in 2016, The Guardian analysed and published⁸ 70 million comments posted under the articles on its website. The study found that out of the ten most abused writers, eight were women, indicating the severity of the violence that women journalists have to face in order to continue to do their job. This, UNESCO writes,⁹ is because women journalists face ever-increasing amounts of gender-based threats and attacks, simply for being women, and further notes, “Attacks against female journalists pose a clear threat, not only to their safety and well-being, but also to the diversity of the press and freedom of expression.”

In addition, a 2018 research¹⁰ by the International Women’s Media Foundation and Troll Busters found that among those surveyed, nearly two thirds women journalists indicated they had been threatened or harassed online, and as a consequence, 40% of them said they avoided reporting on certain stories as a result of experiencing such abuse.

While online violence doesn’t discriminate between genders and identities, it has increasingly been used as a tool to make the internet inaccessible for women. Women journalists who exercise their right to free speech and press are disproportionately targeted¹¹ making it more challenging for them to find or do their assignments. Online violence against women journalists, doesn’t just affect them personally, rather the repercussions are multifold, affecting the journalistic work they produce ultimately forcing them to self-censor in their reporting and online. This further creates a divide in the reports and information assembled while keeping gender sensitivity in mind that reaches the audience.

In Pakistan, online harassment continues to be an obstacle contributing towards the digital gender divide. Online gender based violence against women journalists constantly undermines their work, their achievements and their lives. In a society where patriarchy is deep rooted and defines how it will function, propagating content and information that promotes inclusion, sensitivity, acceptance towards women becomes essential for change to happen. In this report, we intend to explore the experience of online violence against women journalists online and examine its impact and available systems of recourse.

07 Luavut Zahid, Shmyla Khan, Surveillance of Female Journalists in Pakistan, Digital Rights Foundation. 2017 <https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Surveillance-of-Female-Journalists-in-Pakistan-1.pdf>

08 Becky Gardiner, Mahana Mansfield, Ian Anderson, Josh Holder, Daan Louter, Monica Ulmanu, The dark side of Guardian comments, The Guardian, April 12, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/apr/12/the-dark-side-of-guardian-comments>

09 UNESCO stands up against the online harassment of women journalists, June 17, 2019 <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-stands-against-online-harassment-women-journalists>

10 Dr. Michelle Ferrier, Attacks and Harassments, The Impact on Female Journalists and their Reporting, Troll Busters, International Women’s Media Foundation, 2018 <https://www.iwmf.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Attacks-and-Harassment.pdf>

11 Crowdsourced Twitter study reveals shocking scale of online abuse against women, Amnesty International, December 2018 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/12/crowdsourced-twitter-study-reveals-shocking-scale-of-online-abuse-against-women/>

Chapter 2

Research Objectives

1. To understand the extent of online harassment that women journalists face in online spaces.
2. To understand the impact that online violence has on the mental health, professional advancement and personal lives of women journalists.
3. To understand online violence through a gendered perspective, by looking at how women journalists perceive the violence they face online in relation to the violence their male colleagues face in digital spaces.
4. To understand how women journalists cope with online violence and which strategies do they employ to counter online violence or to avoid exposure.

Methodology

This research follows a sequential mixed methods approach, combining survey data as quantitative and in depth informant interviews as a qualitative method of data collection.

Survey

To determine the experience, the reaction and the impact of online violence on women journalists, the study used a survey to collect quantitative data. A bilingual survey questionnaire was created using Google Forms (See Annex 1).

The questionnaire was divided into six sections:

- a. **Section 1. Respondent demographics** – This section was designed to collect basic data about the respondent's experience and professional profile.
- b. **Section 2. Social media usage** – This section included questions to determine the frequency and nature of social media usage of the respondents.
- c. **Section 3. Experiences of online violence** – This section included questions about the perception, understanding and experience of online violence, including questions about personal experiences, experiences of peers and perceptions about likelihood of violence occurring on different platforms.
- d. **Section 4. Responses to online violence** – This section includes questions about respondent's responses to counter online violence and explores their use and experience of different kinds of responses ranging from self censorship, corporate mechanisms to legal responses.
- e. **Section 5. Impact of online violence** – This section includes questions about the impact of facing online violence on respondents' mental health and personal and professional lives.

Chapter 3

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- e. **Section 5. Impact of online violence** – This section includes questions about the impact of facing online violence on respondents' mental health and personal and professional lives.
- f. **Section 6. Gender and online violence** – This section looks at perceptions of the respondents regarding the role of gender in the initiation of violence that they face online.

Respondents

Initially, a virtual snowball sampling technique was used to identify respondents for the survey. Snowball sampling was chosen to help access journalists and news organisations outside the contacts of the Media Matters for Democracy team and explore a hidden population of journalists who self-censor, through social networks. The initial informants consisted of women journalists present on a WhatsApp group that networks over 250 women in media, and from there, respondents were encouraged to share the survey in their own networks and communities to encourage further responses.

Since the overall number of women journalists in Pakistan is low, the Media Matters for Democracy team had to approach some senior journalists to encourage more women journalists to take the survey. The survey was also shared online within journalist specific groups. An open call for responses was not given to ensure that the responses were coming only from the intended target group i.e. women journalists.

Response

A total of 120 respondents filled out the survey online. However, on further examination some invalid entries were found – including some entries from men and some repeat entries. After cleaning the data of the invalid responses, a total of 110 responses were considered for the analysis.

In depth interviews

After the quantitative data was collected and initial data analysis was made, a set of nine in depth interviews were conducted with women journalists to analyse and validate the initial findings. Women journalists who are regular or frequent users of social media were selected for the interviews and the final analysis is informed by information shared by them.

The list of interviewees includes:

Amber Rahim Shamsi

Amber Rahim Shamsi is an award-winning multimedia journalist from Islamabad who hosts “Sawaal with Amber”, a news and current affairs show on Samaa TV. She has worked with DAWN News, BBC World Service as a bilingual reporter, presenter and producer.

Benazir Shah

Benazir Shah is a journalist from Lahore, working as a reporter at GEO web desk. She is also a recipient of 2013 U.N. Correspondents Association Award for Newsweek’s coverage of the polio campaign.

Gharidah Farooqi

Gharidah Farooqi is an anchorperson at Aaj TV where she hosts the show ‘G for Gharidah’. She has 16 years of experience as a journalist.

Iffat Hasan Rizvi

Iffat Hasan Rizvi is a freelance journalist from Islamabad, and a regular columnist for Independent Urdu.

Mehmal Sarfaraz

Mehmal Sarfaraz is a journalist from Lahore, and the co-founder of The Current - a digital media platform that simplifies politics, entertainment and lifestyle news.

Noreen Zehra

Noreen Zehra is a journalist from Karachi, and working as a senior producer at GEO TV Network.

Ramsha Jahangir

Ramsha Jahangir is a journalist from Karachi working at Pakistan’s Dawn newspaper specializing in technology and human rights.

Sabahat Zakaria

Sabahat Zakaria is a journalist from Lahore, and has previously worked as an editor at The News on Sunday.

Tanzeela Mazhar

Tanzeela Mazhar is an independent journalist and writer from Islamabad. She was formerly working as a broadcast journalist at PTV, and has almost 17 years of experience in journalism.

Definitions

The research does not take a predefined frame to define ‘online violence’. The survey includes a set of questions to examine how the respondents understand the term. The decision not to limit the study to a preset definition of online violence was taken to ensure that the responses remain true to the experience of the women journalists who participated in the survey.

The survey does include some prompts to help respondents qualify their experience and perception of online violence. These responses included:

1. Harassment
2. Hate speech
3. Cyber bullying
4. Stalking
5. Hacking
6. Blackmailing
7. Trolling

The respondents also had the option to add other forms of ‘online violence’ as they perceive it and added ‘threatening messages’, including audio and video as elements of online violence.

