



The Reporting Heroes

A Study on the Condition of Afghan Female Journalists

Table of Contents:

<u>ABOUT AJSC</u>	i
<u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
<u>METHODOLOGY</u>	2
<u>FAMILY, THE FIRST BARRIER TO FEMALE JOURNALISTS</u>	3
<u>FAMILY CONDITIONS</u>	4
<u>EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE MEDIA</u>	5
<u>SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS AT WORKPLACE</u>	6
<u>WAYS FEMALE JOURNALISTS RESPOND TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT</u>	8
<u>GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN MEDIA</u>	8
<u>PRESSURES AND THREATS AGAINST FEMALE JOURNALISTS</u>	10
<u>THE NEGATIVE EFFECT OF WOMEN'S WORK</u>	10
<u>THREATS AGAINST FEMALE JOURNALISTS FOR REPORTING AND REVELATIONS</u>	11
<u>CONCLUSION</u>	12
<u>RECOMMENDATIONS</u>	13

ABOUT AJSC

Afghan Journalists Safety Committee (AJSC) is an independent structure dedicated to enhancing safety and protection of Afghan media workers and international reporters working in Afghanistan. AJSC works under the umbrella of Afghanistan New Generation Organization.

AJSC was formed based on the recommendation of Kabul Conference on Freedom of Expression, which was organized in March 2009 by International Media Support (IMS).

AJSC has a board of advisors composed of well-known media workers and civil society activists. AJSC's executive section has official representatives in eight regions of the country and an unofficial focal point in the remaining 26 provinces. This has enabled AJSC to establish representation throughout the country and provide media workers with necessary help when needed.

ABOUT REPORT

This report reflects the findings of a survey performed by Afghan Journalists Safety Committee on the status of female journalists and media workers in Afghanistan. The purpose of the report is to identify the extensive challenges female journalists and media workers face and develop specific measures to tackle those challenges subsequent to development of this report.

For press inquiries please refer to the below contacts

+93 702 50 20 87

info@ajsc.af

www.ajsc.af

www.facebook.com/safetycommittee

www.twitter.com/ajsc_af

Disclaimer: The content of the report is produced by AJSC. It is copyrighted under Afghanistan and International Laws. Usage of the content, graphs or any other material of the report without the authorization of AJSC is not permissible. Dissemination and republishing can only be done with prior permission from AJSC.

INTRODUCTION

The vast growth of free media in Afghanistan over the past decade has provided employment opportunities for a large number of journalists and other media workers in the country. However, this growth has also come with difficulties, among which is the challenging work environment female journalists face. In order to better understand the condition of Afghan female journalists, it is necessary to consider two aspects: first, the overall environment of Afghanistan and the position of women within it, and second, the general condition of journalists in the country.

Gender discrimination and sexual harassment are two of the many social ills that Afghanistan has inherited in part as a result of decades of war. These problems also come as the direct products of the traditions and customs prevailing in Afghan society. In the traditional and patriarchal society of Afghanistan, being born a woman can mean a lack of access to many social opportunities and many barriers to success throughout life. Women in Afghanistan enjoy fewer privileges and less security than men. Traditionally male-dominated, public environments outside the home are often not safe for women, and studies have shown that the vast majority of Afghan women experience sexual harassment outside their homes. According to research by Thomson Reuters Foundation, Afghanistan is the most dangerous country for women in the world.

In addition to being a difficult country in which to be born a woman, Afghanistan is among the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists and the free media. Since it began recording incidents in 2009, AJSC has recorded dozens of incidents of violence against journalists annually. These incidents speak to the unfavorable conditions the free media faces in Afghanistan.

Given this backdrop of gender discrimination and hostility towards the free media, female media workers face intense challenges within the Afghan context. Female journalists in Afghanistan fight for their rights and livelihoods on two fronts. The first involves persuading their immediate family, close relatives and, in some instances, tribes, to grant them permission to work outside the house. Many families are opposed to their daughters and wives working outside the house and woman's decision to work in media usually isn't solely her own choice: relatives and acquaintances tend to get involved.

In the cases women are able to obtain permission to work outside of their homes—usually following a lengthy struggle with family—and overcome the challenge of finding a job in the media, they then walk into a new realm of hostilities, stemming from individuals and groups who oppose free reporting and freedom of speech.

In order to better understand the scale of pressure and the scope of difficulties that female journalists face in Afghanistan while practicing their profession, AJSC undertook a study with the goal of shedding light on the condition of female journalists in Afghanistan.

-
- (1) <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/sexual-harassment-world-s-most-dangerous-country-women>
 - (2) <http://www.trust.org/item/?map=trustlaw-poll-afghanistan-is-most-dangerous-country-for-women/>

