State of Safety of Female Journalists in Nigeria
Report

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Acknowledgment

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Introduction

"Within a split second, an operative of the Department of State Services (DSS) advanced and immediately removed my medicated glasses under the hot sun, which of course demobilized me. Almost immediately, he snatched my iPad. At this point, the other security operatives (it was a combined team of Civil Defence - Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), DSS, and Police) intervened and told him I got clearance and he got more infuriated as his tone showed. He cocked his gun during the process and repeatedly poked his finger on my face, telling me how he would deal with me. In all this, I was defenceless as I could not see properly. I merely followed the voices and leaned towards the policemen who apparently were more reasonable and understanding."

This comment represents thousands of other voices of female journalists in the Nigerian media space who have in one way or the other experienced threats, intimidation, harassment, and other irresponsible behaviours in the hands of security operatives and other actors of governments. It was captured from interviews by the International Press Centre (IPC, 2021), on their experiences while carrying out their professional obligations and duties in moments of national emergencies. Several female journalists at some point in their lives have experienced such intimidation, harassment, threats, and utter disrespect to their fundamental human rights for doing their jobs.

Apart from facing offline attacks and threats, female journalists are also exposed to online safety challenges. Studies have confirmed that female journalists are four times more likely to experience such attacks than their male counterparts. The attacks range from violence, stigmatization, sexist hate speech, physical assault, and rape to murder. In some cases, safety concerns can lead to self-censorship or encourage them to withdraw from the public space. Findings of a global study have indicated that about 40 percent of women journalists have avoided reporting certain stories, to avoid online harassment.

Generally, online safety challenges of female journalists have become a major hazard to the profession, one that threatens their continued online presence, and ability to do their jobs, thereby violating their right to freedom of expression, hampering free and open access to information for all members of society. "I have thought about coming off social media," says BBC political editor, Laura Kuenssberg, in the documentary, "A Dark Place" published by the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM) and the International Press Institute, "but then people are there, who want information, which is the most important thing for me, then they lose, and then I lose," (Safety of women journalists – UNESCO).

Journalism as a challenging profession exposes all workers to risks and difficulties at various levels. Journalists across the world face serious risks such as attacks, threats, arbitrary arrest and detention, and even murder every day, just for doing their jobs – reporting the news and bringing information to the public (Klaassen, 2021). However, the lives of women journalists as multi-task managers are even more challenging than men in the journalism profession.

They constantly have to struggle with various personal, professional and socio-structural challenges, which can derail their career if not properly managed. Also, irrespective of their places of work and the environment, they are vulnerable to attacks not only from their beats but also from colleagues including their bosses, security agencies, agents of politicians, and even family members. This unsafe environment contrasts with their fundamental human rights and the provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), among other international instruments to which Nigeria is a signatory.

It is also pertinent to mention that though both female and male journalists have experienced safety challenges, the harassment of women often takes specific, gender-based forms, including sexual smears, violence of sexual nature, threats against their families, and most recently, social media trolling and cyberbullying. The very fact of being a woman journalist is regarded in some societies as a "violation of social norms" and may lead to reprisals. They are also being labelled as "prostitutes," and reminded many times that they are mere 'women,' who should be home picking beans. This perhaps helps in shaping the perception of people and indeed journalists themselves that the profession is a masculine profession (Jubril & Abubakar, 2018).

The safety and protection of women journalists are important as lack of it is bound to have a direct impact on the quality of democracy and the right of society to access a plurality of information. It is against this backdrop that this research, therefore, seeks to examine the safety and protection challenges of female journalists; provide an overview of current safety practices and procedures in media organisations; and how these affect the performance and safety of women journalists in Nigeria. It would also document the experiences and threats that women journalists in Nigeria, and indeed, West Africa, face in the newsrooms and when seeking information in the course of their work.

Literature Review

Journalists all over the world are potential victims of attacks, intimidation, harassment, unlawful detention, and even murder. Because of the nature of their work journalists are exposed to occupational hazards although the safety challenges of women journalists' usually have gender coloration.

Previous reports, articles, studies, and other investigations on the protection, safety, and other challenges of female journalists have indicated a high prevalence of online and offline harassment, intimidation, threat to life, abuse, and discrimination against them. Beginning from a global perspective, a 2014 global survey of nearly a thousand journalists, initiated by the International News Safety Institute (INSI) in partnership with the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and with the support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), found that nearly two-thirds of women who took part in the survey had experienced intimidation, threats or abuse in the workplace.