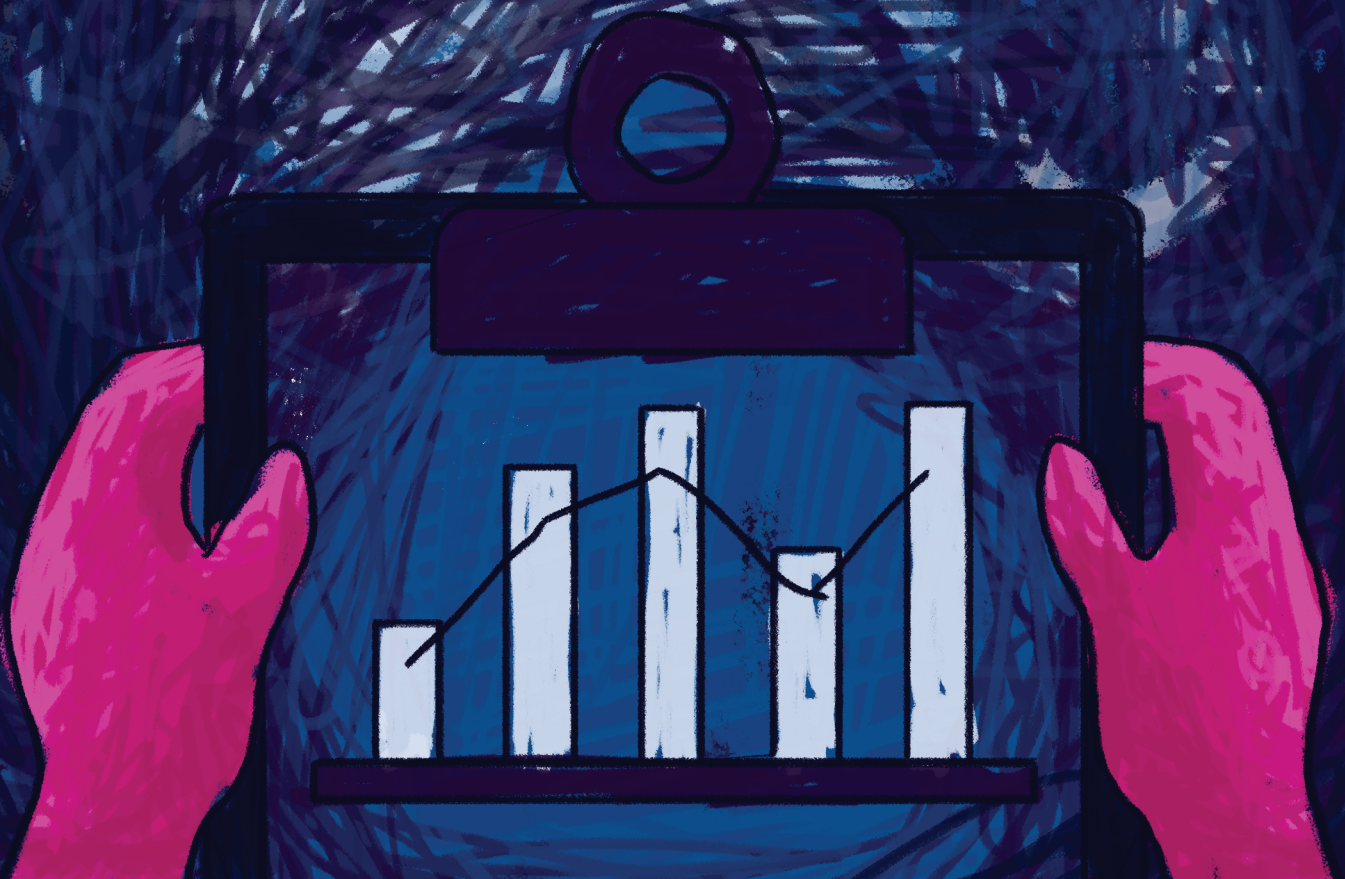
Chapter 4

Limitations of the Research

1. There is some selection bias in the identification of the respondents as there is a limited number of women journalists with considerable online following and reach in Pakistan. Thus, the survey could not be shared in open platforms and call for contributions was not made public. Instead, it was only shared to a closed group of women journalists individually, hence keeping the sample size small.
2. The number of respondents is fairly limited, so there might be some lack of generalizability of the findings on the whole population of women journalists in Pakistan.
3. The research is based on a survey model, thus the respondents' responses may also have been affected by their own understanding and experience. Perceptions and personal experience and engagement with different digital threats and forms of online violence may have affected the respondents' responses.

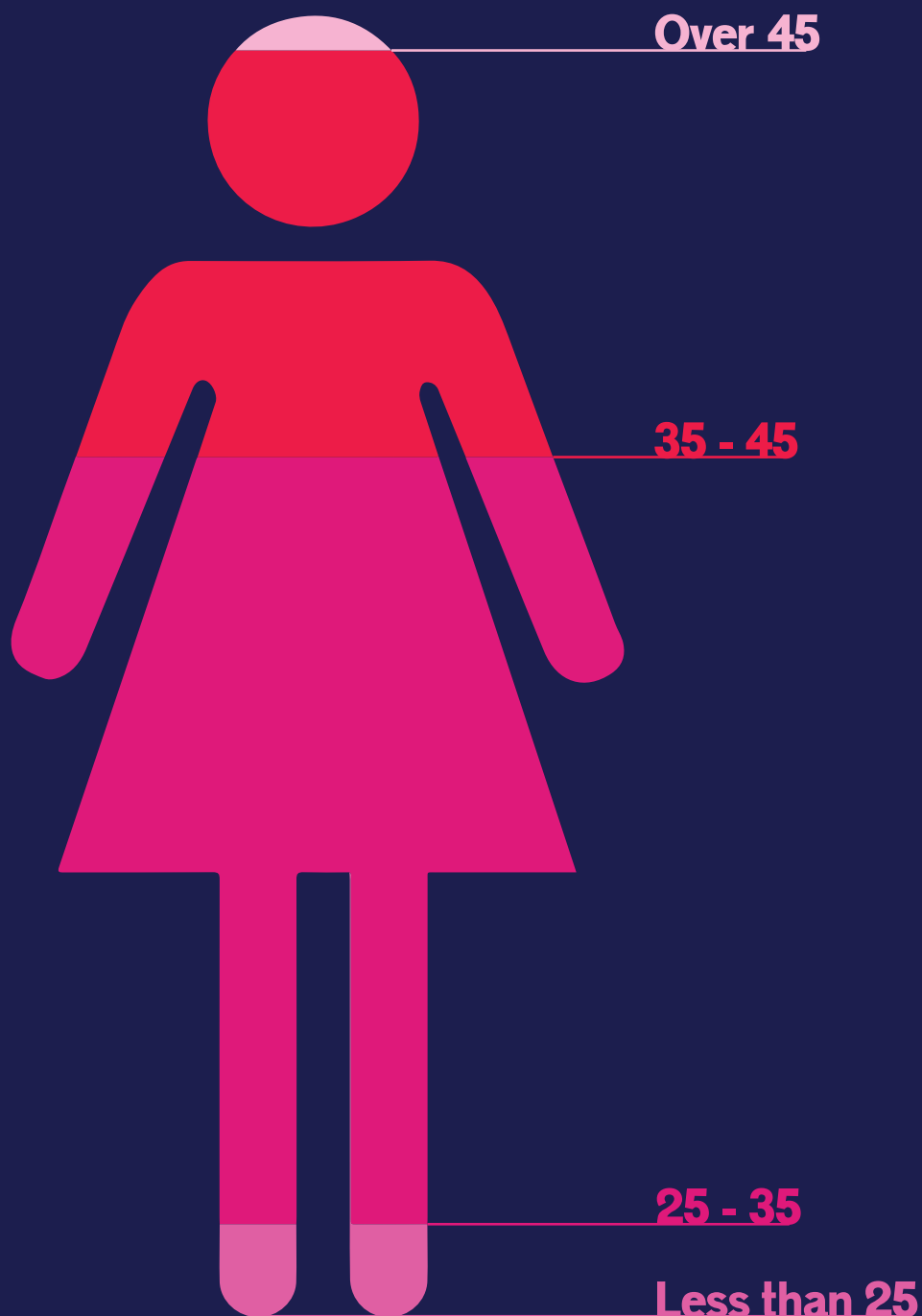
Section 2

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS



Respondent demographics and social media usage

AGE



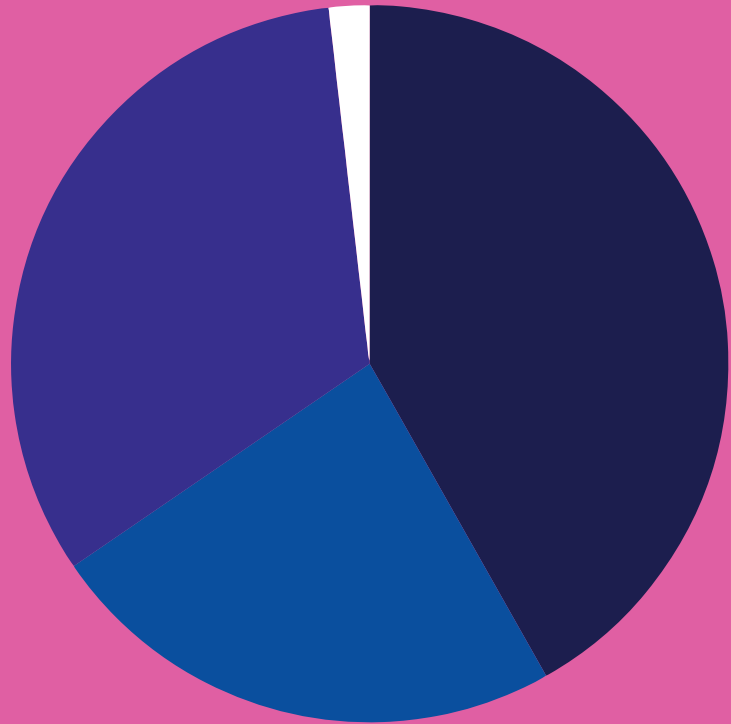
MEDIUM

Digital - 46

Print - 26

Television - 36

Radio - 2

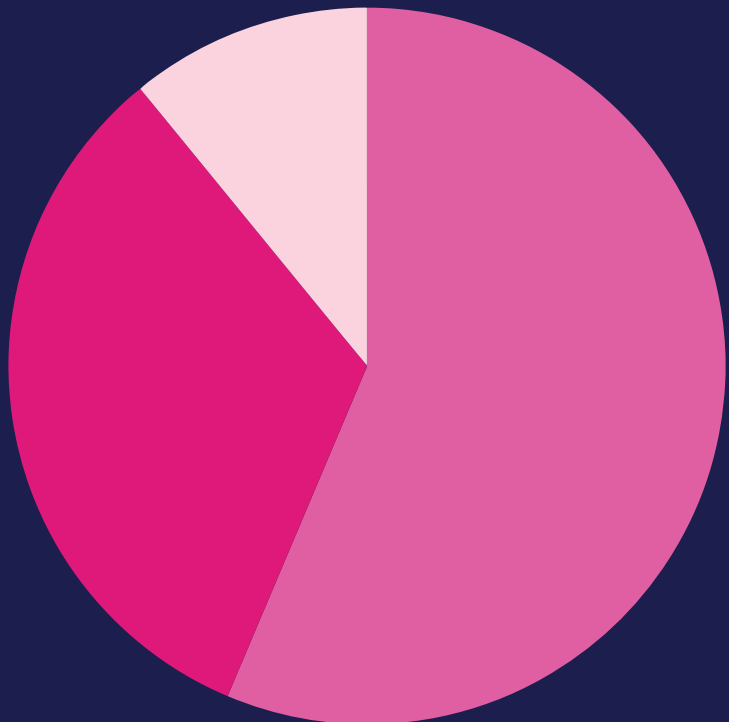


Experience

More than 6 years - 62

3 - 6 years - 36

Less than 3 years - 12



How often do you use social media?