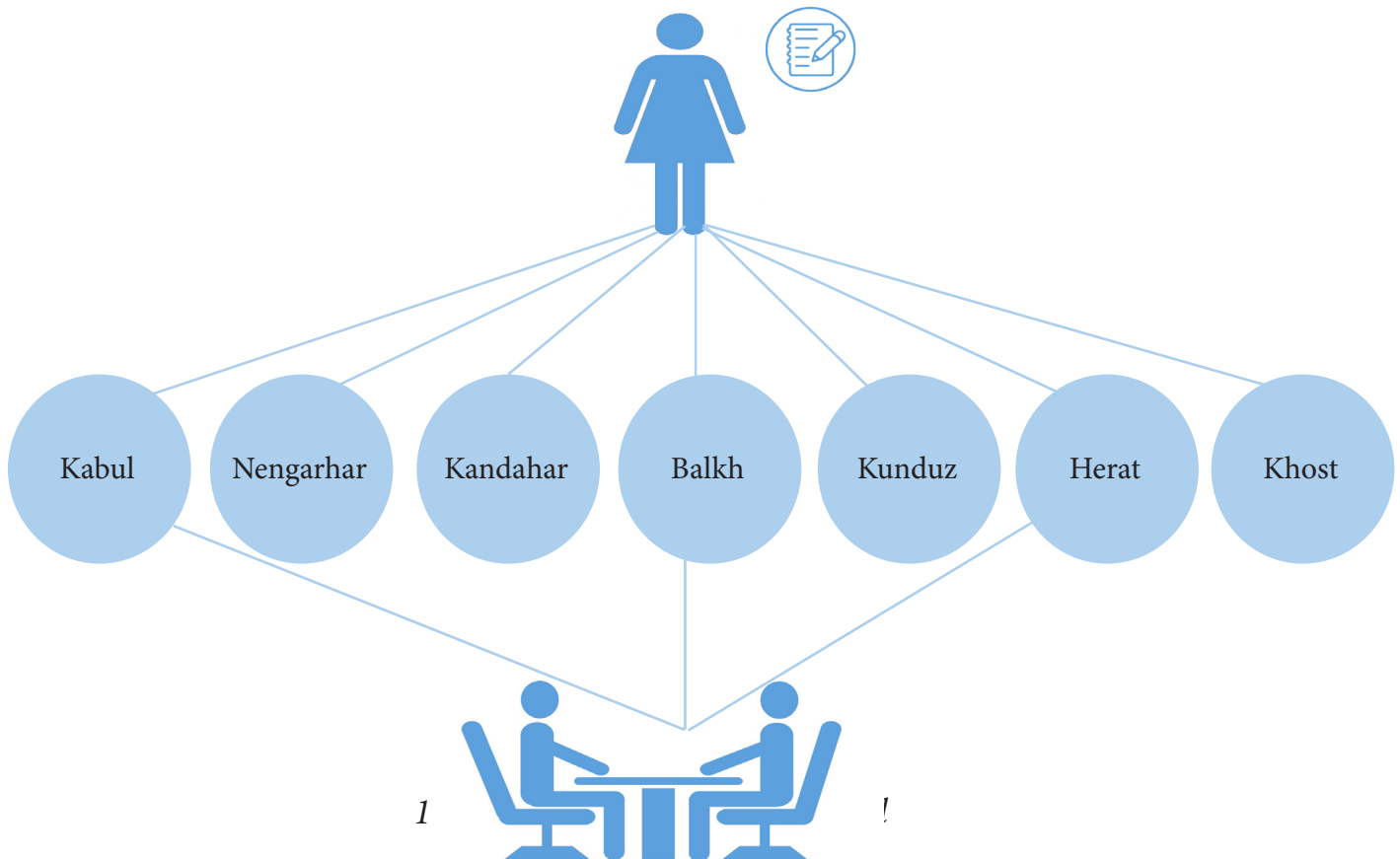
METHODOLOGY

This is the fifth report that Afghan Journalists Safety Committee produces in order to identify the problems faced by journalists in Afghanistan and present recommendation for their solutions. This report reviews the working condition of Afghan female journalists in different provinces of Afghanistan highlighting the obstacles and barriers that female journalists face in the country.

In order to come up with this report, the Afghan Journalists Safety prepared a questionnaire containing 13 questions encompassing different aspects of the work of female journalists in the country. The questionnaires were handed out to female journalists in eight zones of the country. This study was carried out in the provinces where there are relatively more female journalists present such as Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, Kunduz, Nangarhar and Khost provinces. A hundred female journalists participated in the survey and responded to the questions. Besides, the Afghan Journalists Safety Committee carried out interviews with 10 additional female journalists in the three provinces of Kabul, Herat and Balkh. This report contains the first study of its kind carried out to more precisely understand the scale of pressure and the professional constraints that female journalists face in Afghanistan.

Note: Because of the sensitivity of the issue, the names of the participants have been replaced with pseudonyms in this report.

100 female journalists surveyed & interviewed



FAMILY, THE FIRST BARRIER TO AFGHAN FEMALE JOURNALISTS

“I did struggle for months. I was on a hunger strike for several days. I stood my ground until I slowly convinced my mother to allow me to work.”

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Family: includes father, brother, husband, mother, children and sister

Family (relatives) second degree: includes close relatives like paternal uncle, maternal uncle, father-in-law, brother-in-law (husband’s brother), maternal aunt and paternal aunt

Family (relatives) third degree: includes offspring and extended families of the second-degree family

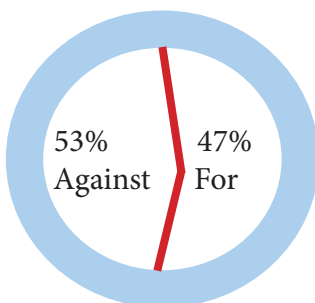
The idea of a woman working outside the house, and especially working within the mass media, is still taboo in many parts of the country. Traditional families, particularly men, including fathers, brothers and husbands, are often ardently opposed to the women of their families working in the media. A job that places a woman in any traditionally public, male-dominated space can be controversial. The case of women working in media, where their images or voices are broadcast to the general public, can elicit intervention by relatives. More than half of the interviewees in this study reported that either some or all of their family members were opposed to their choice to work in the media. 53% of the interviewees reported that their families had a problem with their work in the media and that they had to struggle for months to obtain their family’s consent and reach their goal of working in the media.

Naghma, a journalist working in Kabul said: “There were lots of restrictions. I chose media studies (in college). I did not have my family’s consent to work in TV, especially the kind of work that involved appearing on the screen. Everybody would say, ‘Study but you are not allowed to work.’ They would say that I should become a teacher. After a long fight, I managed to obtain my family’s permission to work in the media with the condition that I would not appear on the screen. I am still continuing to fight.”