Issues of safety and protection of female journalists had become a major concern at the global level so much that between 2012 and 2016, UNESCO's Director-General denounced the killing of 38 women journalists, representing 7 percent of all journalists killed. The report noted that the percentage of journalists killed who were women was significantly lower than their overall representation in the media workforce. This large gender gap in representation in media organisations is the result of the persistent under-representation of women covering important beats and reporting from conflict, war zones, or insurgencies or on topics such as politics and crime. The report also recalls that there was a regression in States' responses to the Director-General's request for information on the judicial follow-up to killings of journalists, with some (15) Member States responding to the invitation to provide information on positive measures taken to address the safety of journalists and impunity.

Safety threats to female journalists happen both online and offline. In 2018, the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) and Troll-busters published a report on attacks and harassment against female journalists, based on a survey of almost 600 women journalists (including Nigeria). Findings of the survey showed that online attacks have become more visible and coordinated. The survey found that: 63 percent of respondents indicated they had been threatened or harassed online; 58 percent of respondents indicated they had been threatened or harassed in person; 26 percent said they had been physically attacked; 10 percent of respondents had experienced a death threat in the past year; 29 percent of respondents indicated the threats and attacks they received made them think about getting out of the profession, among others. Also, 73

percent of women journalists participating in a 2020 survey by UNESCO and the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) said they had experienced online violence in the course of their work.

Methodology

This research used an online survey to aggregate responses from 20 female journalists about the safety and protection of female journalists in Nigeria. It focused on current safety practices and procedures in media outlets and how these affect the performance and safety of women journalists in Nigeria. It also aimed at detailing the experiences and threats that female journalists in Nigeria face in the newsroom, and when seeking information in the course of their work, online and offline.

It sought to know how to improve the safety of female journalists both online and offline through research, reporting and stakeholder engagement on the challenges faced by female journalists in the exercise of their duties. It essentially sought to promote greater awareness among stakeholders, of the abuses and threats, faced by female journalists. It hopes that this would lead to a greater willingness to address the issue, especially on the part of media owners/managers and state actors such as security agents in Nigeria.

The sample population of 20 respondents were female journalists who work specifically in print, broadcast (both radio and TV), online/new media, multimedia and media development agency. Fifty per cent of the respondents were from broadcast media, thus constituting the largest group of respondents while 40% were from radio, and 10% from television. Respondents from the print media constitute 25% of the respondents while online/new media comes third with 20% of the respondents.

The following questions were asked to determine the nature of threats, scale of challenge(s), causes and recommendations from them:

- What are the threats you have faced in the course of your work as female journalists in Nigeria?
- What threats have you faced as a female journalist as you sought information in the course of your work, offline?
- Do you belong to any organisation or pressure group that guarantees your safety as a female journalist?
- Have you ever experienced cyber bullying as a female journalist?

- Has insecurity or threats of safety in the office environment ever impacted your work and performance? How?
- What recommendations would you suggest for the safety of female journalists in Nigeria?

They were encouraged to share their personal stories and given the option of anonymity in telling their stories.

Scope of Security Challenge Faced by Female Journalists in Nigeria

The story is not different in Nigeria. In recent years, the need for the protection of women journalists and guarantee their safety have generated major issues nationally. Several female journalists in Nigeria have experienced one form of attack or the other. These attacks range from sexual harassment, rape, cyber-bullying, among others. Most of the studies conducted and reports made on the issues of safety and protection have confirmed the existence of such attacks on female journalists.

Ibrahim, Aji, Adamu, and Phuong (2021) in a study on, 'safety of women journalists in Nigerian news media: exposing the hushed gender-based discriminations,' examined the safety experiences of Nigerian women journalists to identify the categorisation of gender-based discriminations and coping strategies affected women journalists used to manage to work in a male-dominated media industry. The researchers employed a semi-structured interview approach as the research instrument. According to the report, 37 participants (25 women journalists, 10 men journalists, and 2 human resource managers) were interviewed from 12 broadcast media organisations in Northern Nigeria. The findings indicated that Nigerian women journalists experienced different types of gendered unsafety including discrimination in newsgathering and production and sexual harassment; most of the affected women used risky coping strategies such as ignoring the situation and being silent about it. The study also established the fact that most media organisations in Nigeria lacked policies and frameworks to handle such cases.