2 - Never

6 - Seldom

25 - Occasionally

45 - Frequently

32 - Very Frequently

Chapter 5

The Experience of Online Violence

This chapter examines respondents' perceptions and experiences of online violence. Questions asked in this section explored understanding of online violence, personal and peers' experiences and perceptions about the most hostile platforms and behaviours that might lead to escalation of online violence.

Key Findings

What is online violence?

Online violence	Number of respondents
Harassment	99
Hate speech	88
Cyber bullying	88
Data leaks	80
Creation of fake accounts	78
Blackmailing	75
Trolling	68
Identity theft	66
Doxing	63
Hacking	61
Incitement to violence	61
Stalking	60

Types of online violence faced

Types of online violence	Number of respondents
Harassment	58
Hate speech	55
Creation of fake accounts	48
Trolling	46
Stalking	41
Cyber bullying	38
Hacking	29
Identity theft	17
Blackmailing	15
Data leaks	21
Incitement to violence	12
Doxing	8

Discussion and Analysis

Understanding of online violence

One of the objectives of the research was to examine how women journalists understand the term ‘online violence’. The research framework did not suggest a pre-set definition of this term, and respondents. Not surprisingly, **90% of the respondents** included **‘harassment’** in their definition of online violence.

Ramsha Jahangir,¹² a reporter at Dawn and an avid social media user says, “When I think of online violence, I personally think of harassment. Harassment in the sense that somebody can threaten your privacy, and invade your personal space, online space, and if you are receiving threats which could be death threats or rape threats or blackmail, sharing non-consensual images, a lot of things could fall under harassment and violence.”

Seven in ten respondents included the creation of fake accounts in their definition of online violence, whereas 68% respondents said that blackmailing also constitutes a kind of online violence. Identity theft, doxing, trolling, incitement of violence were among the categories that majority agreed were kinds of online violence.

Experiences of online violence

Gharidah Farooqi, a broadcast journalist and political talk show host, says that she has been on Twitter since 2009 and did not see the level of violence that she sees today until 2014. “This trend of trolling, abuse, violence has increased after 2014. In my opinion, it’s been an upward trend,” she says.

When asked which form of online violence they’ve personally experienced, just over half of the respondents (52.7%) said that they have been cyber harassed. Whereas, around 50% said that they have been targeted by some form of hate speech; almost 41% women journalists that were surveyed said that they’ve been trolled; at least one in every three respondents said they were either stalked online, cyber bullied or the victim of impersonation on social media. 32% of the respondents also said that they were aware of cases where online violence against women had escalated to offline violence.

Even though the majority doesn’t know of cases where online violence escalated to offline violence, the real world impacts of online violence remain.

Noreen Zehra,¹³ a senior journalist associated with Geo News, believes that gender based online violence is an image of what women face in the real world. “I don’t see these two in isolation. There’s no difference between real-life harassment and online violence. In fact, the abuser has the advantage of anonymity on the internet, they take full advantage of this and target women journalists more thinking there will be no repercussions,” she says.

“While commenting on the interlinks between online and offline violence, Benazir Shah,¹⁴ a digital journalist from Geo News’ web desk, says, “There’s this constant fear that what if one of these

12 Ramsha Jahangir, interviewed by Amel Ghani, September 2019

13 Noreen Zehra, interviewed by Hija Kamran, October 5, 2019

14 Benazir Shah, interviewed by Hija Kamran, October 3, 2019

people actually find me and attack me," adding, "They know what I look like, I don't know what they look like.

"They lynch you online," Mehmal Sarfaraz¹⁵ says. "It impacts you mentally."

Only 1 out of 10 respondents said that they've never faced any form of online violence.

The most hostile platform

One of the limitations of the survey and interviews conducted for this research was that all the respondents appeared to be analysing the situation of online violence against women journalists in the context of their Twitter usage. This was further noted in the stats collected through the questionnaire. The majority of the respondents worked in digital media, making it the most common medium among respondents, followed by respondents working in TV.

Additionally, around 43% of the respondents said that Twitter is mostly used to direct violence against women journalists whereas over 31.8% of them said it's Facebook and around 16% of the respondents said that WhatsApp is mostly used to engage in violence against women journalists.

Samaa anchorperson and multimedia journalist Amber Rahim Shamsi¹⁶ says that she uses Twitter strictly for work purposes, and she gets abuse on every tweet that she posts. "I get all kinds of messages in DMs on Twitter, and in private messages on Facebook but I'm not active on Facebook so I don't check them for months. But with Twitter, it's easier to check because I'm more active here."

However, Sabahat Zakariya¹⁷ points out, "Its very bad on YouTube, so I have enabled an approve comments thing so I have to approve the comments [before they appear under the video]."

Ramsha explains, "The biggest thing people face now is hate speech, something we don't talk much about, which can also fall under online violence, rape threats, death threats and there are a lot of hate campaigns around specially when it comes to journalists like we saw abusive hashtags trending in Pakistan, this is a new trend."

15 Mehmal Sarfaraz, interviewed by Amel Ghani, September 2019

16 Amber Rahim Shamsi, interviewed by Amel Ghani, September 2019

17 Sabahat Zakariya, interviewed by Amel Ghani, September 2019

What triggers online violence

Iffat Hasan Rizvi¹⁸ asserts that there's no rules on social media and a person can't anticipate what will bring violence. She says, "You never know. This is a mad man's world and you have to be careful yourself."

Women journalists shouldn't have political views

Benazir says, "I've always been critical of whichever government is in power. When the PML-N government was in power, I was very critical of Shahbaz Sharif because I was reporting from Lahore. There were cynical comments directed toward me, but there was never something alarming. Now let's say when I tweet something critical of the government, even though I self-censor myself a lot, or [when] I'm vocal about women's rights, these are some things that come under this ambit where people tend to direct hate towards me."

Gharidah thinks that reporting on a particular party's mishaps gets a lot of directed hate. "Any wrongdoing by any political party, if its reported, everyone begins bashing them and I would credit PTI for this. Even though PTI says it's not them, it is accounts by their party," she says.

She further says that she was recently threatened by the official account of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, "Recently, the official PTI account (accused and) threatened me for saying 'anti-state' statements which can lose me my job, so this is a direct threat from the official PTI account."

Amber maintains, "They target my political opinions, anything about the ruling party, the establishment, my progressive ideas."

In Gharidah's experience, women journalists are not allowed to talk about science either. She believes that science and technology are linked with humanity and are not political. "I tweeted that India should not be bashed [for failed Chandrayaan-2 mission], science is all about experiments. I was trolled and called a traitor and that I was going against Pakistan's stance, and I was called Indian. My character was talked about," she says.

Religious speech is a no-go

Iffat recalls an incident where she had to delete a tweet because it was shared from news outlet of a minority in the country. And while she says that it was a news story about an FIR lodged against a Shia family for holding majlis in their house, she didn't want to be the target of harassment. "I have experienced this before that just sharing something can get you exploited in the hands of trolls," she expressed.

Mehmal says, "Religion is very polarising, and religious hatred on social media can be toxic."

Tanzeela Mazhar¹⁹ further confirms that people expect a religious person to look a certain way, and if they're not covered the way they think they should be, they don't allow you to talk about religion. "If you talk about religion then the first comment will be on my display picture, my clothes, my appearance. They don't discuss the content or its intent, they discuss my appearance. And if you don't fit in the frame that people consider religious then it means that people don't think you have the right to speak on religion," she shares.

18 Iffat Hasan Rizvi, interviewed by Amel Ghani, September 2019

19 Tanzeela Mazhar, interviewed by Amel Ghani, September 2019

Women's opinion about women's issues is not acceptable

Ramsha says, “There are things you absolutely can't touch without getting backlash, one of them is feminism and MeToo related issues.”

Sabahat says that when something challenges toxic masculinity, men's first instinct is to attack it. “Men have more power [in our society], and any idea that has the power to dismantle some kind of power, it will get strong backlash because the powerful don't want to give up their power. Feminist content gets abuse because men are scared of it,” she says.

“Women rights and feminism become causes of online abuse. Sometimes I have also experienced that even if you aren't talking about anything, just your existence [becomes] a problem. They can't stand a woman who wants to challenge the status quo,” says Tanzeela.

Benazir highlights that there's always the same accounts that would consistently abuse you on all the topics you speak on, be it women's rights or criticism on the government or their policies. “I remember them now because this is how often they appear in my mentions,” she recalls.

Online violence from a gendered lens

9 out of 10 respondents of the survey agree that women that are vocal online are more vulnerable to online violence.

Benazir further confirms this by saying, “On social media, I think women are quite prominent, they are very vocal, and that really disturbs the social norms and bugs men. And I think online violence has increased over time because of this.”