In several instances, the interviewees said that the primary members of their family, including fathers, brothers and husbands, did not have any issue with their work in the media but that other relatives, such as paternal and maternal uncles and third degree relatives, were opposed. Since families are very closely knit in Afghanistan, even opposition by distant relatives can have a large impact.

Shahnaz, a female journalist from Herat said: “In the beginning of my work, I faced intense opposition by my paternal family members. This opposition also turned my mother against my decision to work in the media. The only person who supported me was my father. I struggled for months. I was on a hunger strike for several days. I stood my ground until I slowly convinced my mother.”

The views of the families of female journalists on their work in the media



The data regarding family opposition to women working in the media varied significantly across different regions of Afghanistan. For example, in Kabul only 25 percent of the participants said that either some or all of their family members were opposed to their work from the beginning, whereas this figure stood at 50 percent in Balkh province. In Kandahar and Nangarhar provinces, 80 percent of media workers surveyed said their families were opposed to their work in the media.

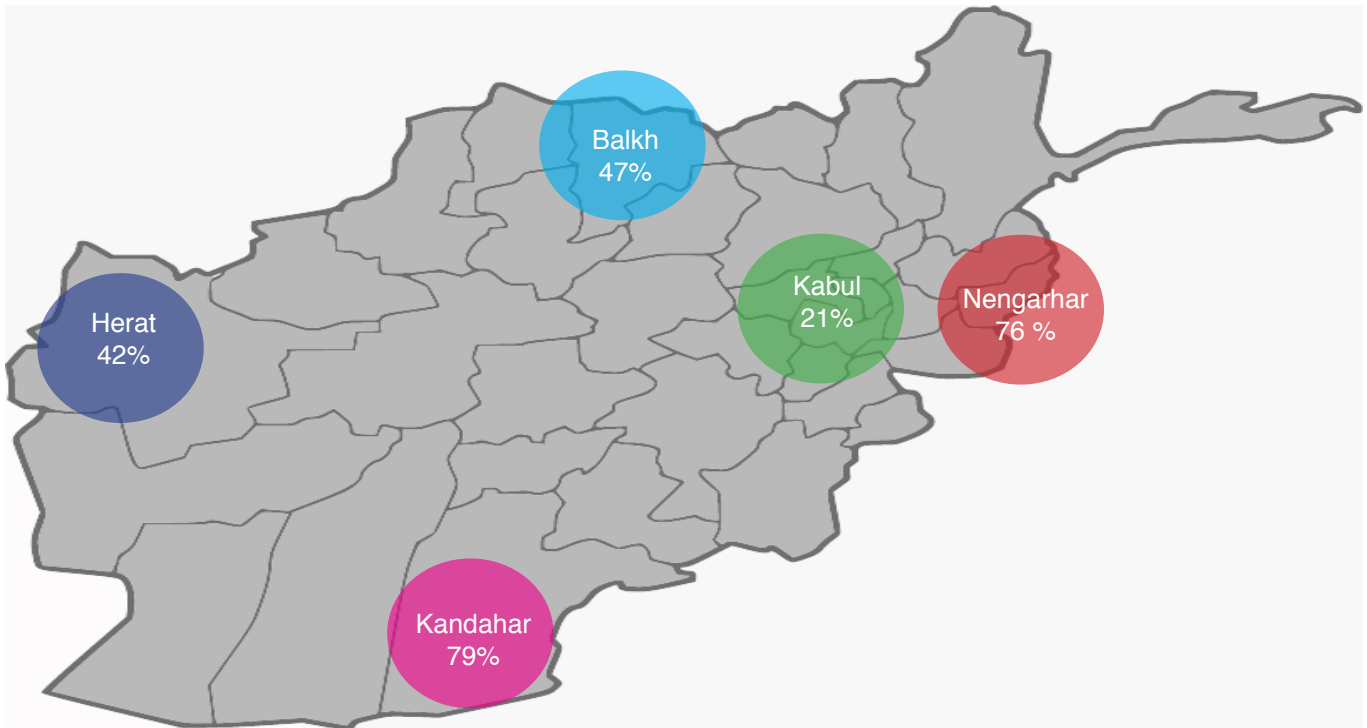


Chart: Percentage of families oppose the work of women in the media

FAMILY CONDITIONS

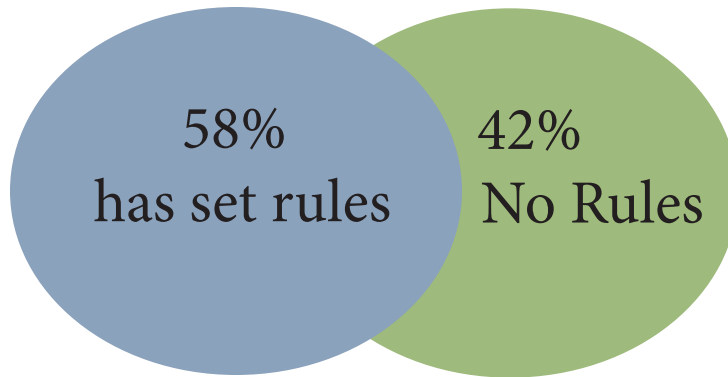
In general, all the families who were initially opposed to females working in the media eventually either partially or fully supported their decisions, based on specific conditions. Additionally, some families who were initially in agreement to women working in the media later set out special conditions and rules.

Nafisa, a female journalist from Ghazni said: “There is constant pressure on me by my family that I should be on time when I commute to work. I should not be late when I come home especially. I should wear the clothing that they ask me to wear. I should not get in vehicles where there are no women. These are the conditions.”