Giving another perspective on safety issues among female journalists in a report entitled, 'Online Violence against Women journalists: A Global Snapshot of incidence and Impacts,' Posetti, Aboulez, Bontcheva, Harrison, and Waisbord, 2020), in collaboration with UNESCO and the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ), examined the incidence, impacts, and responses to online violence against women journalists in 15 countries including Nigeria. The essence of the study was to identify

more effective methods to counter the threat to press freedom, journalists' safety, and women's active participation in Journalism. Among the 12 top findings of the investigation are: That 73% of women respondents said they had experienced online violence; threats of physical (25%) and sexual violence (18%) plagued the women journalists surveyed; 20% of women respondents said they had been attacked or abused offline in connection with online violence they had experienced; 13% increased their physical security in response to online violence and 4% said that they had missed work due to concerns about the attacks jumping offline; the mental health impacts of online violence were the most frequently identified (26%) consequences. 12% of respondents said they had sought medical or psychological help because of online violence.

Other findings of the report are the story theme most often identified in association with increased attacks was gender (47%), followed by politics and elections (44%), and human rights and social policy (31%); 41% of the respondents to this survey said they had been targeted in online attacks that appeared to be linked to orchestrated disinformation campaigns; and political actors are the most frequently noted sources (37%) of attacks and abuse after, anonymous or unknown attackers (57%), according to women respondents, among others. Some of the online threats include abuse with hateful language, harassment with unwanted private messages, target with reputational threats, received threats of physical violence, threats with sexual violence, detected surveillance, etc (UNESCO &ICFJ, 2020).

In addition, the International Press Centre, IPC (2015) conducted a baseline audit on the safety and security of journalists in Nigeria on the premise that "Journalists in Nigeria face enormous safety challenges in fulfilling their professional obligations to society." The objective of the baseline audit was to unravel the challenges that Nigerian journalists encounter in the course of meeting their daily obligations to society and their organisations.

The study concluded that the safety challenges were partly due to the prevailing negative disposition of stakeholders in society including actors in governments in addition to existing institutional encumbrances under which the media operate. It recommended that stakeholders should work towards addressing the safety concerns of journalists to enhance their jobs.

In the same vein, IPC (2018) in partnership with the Open Society Foundation (OSF) conducted a National Survey on Safety of Journalists and Press Freedom in Nigeria. The study was aimed at providing safety advisory, issuing prompt alerts, and coordinating necessary activities on attacks/assaults on journalists and media outlets.

The findings further confirmed the prevailing hostile environment, which is antithetical to independent journalism practice and thereby requires concerted advocacy and continuous engagement of stakeholders towards guaranteeing the safety of journalists to enhance press freedom. In response to the recommendation of the 2018 report, IPC set up a Journalists' Safety Alert Desk to carry out designated tasks, among others.

In 2020, IPC also presented a report on the state of attacks on journalists and media in Nigeria in continuation of efforts aimed at highlighting the prevailing challenges to the safety of journalists. The general objective was to consolidate the struggle through campaigns and advocacy, for the Nigerian journalism environment to be conducive for journalists and other media professionals. The report, according to IPC, was generated through desk and field activities by press freedom monitors engaged in each of the country's six geopolitical zones. The mythology employed for the collation of reports included monitoring of media reports as well as assessment and follow-up on information relating to reported attacks on journalists and media organisations. The findings of the report revealed 48 cases of attacks on journalists (women inclusive) and eight (8) attacks on media outlets. The results were further broken down along the six geopolitical lines as follows: South-East (SE) eight (8) cases; South-West (SW) eleven (11); South-South (SS) twenty-three (23); North-West (NW) one (1); North-Central (NC) two (2); and North-East (NE) three (3). In all, a total number of 19 states and Abuja (FCT) were affected; namely, Abia, Abuja (Federal Capital Territory), Adamawa, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Borno, Delta, Ekiti, and Edo. Others were Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo, Kaduna, Kogi, Lagos, Nasarawa, Ondo, Osun, and Rivers. The attacks, which included physical assault, abduction, expulsion from government houses, battery, gun attacks, harassment, threats to life, murder, suspension from work, robbery, and unlawful arrest/detention, cut across print media, broadcast, online, and other not specified media outlets.