In addition to this, around 75% of the respondents said men and women journalists do not face online violence the same way.

Mehmal says, “Women get very sexual abuses, slut shaming, body shaming, all this is very taxing on you. They get graphic with the insults.”

“Abuse targeting women journalists is always very personal and very sexualised, while the abuse male colleagues face gets personal but it is never targeted at them and is instead targeted at their wives and children.”

Amber Rahim Shamsi

Iffat Hasan Rizvi²⁰ says, “They want us to talk about fashion, and write on domestic issues, at most social issues but if we write our opinion on something political, it’s like we have accidentally entered the male domain. I was told, ‘go home and cook rotis, Karachi ki siyasat se kia lena dena [what do you have to do with Karachi’s politics?].’”

Noreen thinks that men who can’t stand a strong, independent woman with strong opinions resort to violence.

“It’s their own insecurities at display,” she says.

Benazir says, “It’s not like men don’t get harassed online. But women are always an easy target.”

Getting personal

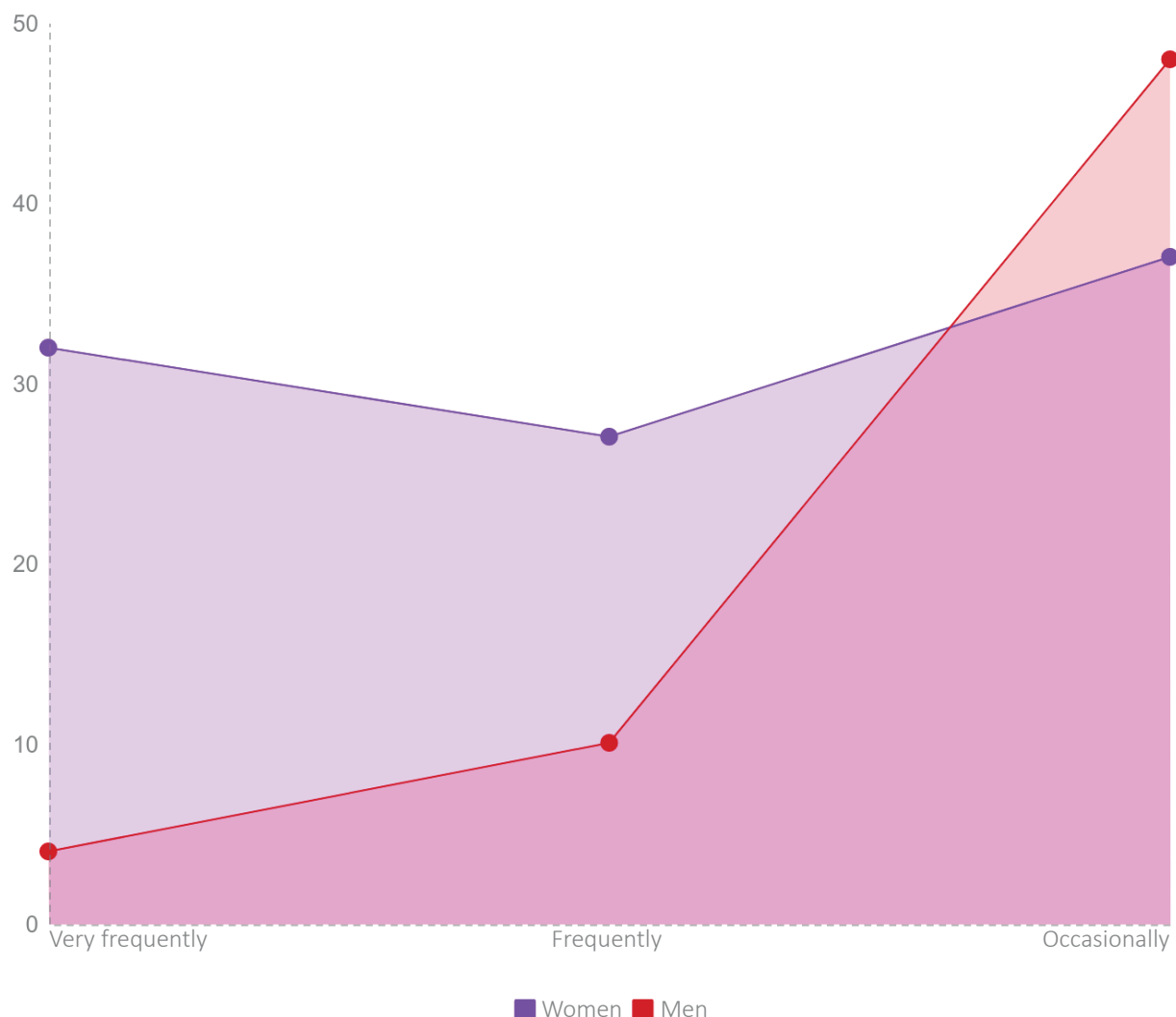
There is a general consensus that women journalists always get attacks that are personal in nature. Trolls deploy coordinated attacks to discredit women journalists’ work and credibility by either spreading lies and rumours about them, using their personal information out of context, pointing out flaws in their appearance, bringing up an incident from the past, or associating them with an influential man.

This is further reflected in the responses of the survey when asked how often do respondents think men and women journalists face abuse targeting their personal lives or character, 5 out of 10 respondents said that women’s personal lives and character get targeted frequently and very frequently collectively, while only 1 out of 10 respondents said that men also get targeted abuse on personal lives and character.

20 Iffat Hasan Rizvi, interviewed by Amel Ghani, September 2019

Moreover, no respondent said that women never get abuse targeted at their personal lives and character, whereas 7 people said this when asked about men.

Abuse targeting personal life and character



Gharidah shares, “Men get abused but the kind of abuse they face is different than that of a woman’s. A man’s pants are never discussed but a woman’s jeans are talked about, in a vulgar and dirty way. Men are called out for being a ‘lifafa’ journalist or appeaser. Their character or dignity is never talked about. They both get target but the target’s extent and intensity is very different.”

Tanzeela says, “Society has objectified women as something that has a shape and wear colourful clothes, or wear a burkha. And this reflects online as well.” She adds, “The moment you say something that someone doesn’t like or challenges someone, they immediately start attacking you personally. They’d say, ‘look at your hair, look at your clothes, look at your face, whose mistress are you?’ They always presume that you’re someone’s mistress, or you take money from someone. We’ve associated honour with women, and this is why their character gets targeted immediately.”

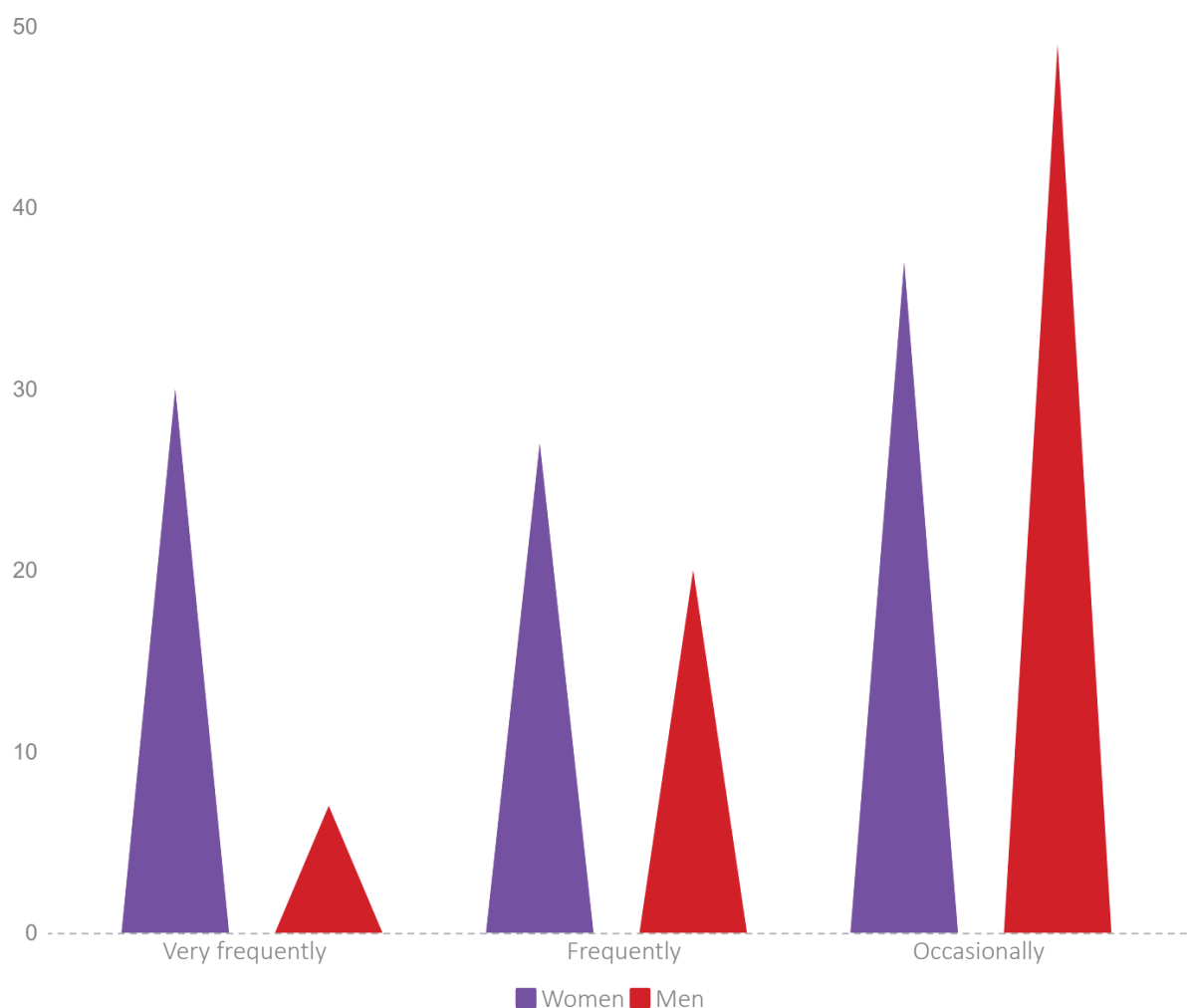
Ramsha adds, “It’s very easy to sexualise women and threaten them in this society because of our regressive views, it’s something like ‘izzat ka masla ho jata hai [it becomes a matter of honour].’ You can threaten women, you perceive them to be weak, to be intimidated by that kind of sexualised threat.”