Fifty-eight percent of the participants in this study said that their families set similar conditions if they were allowed to work in the media. These conditions were common across regions of Afghanistan and can be generally categorized as follows:

- Working within specific hours on official days and returning home at a specific time
- Not participating in live entertainment programs that involve direct contact with audiences
- To the extent possible, staying away from verbal contact with men in the workplace (this condition varied significantly from province to province)

Question: Do families have specified boundaries for female members to work in media



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

“You are a woman. You cannot go to the provinces or participate in the conferences so we cannot offer you a job.”

Having secured her family’s consent and accepted their conditions, a female journalist then sets out to find a job. Thirty-nine percent of the respondents said that it is easier for women to find a job than for men, but the reasons given for this discrepancy varied from respondent to respondent.

Waheeda, a female journalist in Nangarhar province said: “Finding employment is easier for women not only in the media but also in all other organizations. It is easier [for women to find a job] because employers usually want to take [sexual] advantage of them at some point in the future. That is why it is easier.”

Zarmeena, a female journalist in Nangarhar province believes that the reason it is easier for women to find work is that only a smaller number of families allow their daughters and wives to work in the media, thus creating a shortage of female labor. In other words, there is low demand on the part of the women for work in the media, which is the reason it is easier for female job seekers to find work in the media.

In contrast, 35 percent of the respondents believed that it is more difficult for women to find work than for men. Zohra, a female journalist in Kabul said: “It is difficult to find work. First of all one should have a connection or acquaintance in the local media. As far as the international media is concerned, it is on the tip of their tongues to say ‘you are a woman. You cannot travel to the provinces or participate in the conferences so we cannot offer you a job.’”

Nargis, a female reporter in Mazar-e-Sharif said: “Today a number of male journalists have created barriers against women’s entry into this [area of work], and one man works in several local and international media organizations. This has led to limited employment opportunities for a large number of female journalists.”

Only 26 percent of the participants reported that there is no difference between the difficulties men and women face in finding a job in media. These respondents stressed that the important factors in job seeking were not gender, but rather that each media organization has its own criteria for recruitment.

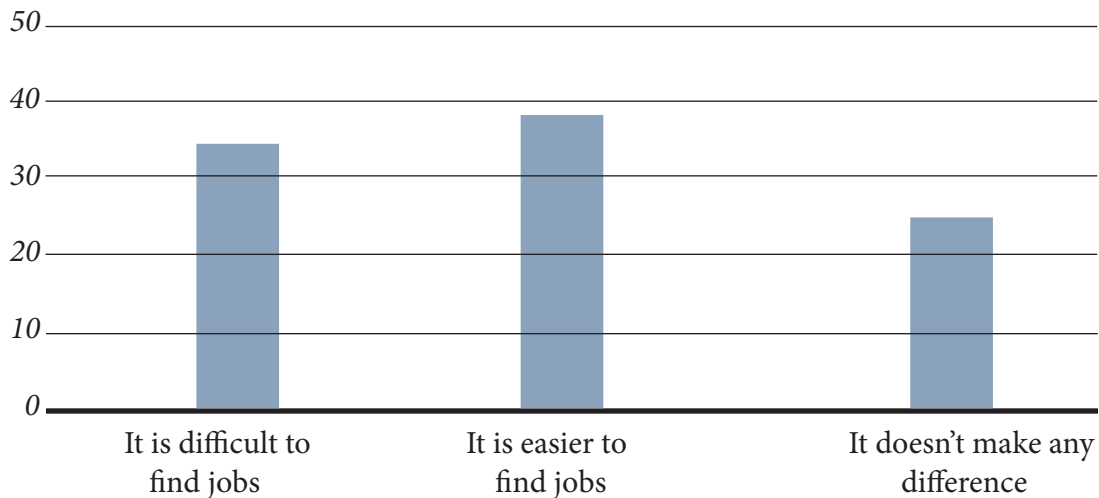


Chart: Employment Opportunities for Female Journalists

SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS AT WORKPLACE

Definition: sexual harassment is defined here as any intimidation or advances of sexual nature or any promises of reward in exchange for unwanted sexual favors.

According to the views of those participating in this research, in Afghanistan, sexual harassment involves:

Verbal harassment, including making comments of a sexual nature, commonly known as *purza*.

- Visual harassment, including staring and making faces for sexual purposes
- Bodily, physical harassment, including touching women's bodies
- Harassment by telephone
- Harassment through the internet

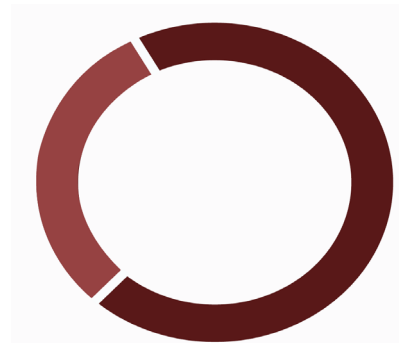
Respondents felt that the scale of harassment was directly proportional to the level of women's presence in society. The more women are present in the society, the more participants reported the scale of harassment increased. Since media work by nature takes place in public spaces, female journalists were subjected to sexual harassment in many contexts.

Sixty-nine percent of the participants reported that they had been subjected to sexual harassment within their workplaces.

69% has been sexually violated



31% hasn't been sexually violated



Harassments occurred outside the workplace as well. Women reported to being subjected to harassment as soon as they walked out of their home or workplace. They also reported harassment by media audiences during live broadcasts, and by media colleagues at their workplaces. Respondents reported the highest figures of sexual harassment to occur at their workplaces, with male colleagues as the perpetrators. Fifty-nine percent of the participants said that they have been subjected to sexual harassment by media colleagues at workplace.