Furthermore, IPC's (2020) report entitled, 'Voices from COVID-19 frontlines,' which was conducted during the restrictions of movements on account of the COVID-19 pandemic and the #EndSARS protest highlighted attacks on female journalists alongside their male counterparts. In conclusion, the report stated that the prevalence of attacks by security agents poses a herculean challenge that must be nipped in the bud by engaging stakeholders to ensure that the media continues to function in an enabling environment. The report noted that the media cannot properly provide information that will serve the public good in Nigeria if the lives of journalists were not safe-guarded. It recommended the design of a safety manual with updated tips for identifying and reporting threats to safety to be available to journalists and other media professionals.

Also, Chika (2018) examined the challenges confronting female journalists in Enugu, Nigeria using a semi-structured interview to study 35 female journalists with a mean age of 28 years who had practiced between 5 and 15 years. The findings of the study showed that challenges confronting female journalists include discrimination from news sources and colleagues at work, sexual harassment, and family roles. The study concluded that female journalists were confronted with career-related challenges, not because of their performance on the job but because they are women.

To further confirm attacks on female journalists in the Nigerian media space, Ibrahim and Spikin (2021) looked at safety challenges faced by female journalists in selected media organisations in Kano state, Nigeria. The study was hinged on the Spiral of Silence theory to show how female journalists keep mute about challenges they experience and prefer to report the so-called soft news. The study used focused group discussion and in-depth interviews as the research methodology. The findings of the study showed that most of the participants had experienced threats, attacks, harassment, marginalisation, and discrimination. It concluded that most media organisations do not have laid down safety policies except for a few measures when the need arises.

Findings/Result

In their responses to what they considered the most common safety breach for female journalists in Nigeria, 55% of the respondents identified poor welfare, followed by sexual harassment at 50%; while lack of institutional support was 35% and job security 30%. Interestingly, only 2% had experienced cyber bullying. See Figure 1.
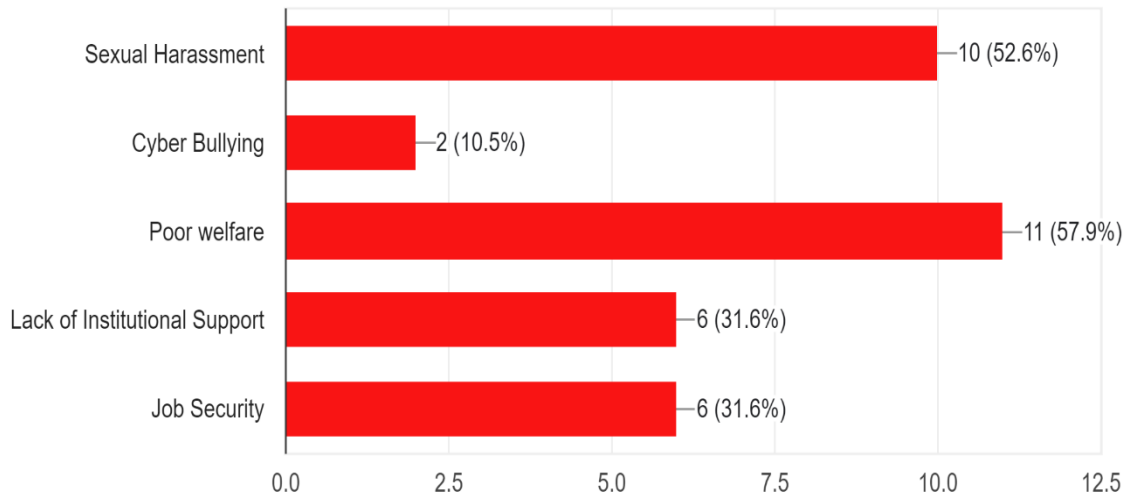
Figure 1: Common Safety Breaches for Female Journalists in Nigeria