“Any woman who is bold, outspoken and independent, opinionated, she is a threat to a man and the easiest way to attack is - in a man’s way - to discuss her body from her face to her toenail,” Gharidah comments.

Attacking professional credibility

Respondents of the survey were also asked about how often do they think men and women face online abuse targeting their professional credibility, no one said that women are never targeted for their professional credibility, in fact, 57 people said that they are targeted frequently and very frequently. However, in the case of men, 49 out of 110 respondents said that their professional credibility is occasionally targeted while 27 people said that it’s targeted frequently and very frequently, and 6 people said that men’s professional credibility is never questioned.

Abuse targeting professional credibility



Ramsha illustrates, “When women make statements, it’s more about the women in question than the statement so the object of attention becomes the person not the statement, whereas when it comes to men, it’s more about what they are saying than themselves.”

Respondents were asked to list specific kinds of abuse hurled at women journalists, to which one respondent wrote, “calling women derogatory terms, mainly because (a) they work, (b) they work in the media, where they are visible; questioning their character just because they have proved a point, or expressed their political opinion; sharing personal pictures of the woman.” They also stated, “Threatening women of gruesome and/or sexualised consequences; last of all, and probably what perturbs them the least is questioning the woman’s professional capacity - a question which should come first rather than last.”

Fighting impersonation

Amber recalls multiple attempts of hacking on her Facebook account when talking about the kind of violence she faces. These hacking attempts, if successful, can potentially pose serious harm to the safety of the women journalists and the people they’re connected with.

Misinformation and impersonation remain two of the biggest challenges to tackle on online platforms while continuing to affect or threaten the safety of those directly targeted through these attacks. In Pakistan, multiple incidents suggest the serious repercussions of misinformation and fake profiles. A mainstream example of this is that of Mashal Khan,²¹ a student of Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. His murderers accused him of blasphemy and justified his murder based on the Facebook statuses someone posted from his fake profile.

Given the political climate in the country and the surging mob mentality, journalists are increasingly recognising the need of digital security. And this reflects in the responses as well.

7 out of 10 respondents said that they’re aware of the basic digital security practices, almost 6 out of 10 respondents said that using these techniques can help you protect from online violence.

21 Asad Hashmi, Pakistani student killed over alleged blasphemy, Aljazeera, April 13, 2017 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/04/pakistani-student-killed-alleged-blasphemy-170413132802997.html>

Chapter 6

The Impact

This chapter looks at the impact that online violence has on women journalist's mental health, personal and professional lives. The questions focused both on understanding the direct impact online violence had on the women and how it had impacted colleagues around them, in order to get a wider look at the issues experienced.

Key Findings

9 out of 10 respondents believe that online violence has an impact on their mental health.

5 out of 10 respondents know someone who has had to seek professional help to deal with the impact of online violence.

6 out of 10 respondents have refrained from sharing their work online due to fear of online violence.

8 out of 10 respondents have refrained from sharing their political opinions online due to fear of online violence.

7 out of 10 respondents have refrained from sharing their personal opinion online due to fear violence.

Psychological impact

A study²² conducted by Amnesty International in 2018 states, “The psychological consequences of violence and online abuse remain under-researched, and as a result, understated.”

The report found that the majority of the women that were polled across 8 countries for the study who experienced abuse on social media platforms reported stress, anxiety, panic attacks, powerlessness and loss of confidence as a result.

The impact of online violence seeps beyond the internet, and directly affects the mental health of the victim.

Online violence against women journalists who continue to report on various issues, at times sensitive and taxing, in a hostile political environment, affects their psychological well-being, further impacting their work.

22 Amnesty International, Toxic Twitter - The Psychological Harms of Violence and Abuse Against Women Online, 2018 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/research/2018/03/online-violence-against-women-chapter-6/>

Amber says that she finds herself very angry when she's active on social media and reading the hate targeted at her.

When asked if online violence has an impact on the mental health of women journalists, 95% of the respondents said that it does.

Iffat says that she used to get threatening calls and emails, and because of this she has not reported on a lot of important issues. "I don't feel safe," she expresses.

Mehmal says, "They get graphic with the insults. It impacts you mentally."

Noreen shares that the psychological impact of the threats that she received were very severe, enough for her to consider leaving the country, let alone journalism altogether. She says, "I got paranoid. Everytime someone would knock on my door, or every time I'd leave my house, I was constantly worried that what if that person actually comes and throws acid on my face."

Given the evident repercussions, when asked if they know of any cases in which women journalists have had to seek professional therapy to deal with the impact of online violence on their mental health, there was a visible divide among respondents. Almost 50% of the respondents said that they are not aware of any women journalists who sought professional psychological help in response to the online violence, the other 49% said that they in fact know someone who sought this help.

Gharidah says, "Your mental health is a very serious thing and if you are constantly abused and you can fall prey to depression and it affects mental health. But whenever I get the chance, I advise men and women not to let it get on your nerves."

Impact on personal relations

Noreen believes that Pakistan being a male dominant society, has always asserted that men are the protectors of women, and that a woman needs to be controlled by the men in her house. This notion is quite evident in how people address women, their personal and professional credibility. The idea that women are the honour of the house is based on this very notion.

This is why when a man is targeted on a personal level, it's always through the women in his house, which Amber further confirmed in the case of male journalists when they're abused online. Furthermore, when someone thinks that a woman needs to be controlled, their family is contacted.

The respondents of the survey were asked whether online violence has an impact on the family and friends of women journalists, and 95% of the respondents said it does affect their personal relations.

Iffat shares that there are a lot of incidents where her personal life was affected because of the online violence. She recalls, "The [Nazi] symbol was drawn on one of my pictures and it was sent to my husband [saying] that you have married a CIA agent and [that she] makes jokes about religion." She adds, "Your family life can be disturbed. Even if it's nothing, your sleep will be disturbed."

Tanzeela says, “[When I get online abuse,] my first tension is that if someone from my family sees this what will they think. What will my family think.”

Mehmal reveals that she doesn’t post her husband’s photos online out of fear of being trolled. “If they know about my personal life then they will come for it,” she says.

Impact on the work of women journalists

Restrictions on taking or sharing assignments

The mental trauma and fear inflicted through online violence affects the amount and quality of work that women journalists produce. In addition to declining assignments, there’s constant unrest and anxiety about the safety of those associated with them.

Iffat says, “My mother-in-law told me not to do ‘adventures’ again. It does get disturbing, they [my family] are not journalists, they don’t know.” She further says that she has written a lot of columns that she can’t get published anywhere because of the fear of being attacked afterwards.

9 out of 10 respondents of the survey said that online violence or the fear of it has an impact on professional choices made by women journalists.

When asked whether online violence or predicted backlash on commenting on any topic affects her freedom of expression, Gharidah says that it happens a lot especially on issues like criticising the government’s policies or presenting a different narrative on anything related to national security. Furthermore, Amber was asked whether she has declined to report or discuss any topic in order to prevent online abuse, she says that she has never declined an assignment out of fear of online violence, but has done it multiple times for safety reasons.

3 out of 10 respondents said that they have declined an official journalistic assignment due to the fear of online violence. And 6 out of 10 respondents said that they have refrained from sharing their work online due to the fear of online violence.

Self-censorship

The Internet As We See It: Gendered Perceptions from Pakistan,²³ a research by Media Matters for Democracy, found that women self-censored and restricted their own usage of the Internet. “One of the common reasons for this was again the fear of harassment. Women said they were more likely to curtail their opinion online based on their own judgement of what type of reaction they would get, rather than pressure from other individuals,” the report finds.

23 Amel Ghani, Sadaf Khan, The Internet As We See It: Gendered Perceptions from Pakistan, 2019 <http://digitalrights-monitor.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/The-Internet-as-we-see-it-publication.pdf>

Noreen agrees and says, “Women generally hesitate in sharing their experiences of violence with the world because of the victim blaming they have to face later. But when they do share, the sexualised nature of the online violence in response to their story forces them to deactivate their profiles, go underground for indefinite time.” She adds, “At one point, the society gets successful in controlling women and their experiences.”

The consequences of online violence are not stand-alone, in fact it further affects the larger freedom to report and free expression of women journalists, widening the gap between the stories and a woman’s perspective of that news. Most women journalists share that they started to self-censor themselves because of the increased targeted attacks against them on the digital platforms. They opine that this is an effective strategy to avoid online violence.

8 out of 10 respondents said that they’ve self-censored themselves in digital spaces as a strategy they employ to counter online violence.

6 out of 10 respondents thought that deleting or suspending their accounts is an effective or somewhat effective strategy to counter online violence.