Sonia, a female journalist in Kabul said: “Most of the harassment takes place in the media community, and is mostly verbal or visual.”

Zainab, another female journalist from Ghazni province said: “Last year one of our colleagues who now works in Kabul for a TV network asked me for sex in exchange for money. I shared the issue with the chief editor who then fired him.”

Forty-one percent of respondents reported that they experienced harassment mostly while coming out of their home or office, and during live broadcasts.

Sosan, a female journalist in Kabul said: “There are no women in Afghanistan who have not been subjected to sexual harassment. All of us, from the time we leave home until we return, are subjected to harassment in different forms, ranging from hearing perverse comments to being shoved, touched when the opportunity presents itself, and finally to being showered with insults from a distance. They all harass us.”

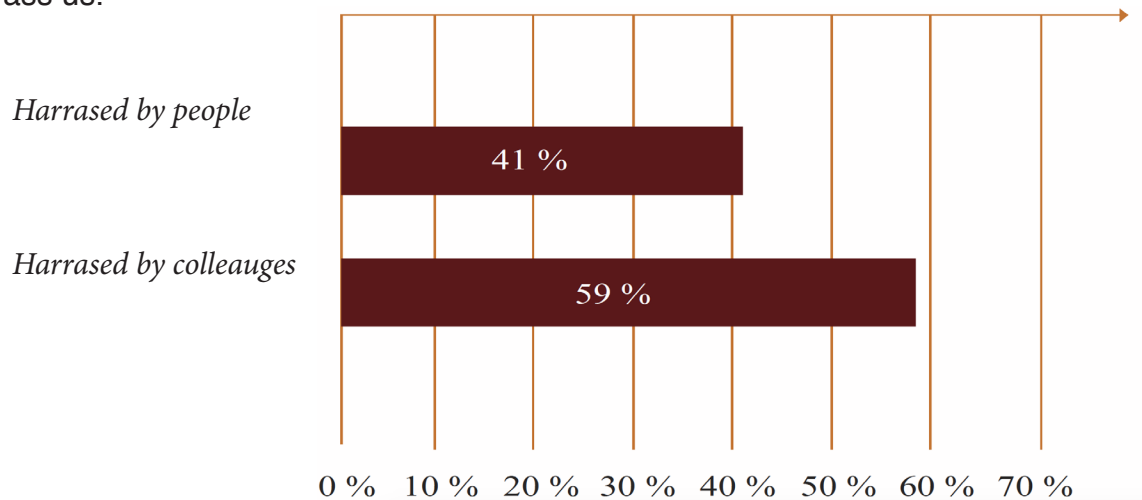


Chart: percentage of harrasment of female journalists

Some of the participants mentioned other factors related to sexual harassment. Zakia, an activist journalist working in Kabul said: “When I first started working in the media, I interviewed one of the senior officials, whose name I don’t want to mention. I gave him my visitor card. When I arrived home in the evening, I started getting text messages from him asking me when the program would be broadcast. He tried very hard to ‘befriend’ me. I never responded to his messages. Later, I heard that the same person had told one of my friends that I was his girlfriend and that he left me because I had bad morals. I had only met him once during an interview but [because of his claims], my colleagues thought that I was his girlfriend.”

Zarin, a female journalist in Mazar-e-Sharif said: “Most of the time, we are subjected to sexual harassment by the guests who get invited to the studio for recording programs.”

FEMALE JOURNALISTS RESPONSES TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT

One of the factors behind the increase in instances of sexual harassment of female journalists at the workplace is the silence of victims to report these incidents. They usually appoint silence out of the imperative to preserve their and their families' honor. AJSC's questionnaire asked respondents whether they would report harassment by media colleagues if it happened in the future. Seventy-five percent of respondents gave an affirmative answer to this question.

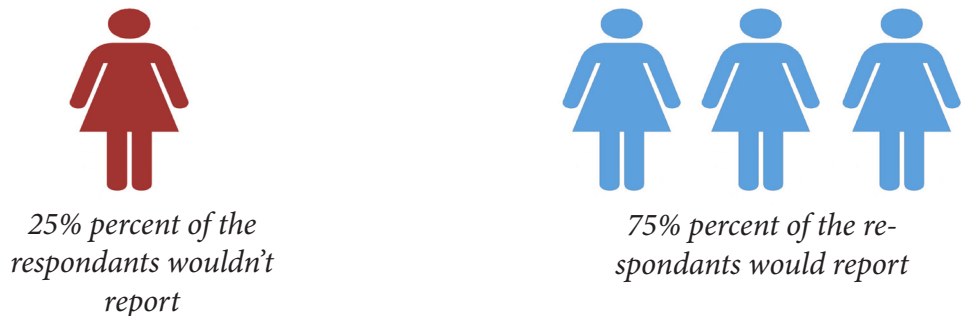
Zahra, a female journalist from Herat said: "Yes, I would report it. I would do it for my own safety. A journalist has to deal with all kinds of people so it is better that [those in charge] are informed, so as to prevent future instances of harassment."

However, 25 percent of participants gave a negative response to this question, explaining their reasoning as follows:

Azita, a journalist in Herat, said: "I try to solve the issue myself, because if I report it, I myself will end up with a bad name and reputation. Those in charge are likely to suspect me without even thinking about whether it was a case of harassment or not. The end result would be that I would lose my reputation."

Freshta, another journalist in Herat said: "What if we have a problem with those who are in charge? Whom should we report it to? Those high up in the media commit most of the sexual harassment themselves."

Question: Do you report cases of sexual harassment to management



GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN MEDIA

Gender discrimination is another major concern for female journalists in Afghanistan. Fifty-one percent of survey respondents reported that the authority and salaries of women were lower than men in their media organizations.