On whether there are established safety practises and procedures 45% of the respondents stated that there are no safety practices and procedures in place in their media organisations. See Figure 2.
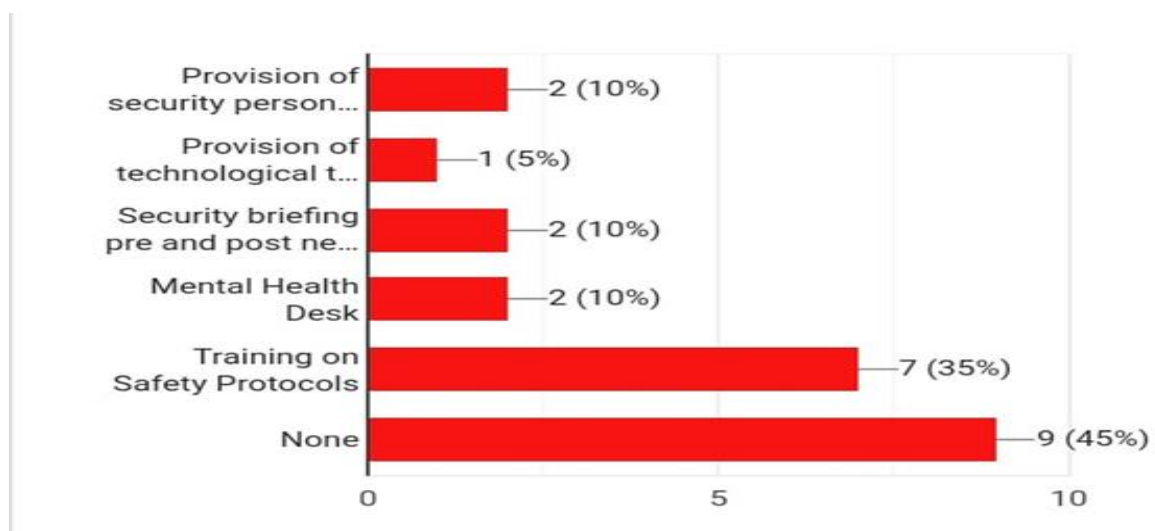
Figure 2: Safety practises and procedures

Regarding threats faced in the course of duty as female journalists in Nigeria, the following quotes on sexual harassment and impunity from security officers stand out:

"I have been in the practice for over a decade and the only sad experience I can relate with was a scheduled interview with a so-called reputable stakeholder in the trade union. While inserting my battery into the midget to have the interview after exchanging pleasantries, the next word he uttered was 'look my trouser zip', showing me his private part and the need for me to pay attention to it if he will grant the interview. I immediately called off the interview and walked out of his office."

"In 2015 I was sent to cover a house of Assembly member town hall meeting in Enugu, and it happens that our governor attended the occasion and as I want to snap him with his entourage, one of the SSS boys rushed to me and said, 'don't take', I told him that if I fail to take this picture, he will go from there. I took the picture, and it was used front page the next day."

Themes common to the respondents are as follows: Covering elections in volatile part of the country; Post workplace hazard commuting home – working late hours without protection, non-provision of transportation to return home; Poor welfare – transportation; lack of job security; hateful feedbacks; mental health and stress; sexual Harassment; Threat to life by public officers without protection from the media organisation; No official transport arrangement to and from assignments or work, when on early morning or evening shift; Police brutality; Bullying & frequent sexual harassment from superiors; Gender inequality on some occasions.

Offline threats faced by female journalists in the course of work are varied. They include patronising and condescending attitude and subtle threats from the public and superiors. Threats of phone seizures, calling security to physically push us out, being pushed off while trying to get an interview, security guard harassment, gun shots close to me while covering protests. The threat of tokenism and marginalisation from male colleagues. Our male counterparts are often just being benevolent for allowing us practice alongside them. Poor welfare package

Bullying, Insecurity, threat and harassment in the cause of duty, withholding information needed for reportage on the basis of gender, Rationing of praise - especially in company of male Journalists. Giving recognition to the male while female journalists have little or none.

A respondent stated that *"people reminding me that I am a woman (as if I don't know) and that as a wife and mother, I should be minding my home instead of jumping on issues I cannot resolve, or get solutions to"* while another said, *"I have been a victim of insurgency"*.

"Officers and others who believe that my body should be substituted for information. I have been denied accreditation and sometimes access to the organizations these PROs work in because I refused to dance to their tune."

"The threat I have faced as a female journalist in the course of seeking information was very recent, when I was arrested by joint security operatives comprising the Police command in Edo, the Edo Security Network, and the Edo state Vigilante, for covering a political engagement."

"There was a day before the passage of Freedom of information bill, I went to one of the schools here to know how many students that were expelled because of their involvement in cult activities, the school authority refused to give out the information, stating that it is not yet for public consumption. I felt bad because the information was later released to a male journalist."