6 out of 10 respondents said that they actively reframe their opinions in order to avoid being attacked and 7 out of 10 respondents felt that this strategy is effective or somewhat effective.

7 out of 10 respondents said that they refrain from expressing their political opinions due to fear of online violence and the same number said that they also refrain from expressing their personal opinions online.

Ramsha thinks that women journalists are more critical of what they post online. She says, “Feminism is a very personal issue to women but they don’t want to associate themselves or publicly call themselves a feminist because of the hate it invites.”

This pattern is seen very often among the women victims of online violence, and was further found in the research, *The Internet As We See It: Gendered Perceptions from Pakistan*. Women respondents for the research said²⁴ that “they ‘backed off’, deleted or suspended profiles, became less vocal and avoided talking about ‘sensitive issues’ to ensure that they do not face harassment.”

24 Amel Ghani, Sadaf Khan, *The Internet As We See It: Gendered Perceptions of the Internet*, Page 30 <http://digitalrights-monitor.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/The-Internet-as-we-see-it-publication.pdf>

Iffat says that coordinated campaigns are launched to silence women journalists. She says, “It’s not just ‘someone’. These are paid trolls who try to make these open, online spaces dangerous for us. Very few people express their actual opinions on Twitter. These are campaigns, targeting certain issues. If anyone dares talk about them, they are digitally lynched.”

Noreen agrees, and adds that except for a few, women journalists don’t have the mettle to follow the unpopular opinion and stand by it as well. “On an individual level, I know that women journalists also self-censor for the sake of appeasement, for the sake of being liked.”

Ramsha shares that self-censoring is women journalists’ way to avoid receiving hate. “Nobody wants to drive hate to their timeline so they don’t talk about these issues, these red lines - ‘we’d rather not go there’. It has made women very selective of the issues they talk about online,” she concludes.

Noreen points out, “Self-censorship is their way of survival.”

These experiences connect with the finding of the study that vocal women journalists are most vulnerable to online violence, indicating that hostile environments are created for them in order to silence them.

Chapter 7

Seeking Respite

This chapter examines the tools that women journalists have used to report violence they face in digital spaces. The questions focused on understanding how often women use these tools, how comfortable they feel when reporting and how effective they find the reporting mechanisms available to them.

Key Findings

8 out of 10 respondents have never reported online violence to law enforcement agencies, although most of them have experienced it.

2 out of 10 respondents said they had reported online violence to the relevant authority and only a quarter of those said the perpetrator had been stopped by them.

Reporting to social media platforms

When asked what strategies have they employed to counter online violence, 7 out of 10 respondents of the survey said that they have reported it to social media platforms and 8 out of 10 respondents felt that it is an effective strategy.

Respondents were asked if they were satisfied with the outcome of reporting the online violence to the relevant social media platform, almost 41% said that they were somewhat satisfied, whereas only 6% said that they were very satisfied, and 30% said that they were not satisfied at all.

Benazir expresses uncertainty of definite results with reporting to social media platforms. “Social media companies can only do so much. It can just block the account but it can’t address the issue. It’s just a band-aid on it, and can’t go to the root cause of the issue and address it,” she points out.

Ramsha says social media platforms are actively taking responsibility of dealing with online violence that is constantly increasing, but she also thinks that prompt response is crucial as violence spreads and effects “in seconds”. She suggests, “It needs to be digitised and more tools [need to be introduced].”

Benazir says, “Twitter has been somewhat responsive to a lot of my requests.” Whereas, Amber says, “I tried to report [the violence] to Twitter once. But it didn’t work.”

Reporting to Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA)

2 out of 10 respondents said they had reported online violence to the relevant authority and only a quarter of those said the perpetrator had been stopped by them.

Sabahat thinks that people choose to report to social media platforms because there is a sense of anonymity and there is a certain lack of trust and expectations of effective response from the government. “If my nude pictures get leaked and I complain to the government, four men will be receiving it and laughing over it,” she reckons.

Benazir thinks that women journalists do not report to law enforcement agencies because they don’t know how to report it. “I honestly wouldn’t know how to go about it. I don’t see anyone educating us.”

Whereas, Ramsha says that Federal Investigations Agency (FIA) cannot deal with online violence against women journalists unless cybercrime law is amended. “We need to go back to legislature. We need to go back to policy. We need to have more representation, union-level, policy-level. It has to be collective effort. Only then will we be able to do something about it. It doesn’t involve one stakeholder, you can’t pin all the blame on platforms or [law enforcement agencies]. They are not taking it seriously,” she asserts.

“A law will not make a difference until it seeps into society,” Sabahat says.

“As a journalist, the perception about us is that we have contacts and we are heard. If we don’t get justice, a normal woman who is sitting at home or who works in an office, if she gets abused, how will she speak up? How will she get justice?” Gharidah questions. “And if women journalists see that Gharidah’s case did not go anywhere, they will think nothing will happen if they file a case,” she adds.

Respondents also expressed a certain level of victim blaming from the law enforcement agencies. One woman journalist wrote, “The most looming abuse is that the higher authorities [blame the victim] instead of blaming the violator.”

Benazir says that in Pakistan, women are always victim blamed for the violence they face, and ‘that’s generally the image that you have about women, that they must have done something to invite this kind of anger and hate.’ She asserts that women are blamed for honour killing, rape and molestation, and says, “it extends to social media [violence] as well because that’s the general mindset.”

Ramsha shares that there’s a visible backlog of cases related to online violence, and these complaints keep piling up. However, when it comes to any case that has political outcomes, the actions by the law enforcement agencies happen overnight. She points out, “Everything has to be politicised. If they can do it on ad hoc bases when it comes to political cases, I’m sure they can do it for harassment cases as well.”

Tanzeela said she did report an online attack targeted at her to the FIA but she was not able to get it removed.

Gharidah says, “FIA is a very weak institution, and despite the fanfare around its launch that this will help in dealing with online violence, their cybercrime wing is toothless when it comes to the safety of journalists.”

“Potentially a public prosecution would help in dealing with the situation. I think it will encourage other women as well,” Amber suggests.

Benzair further states that the climate of hostility and “the climate of ‘men can get away with whatever they want’” can be reduced if enough cases are reported to the FIA or taken to the courtroom, and if implementation of laws happens.

Chapter 8

Finding Support

Laura Macomber, press freedom project manager at PEN America, says,²⁵ “One of the most effective strategies to counter hate online ‘is when other groups or supportive communities come together and enter the space where the hate is taking place, and they try to re-appropriate the narrative.’”

Because of the social stigma attached to gender based violence, victims often feel isolated and helpless. As a result, they start to blame themselves for their experiences. A similar pattern has been seen among victims of online violence where they don’t report the abuse because they fear they will be punished for it. This further builds up psychological trauma, as has been seen in multiple cases²⁶ related to online harassment.

As established by the findings of the research, women journalists face constant and unfettered online violence of personal nature that leaves significant impact on their personal and professional life, and mental health. In such instances, there’s a general consensus that there needs to be a support mechanism for women journalists to deal with the trauma of online violence.

Sabahat expresses that she believes in social change more than laws and says, “We need a support system to tell people they are not alone. It will work for me [if] someone [comes up to me] and tells me, ‘it’s ok, I have been through this too.’”

Gharidah shares the same sentiments and says that there should be at least one women journalists group to support victims of online violence. “With all kinds of women journalists, camerawomen, reporters, producers, desk people, anchors, all kinds of journalists need a centralised forum that raises its voice for them,” she says.

Whereas, Iffat believes that women should support each other in all instances just like men do. “I think women should support each other in right or wrong. I appreciate these groups, media journalists and female journalist groups. There are a few who play a great role,” she says, adding, “people with large followings should come forward and openly support.”

Role of media organisations in supporting journalists

Noreen says media organisations have a big role to play in protecting women journalists, and to ensure that the committees they form to deal with harassment of women journalists are unbiased and have individuals who understand the sensitivity of the situation. She says, “Even though they set up these departments with good intentions, but the people sitting in this committee come from

25 Jesselyn Cook, Staying Online: How To Deal With Trolls Without Quitting Social Media, Huffington Post, April 5, 2018 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/coping-with-cyber-harassment_n_5acb4622e4b0c4f1932026fa

26 Muhammad Hussain Khan, Threats, blackmail forced Naila Rind to end her life, concludes judicial probe, Dawn.com, December 5, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1374538>

our society only; they have their own baggage; misogynist men and women are sitting on these panels doing the investigations, and these factors make the process weak.” She adds that while these cliched departments exist but they are not effective, suggesting, “there’s a need to challenge their understanding, and train them to handle such complaints.”

Benazir asserts that women journalists should be supported by their media organisation when they face online violence. “There should’ve been someone at the workplace who’d have come up to me and told me that if something like this happens, this is how to go about it and this is how the company will support you. And I haven’t been told that,” she says.