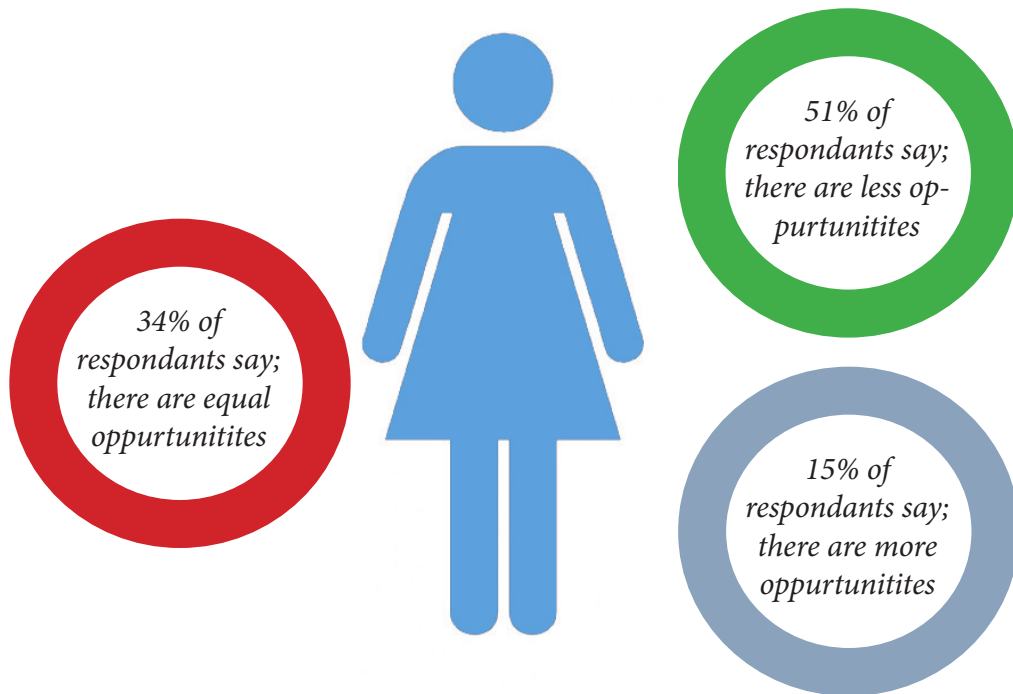
Zarmeena, a journalist in Kunduz province said: "The media organizations attempt to pay the women they recruit less than men. They usually come up with excuses such as a shortage of financial resources or unfavorable economic conditions, whereas if they recruit a man for the same position, they are likely to pay him much higher. I have experienced this several times myself. Several men and I have worked in the same position and I have received a lower wage for doing the same work."

Nasrine, a journalist in Kabul said: "The jobs that women tend to get are usually more difficult with fewer benefits relative to men. The main problem is that no contract is signed between the media organization [employer] and the journalist. That is why there is no job security and women can easily be fired from their work."

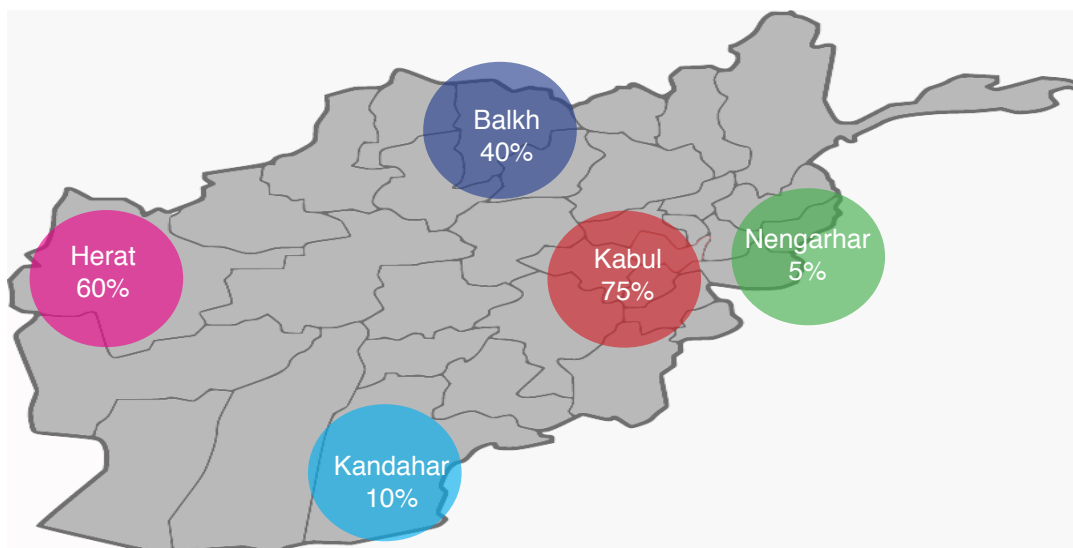
Samana, a media worker in Herat province said: “I am not content with the salary that I receive, because my male colleagues who perform the same work get paid twice as much as I do.”

It is worth noting that 15 percent of the participants believe that women get paid more and enjoy more authority relative to men. Another 34 percent of all respondents reported that there was no difference between men and women in their workplace and that everyone was paid according to his or her level or work, and exercised authority according to his or her competence.

Authorities and Opportunities of Executive Positions for Women in Media



Notably, 95 percent of the participants in Nangarhar province reported that within their media organizations, women enjoyed higher authority and more benefits than men. Yet in Kabul, figures showed the opposite trend: in Kabul, no participant reported that women enjoy more authority and benefits relative to men, and nearly 75 percent of the respondents in Kabul reported that within their media organizations, women enjoy lower authority and fewer benefits than men.