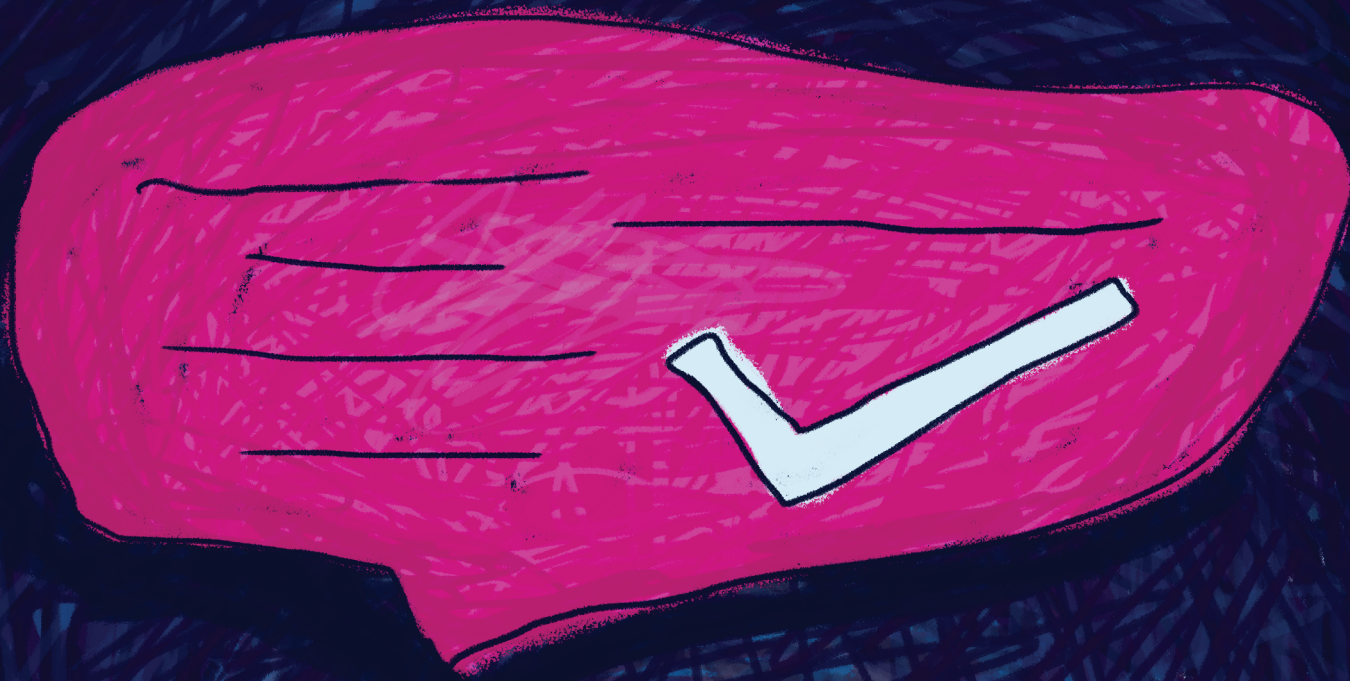
Gharidah emphasises, “[Media] organisations must stand with journalists. Aaj stands with me, but a former organisation did not stand with me, not just with me but with other women too. Organisations need to stand with their people.”

According to Ramsha, press clubs, unions, and networks of journalists need to step up and raise awareness on how to counter or prevent online harassment, and further secure yourself online.

Benazir believes that legal action could be taken against the perpetrator of online violence, but women journalists are always financially struggling making it difficult to even consider going to court. “Will I be able to afford the fee of the lawyer? This is where the media organisations should step in and say that we will support you or provide you some sort of assistance if you do pursue a case.”

Section 3

RECOMMENDATIONS



Chapter 9

Recommendations for Stakeholders

In the light of the findings of this research and after interacting and speaking to multiple women journalists, MMFD put the following recommendations forward to various stakeholders that play an important role in controlling and hence transforming the working conditions and subsequent consequences of women journalists in Pakistan.

Recommendations for Law Enforcement Agencies & FIA

A significant number of respondents reported that they have faced some forms of online violence that are criminalised by law - in particular blackmail, stalking and leaks of personal data appear to be commonly used strategies to target women journalists online. At the same time, the majority of women journalists never approached law enforcement, and those who did, do not report a high level of satisfaction with the legal remedies offered. Thus, the law enforcement agencies should:

1. Be trained and equipped to deal with the cases that are gender sensitive in nature, and require a certain level of understanding around the issues that women, in general, face in Pakistan.
2. Have adequate number of women investigation officers to receive and file complaints of online violence against women.
3. Improve implementation of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (PECA) to ensure that help is available for women journalists and perpetrators can be held accountable.

Recommendations for Media Organisations

The data demonstrates that the issue of online violence has a direct impact on women journalists' professional lives. As most of the respondents are vulnerable to online violence due to their professional work, their employers i.e. the media organisations also have a responsibility to help women journalists counter this challenge. Thus, it is recommended that media organisations;

4. Create support systems within newsrooms to help women journalists navigate the challenge of online violence. This could include digital safety sessions, legal and psycho-social support to help journalists understand possible courses of action.
5. Ensure that the newsroom staff has necessary gender sensitivity trainings and understanding to become allies who can provide some support if and when their female colleagues are subjected to online violence.
6. Ensure that there is a neutral and gender sensitive committee in place, that has the skill and authority to investigate cases on harassment against women and further ensure that the committee recognises online violence as a serious and punishable form of violence against women.

Recommendations for civil society and other stakeholders

7. Media development and digital rights organisations should arrange skill building and awareness raising sessions for women journalists, enabling them to better respond to instances of online violence, and of the process of filing complaint in case they are targeted online or offline.
8. Media development organisations or journalist bodies, should facilitate creation of a support network that can offer help and support to those who are dealing with or have dealt with online violence.
9. Media development organisations, press clubs, unions and other stakeholders should document structured hate campaigns against women journalists to better understand the trends, which will enable them to device responsive strategies to counter online violence against women journalists.

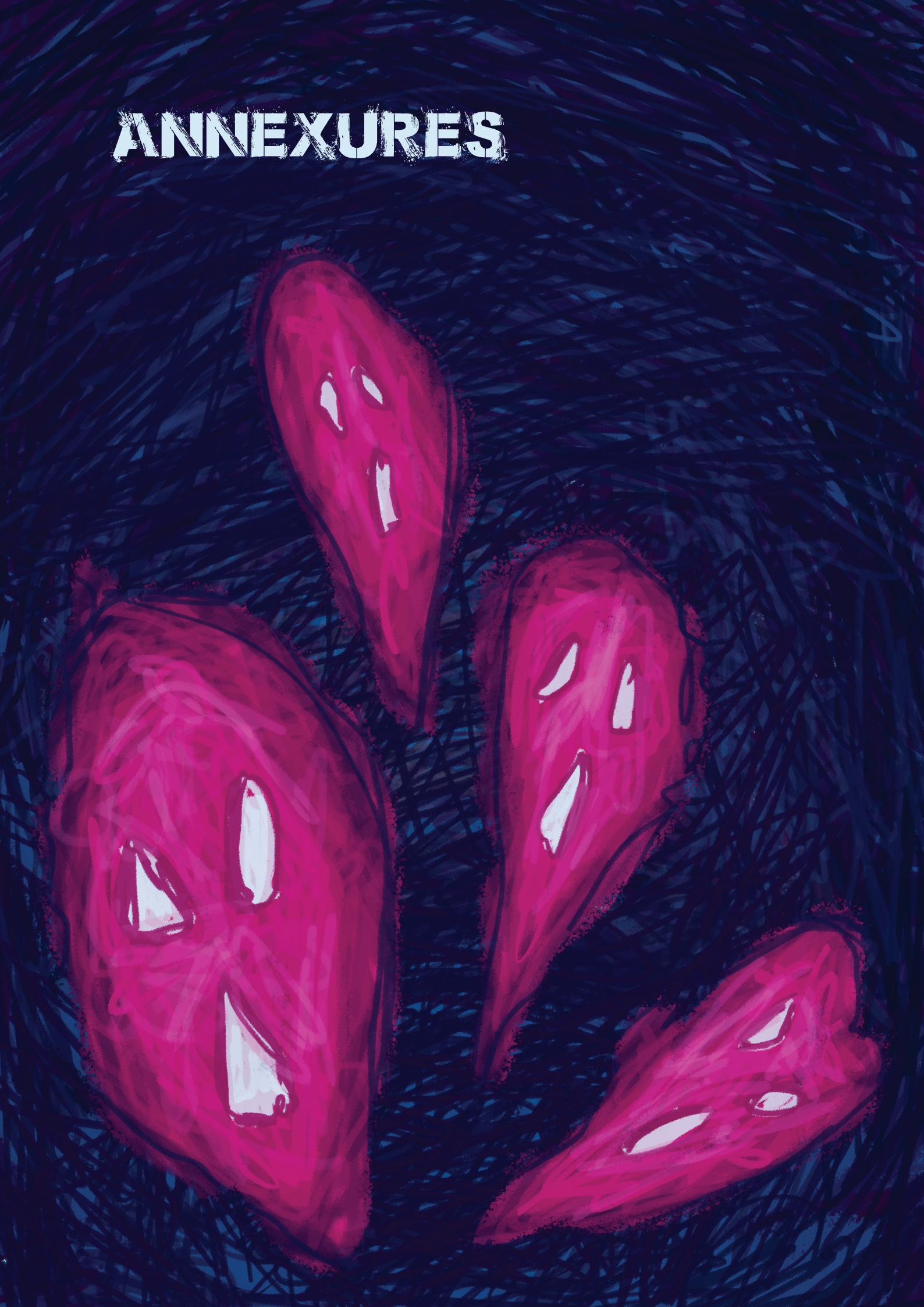
Recommendations for further research

The purpose of this study was to create an understanding of online violence faced by women journalists in the country and to explore some of the impacts and responses to the abuse they face. It also attempted to understand how these journalists view and classify online abuse specifically. The subject is vast and the research findings demonstrate that the issue of online violence is so prevalent that much further research is needed to understand the issue in depth.