Provincial Breakdown of Authorities and Opportunities of Executive Positions given to women

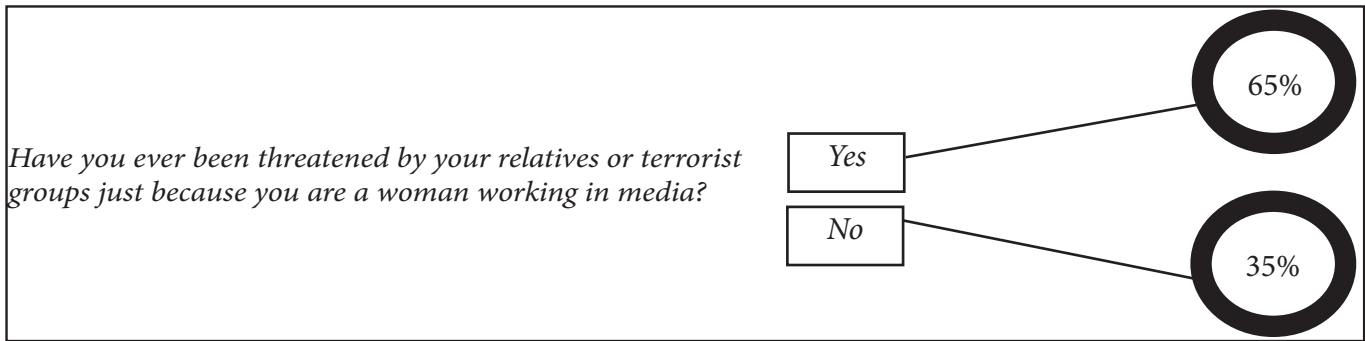
PRESSURES AND THREATS AGAINST FEMALE JOURNALISTS

Afghan female journalists face difficulties and threats on multiple levels. The first pressures come from relatives who are opposed to the women of their families working in the media, considering such work a dishonor for the entire “tribe” or family. Failing to stop the women of their families from working in the media, these families might resort to other measures, including disowning women.

Maryam, a journalist in the central zone of the country, said: “Ever since I started working in the media, our close relatives called us kaffir (disbelievers) and cut relations with us.”

Zarmeena, from Kandahar province said: “I have been directly asked by relatives, friends and neighbors on many occasions, even by interviewees during interviews, ‘Do you have a family?’ In many places I have been called faithless and have been told that since I work among men and speak with men, I don’t have faith.”

Sixty-five percent of participants reported that they have been intimidated or threatened by their relatives, acquaintances and religious extremist groups because they are females working in the media.



THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF WOMEN’S WORK ON PERSONAL RELATIONS

The negative perception of relatives vis-a-vis women who work in the media was reflected in participant responses: 42 percent of respondents believed that women’s work in the media negatively impacted their personal relationships and took away the opportunity for them to get married. Only 16 percent reported that a women’s work in the media does not have any negative effect on their personal relationships. Twenty-six percent responded as unsure, and 16 percent reported that women’s work in the media can have a positive effect on their personal relationships.

Negar, a journalist in Herat said: “The common perception is that women and girls who work in the media are immoral and corrupt, which is why many women working in the media have not been able to get married.”

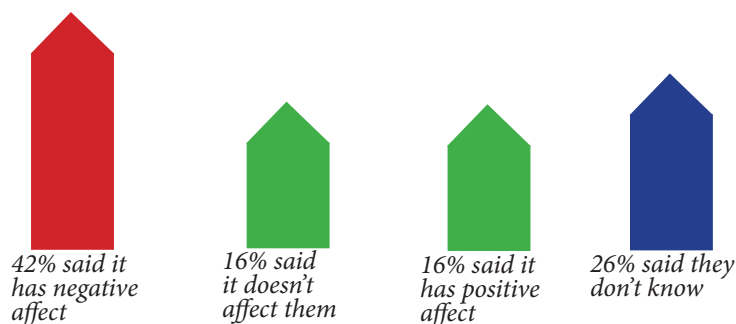


Chart: Effects of Women’s Work on Their Personal Relations

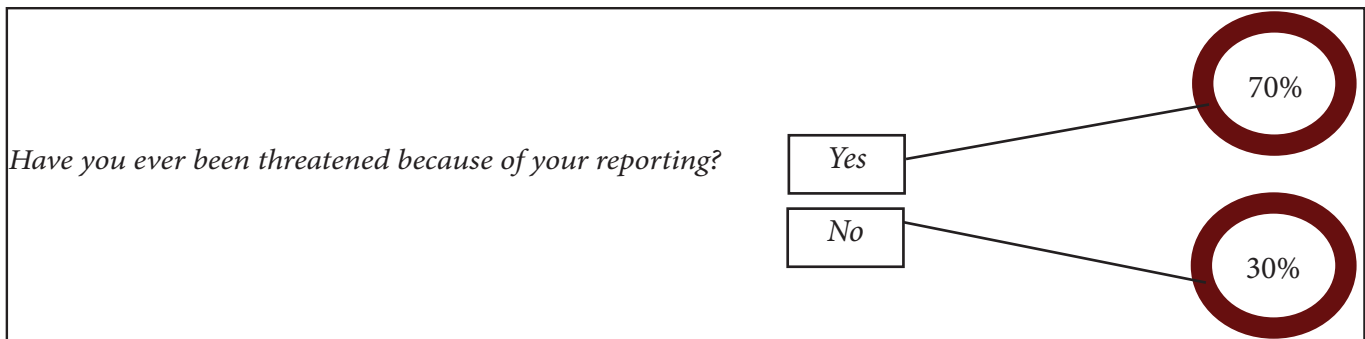
THREATS AGAINST FEMALE JOURNALISTS FOR REPORTING

In addition to the many gender-specific problems female journalists face, they are also affected by the insecurity and the threats that affect all journalists working within the Afghan context, both male and female. Thirty percent of the respondents reported that they have been subjected to intimidation or violence at least once since they started working in the media. They attributed these incidents to their political reporting.

A female journalist in Herat said: “I had gone to prepare a report when I was beaten by the officials of the Juvenile Care and Reform Center. On a different occasion, I prepared a report about a village leader in one of the districts of Herat province who was beating local people on the suspicion of theft. After my report, the village leader was arrested on the orders of the Minister of Interior and from then on I started receiving threats. I persisted despite the threats because it was an achievement for me to free people of the village from the evil of an obscurantist oppressor with the help of God.”

In other cases, threats were to the extent that they forced female journalists to leave their work.

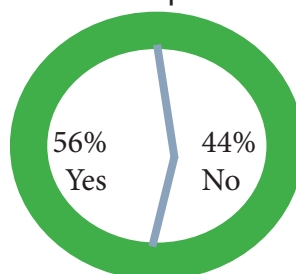
A female journalist from Daikondi province said: “I started receiving anonymous threats because I was preparing and publishing a report on a woman in the Justice Department of the province who claimed she had been beaten and asked to give up her daughter as a bribe, among other reports on the new township of Daikondi province. I initially resisted but I was eventually forced to resign from my job for my own safety and security. Now I fear for my life.”



PSYCHOLOGICAL HARMS

Reporting news on violence that result from conflict adversely affects all journalists, and women are not an exception. Fifty-six percent of respondents in this study reported that their coverage of violent incidents and news has harmed them psychologically.

A female journalist from Kabul said: “It ruins my psyche to prepare the news and reports on bad security incidents. I have wept many times during interviews along with the people I have been interviewing, and at times I have hated my job. I have also wept later while writing the report, and have felt uneasy for days.”



Have you ever been traumatized because of a particular news you have reported?

CONCLUSION

In light of the data analyzed in this report, it is clear that female media workers face substantial obstacles in their work, both gender-related and universal to all journalists in the Afghan context. Social and cultural restrictions limit female mobility and increase women's vulnerability in the workplace. Women must strive to overcome extensive barriers to pursue media work, including family opposition, social pressures and strong stigmas and taboos. Despite a shortage of female workers, women often face difficulties securing a job in media.

Upon entering the workforce, women continue to face substantial problems, including pay discrimination, harassment, violence, threats and psychological effects of their work. The data analyzed in this research showed high rates of sexual harassment, intimidation and violence at the workplace. Cultural stigmas and taboos lead to low levels of reporting of harassment, and it is possible that the rate of harassment incidents is higher than the reported figures. Sexual issues and sex-related matters are taboo in Afghanistan, and many are unwilling to openly discuss incidents or report instances of abuse. However, this study showed high rates of overall harassment, and male colleagues as one of the most common groups of perpetrators of sexual harassment.

Apart from sexual harassment, women also suffer from other forms of gender discrimination at workplace. Common beliefs and cultural restrictions in the society have led to a lower public perception in the capability and potential of women to perform their work as well as their male counterparts. The patriarchal culture prevailing in the Afghan society has created barriers for women's success. As reported by participants in this research, women tend to receive lower pay, benefits and job security than their male counterparts in the workplace.

In addition to the risks that all media workers face in the unpredictable, conflict environment of Afghanistan, female journalists are often intimidated and threatened because of their profession and gender. Relatives, acquaintances and extremist religious groups that are opposed to women working outside the house are the most commonly responsible parties for these threats and intimidation. Female journalists are furthermore subjected to moral accusations that often negatively affect their personal lives, such as the opportunity to get married.

Against these overwhelming odds, hundreds of female journalists continue their work in Afghanistan, with hundreds more studying journalism in various universities across the country, training to become the future of journalism in Afghanistan. To that end, it is not out of place to call female journalists heroes of Afghanistan; heroes fighting for freedom of expression, speech, livelihood and the future of female media workers in the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are presented to different relevant organizations and institutions according to their order of priority.

To the directors of media organizations:

- Discrimination against women has been prohibited in article 22 of the Constitution of Afghanistan. To that end, discrimination against women is not only against the ethics and principles of journalism and human rights conventions, but also illegal according to the law of the land.
- More opportunities should be given to women to fully exercise their capabilities and explore their potential.
- Instances of harassment of female journalists, particularly participated by male media workers, should be treated with absolute seriousness. The directors of media organizations should facilitate a work environment where female journalists feel safe and empowered to share their problems and complaints with those in charge.
- Special policies and procedures on ethics, sexual harassment and gender discrimination should be prepared and enforced.

To Government Organizations:

- Threats against journalists, particularly female journalists, are a matter of serious concern. The relevant government authorities should take serious and practical measures against those who issue such threats.
- Special anti-harassment laws should be developed, passed and enforced.
- Law enforcement organizations should prepare and implement special preventive measures aimed at addressing street harassment of women. Perpetrators of street harassment should be punished based on the laws.
- The government should undertake public educational and cultural programs to improve social security of women.

Recommendations to international organizations:

- The international community should morally and financially support training and capacity building programs for journalists, particularly female journalists, to be undertaken by journalist advocacy organizations.
- International community should also pressure Afghan government to take meaningful measures towards protection of women in their work place and also against street harassment.
- International organizations and donors should make their media aid and grants conditional to presence and implementation of serious and meaningful anti-sexual harassment policies and procedures in the media outlets. In the absence of such practices, donors should not work with media outlets on media-related projects and programs.