Some recommendations for further research are:

- There is scope for further research on the issues and reasons that drive online abuse against women journalists more specifically to understand the correlations between the types of content that gets more abuse online or are there specific incidents that drive more serious types of online abuse. There is also a need to place online abuse and its reasons within the larger sociocultural context of society.
- There is also a need to explore how often and why online abuse faced by female journalists translates to physical abuse or brings physical harm to them.
- This research focuses on women journalists and the online abuse they face. When taking a gendered approach, the research only questioned women on the differences between the online violence they and their colleagues experience. A more in-depth perception of these differences could be created by asking male journalists the same questions.
- There is further research needed to determine the historical context tracking the escalation of online violence and some of the reasons behind the increase in this abuse.

ANNEXURES



Annex 1 - Survey Questions

Respondent Details

1. Name
2. Email
3. Gender
 - a. Man
 - b. Woman
 - c. Other
4. City
5. Age
 - a. Less than 25
 - b. 25 - 35
 - c. 35 - 45
 - d. Over 45
6. Medium - Choose the medium you predominantly work for.
 - a. Print
 - b. TV
 - c. Digital
 - d. Radio
7. Experience
 - a. Less than 3 years
 - b. 3 - 6 years
 - c. More than 6 years
8. Beat
9. Does your social media profile state your profession?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Social Media Usage

10. How often do you use social media for professional purposes?
 - a. Never
 - b. Seldom
 - c. Occasionally
 - d. Frequently
 - e. Very Frequently

11. How often do you use social media in your personal life?
- a. Never
 - b. Seldom
 - c. Occasionally
 - e. Frequently
 - f. Very Frequently
12. How do you generally use social media for professional work? Tick all that apply.
- a. For collecting information
 - b. For sharing and dissemination of work
 - c. For networking
 - d. For sharing and expressing opinions
13. How do you generally use social media in your personal life? Tick all that apply.
- a. To stay connected with family and friends
 - b. To get information
 - c. For sharing and expressing your opinions
 - d. For entertainment
 - e. For social media groups and communities
14. Do you use separate accounts for personal and professional use?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
15. Are you aware of basic digital security practices?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
16. Do you think using basic digital security techniques can help you protect yourself from online violence?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

Experiences of Online Violences

17. In your opinion, what is online violence? Select all that apply.
- a. Harassment
 - b. Hate speech
 - c. Incitement to violence
 - d. Cyber bullying
 - e. Trolling
 - f. Stalking
 - g. Doxing [Public sharing of identifying information, usually with a malafide intention]
 - h. Identity theft
 - i. Leaks of personal data including pictures, video, audio etc
 - j. Hacking
 - k. Creation of fake accounts
 - l. Blackmailing
 - m. Other

18. Which of the following forms of online violence have you personally faced?
- a. Harassment
 - b. Hate speech
 - c. Incitement to violence
 - d. Cyber bullying
 - e. Trolling
 - f. Stalking
 - g. Doxing [Public sharing of identifying information, usually with a malafide intention]
 - h. Identity theft
 - i. Leaks of personal data including pictures, video, audio etc
 - j. Hacking
 - k. Creation of fake accounts
 - l. Blackmailing
 - m. Other
19. Do you know of any cases where online violence against women journalists has escalated to physical violence?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
20. In your opinion, which of the following social media & communication platforms is used most often to engage in violence against women journalists?
- a. Facebook
 - b. Twitter
 - c. LinkedIn
 - d. WhatsApp
 - e. Instagram
 - f. YouTube
 - g. Other
21. In your opinion, are women journalists who are vocal online more vulnerable to online violence?
- a. Yes
 - b. No

Responses to Online Violence

22. Have you ever employed any of the following strategies to counter online violence?
- a. Self censorship
 - b. Deleting or temporarily suspending account
 - c. Reframing the opinions
 - d. Deleting the offending comments
 - e. Reporting to social media platforms
 - f. Reporting to law enforcement
23. In your opinion, how effective are the following strategies to protect yourself from online violence?
- a. Deleting or temporarily suspending account
 - i. Not effective at all
 - ii. Somewhat effective

- iii. Very effective
- b. Reframing the opinions
 - i. Not effective at all
 - ii. Somewhat effective
 - iii. Very effective
- c. Deleting the offending comments
 - i. Not effective at all
 - ii. Somewhat effective
 - iii. Very effective
- d. Reporting to social media platforms
 - i. Not effective at all
 - ii. Somewhat effective
 - iii. Very effective
- e. Reporting to law enforcement
 - i. Not effective at all
 - ii. Somewhat effective
 - iii. Very effective
- f. Responding to or threatening the perpetrators of violence
 - i. Not effective at all
 - ii. Somewhat effective
 - iii. Very effective

24. If you have ever reported an incident of online violence to the relevant social media platform, how satisfied were you with the response?

- a. Not satisfied
- b. Somewhat satisfied
- c. Very satisfied
- d. Never reported to social media platforms

25. If you have you ever reported an incident of online violence to the relevant law enforcement authority, how satisfied were you with the response?

- a. Not satisfied
- b. Somewhat satisfied
- c. Very satisfied
- d. Never reported to law enforcement

26. If you ever initiated legal action against online violence, was the perpetrator stopped by the relevant authority?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Never initiated legal action

Impact of Online Violence

27. In your opinion, does online violence have an impact on the mental health of women journalists?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Don't know

28. Do you know of any cases in which women journalists have had to seek professional therapy to deal with the impact of online violence on their mental health?

- a. Yes
- b. No

29. In your opinion, does online violence have an impact on the family and friends of women journalists?

- a. Yes
- b. No

30. Do you think online violence or the fear of it has an impact on professional choices made by women journalists?

- a. Yes
- b. No

31. Have you ever declined an official journalistic assignment due to the fear of online violence?

- a. Yes
- b. No

32. Have you ever refrained from sharing your work online, due to the fear of online violence?

- a. Yes
- b. No

33. Have you ever decided to refrain from expressing your political opinions, due to the fear of online violence?

- a. Yes
- b. No

34. Have you ever decided to refrain from expressing your personal opinions, due to the fear of online violence?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Gender and Online Violence

35. Do you think men and women journalists face online violence in the same way?

- a. Yes
- b. No

36. How often do you think men and women journalists face sexualised abuses?

- a. Men
 - i. Never
 - ii. Seldom
 - iii. Occasionally
 - iv. Frequently
 - v. Very Frequently
- a. Women
 - i. Never
 - ii. Seldom
 - iii. Occasionally

- iv. Frequently
- v. Very Frequently

37. How often do you think men and women journalists face abuse targeting their personal lives or character?

- a. Men
 - i. Never
 - ii. Seldom
 - iii. Occasionally
 - iv. Frequently
 - v. Very Frequently
- a. Women
 - i. Never
 - ii. Seldom
 - iii. Occasionally
 - iv. Frequently
 - v. Very Frequently

38. How often do you think men and women journalists face abuse targeting their professional credibility?

- a. Men
 - i. Never
 - ii. Seldom
 - iii. Occasionally
 - iv. Frequently
 - v. Very Frequently
- a. Women
 - i. Never
 - ii. Seldom
 - iii. Occasionally
 - iv. Frequently
 - v. Very Frequently

39. Are there specific kinds of abuse hurled at women journalists? Please list examples of abuse you have seen used for women journalists.

Annex 2 - Questions for the Interviews

1. Could you tell us a little bit about how long you have been using social media and what your primary usage is? For instance are you using it more to share your work, your opinions? Both?
2. Which platform would you say you are most active on?
3. Could you tell us a little bit about your experience of online abuse? What are the ways in which you have been targeted online?
4. The examples or the instances that you are talking about, if you recall is there a specific type of comment or incident that brought about this abuse online?
5. How often do you receive abuse online, and if you could tell us what brings it about, in your opinion?
6. In your opinion, has the nature and intensity of digital attacks against women journalists changed over time?
7. Our research shows that female journalists generally believe they face more abuse online than men, why do you think this is?
8. Why do you think a lot of sexual abuses are targeted specifically at women journalists?
9. Do you think that online violence against women journalists poses a threat to their freedom of expression? If yes then does this threat affect both personal and professional lives?
10. Has it ever impacted your life and work and if so how? How has your own online behaviour been affected after facing digital threats / harassment?
11. Do you think women have appropriate support systems to tackle the challenges and impacts of online violence?
12. Do you think that if legal remedies are sought by victims of online violence, it would be an effective deterrent?
13. Most women in our survey said they would not report to the authorities and when they did they didn't find the response satisfactory? Why do you think this is?
14. Most women in our survey feel comfortable reporting to social media platforms, even though they aren't satisfied by their responses either. Why do you think that is?
15. We often see that women who are facing harassment are questioned about their own attitudes and practices and there is a certain level of victim blaming. Do you think this attitude extends to victims of online violence as well? What can be done to improve the situation?

About MMFD:

Media Matters for Democracy (MMFD) works to defend the freedom of expression, media, Internet, and communications in Pakistan. The main premise of our work is to push for a truly independent and inclusive media and cyberspace where the citizens in general, and journalists in specific, can exercise their fundamental rights and professional duties safely and without the fear of persecution or physical harm. We undertake various initiatives including but not limited to training, policy research, advocacy, movement building and strategic litigation to further our organizational goals. We also work on acceptance and integration of digital media and journalism technologies and towards creating sustainable 'media-tech' initiatives in the country. MMFD recognises diversity and inclusion as a core value of democracy and thus all our programs have a strong focus on fostering values and skills that enable and empower women, minority communities, and other marginalized groups.