55% of the respondents do not have membership of a pressure group or organisation working to guarantee their safety. Out of the 45% who indicated membership, four cited International Press Centre (IPC), four cited their media organisations – Solid 100.9 FM, Press Freedom Monitor, Voice of Nigeria and Nigeria Observer newspaper. See Figure 3.
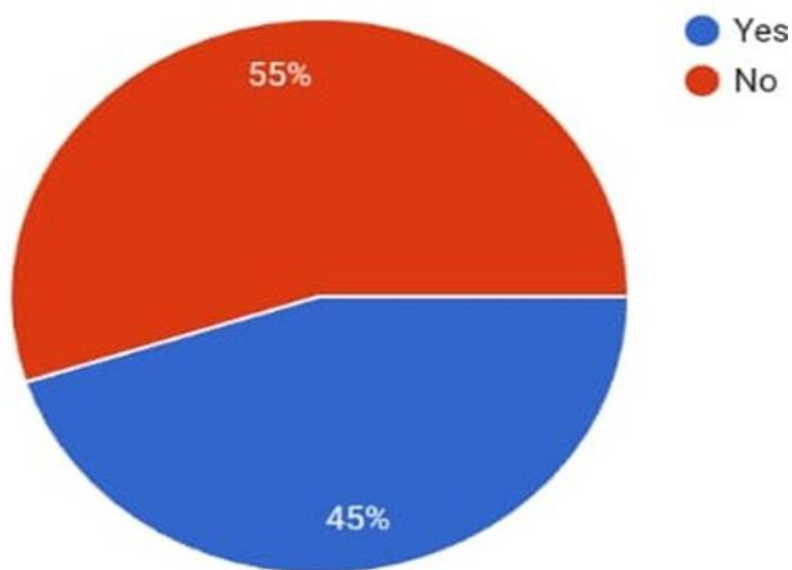

Figure 3: membership of safety of journalists' organisation

Five respondents cited Nigerian Association of Women Journalists, (NAWOJ), three cited the Nigeria Union of Journalists. A respondent stated that, "I belong to the NUJ, if that falls under the kind of organizations you mean.", another said, "I don't know whether to say yes or no in the previous question because NUJ no longer serves its purpose". This puts a question mark on the function of NUJ, the trade group for

journalists. A respondent indicated membership of a women community, while another mentioned, 'Wanadata' group.

70% have never experienced cyber bullying while 30% indicated that they do occasionally. **See Figure 4.**
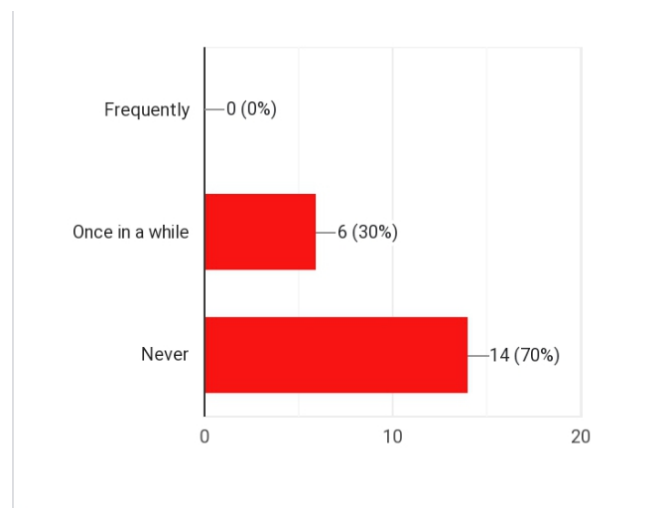
Figure 4: Cyber bullying among respondents

Insecurity or threats of safety in the office environment has impacted the work and performance of few of the respondents in these five major ways: Forced to either do wishy washy job or delay submission in a bid to avoid the risk of late-night movement; fear to go out for assignment sometimes; risk of being kidnapped and its demoralising effect by affecting the thought process, lack of workplace support. A respondent said "Yes, the office is made very uncomfortable, and I asked to be transferred from the agency" while another stated that ". . . I always worry for my safety whenever I have to work late because I don't have a car and one chance is rampant here in Abuja."

The personal stories of the respondents corroborated with the key safety breaches indicated at the beginning of the survey.

"Being pushed roughly by the VP's aides once, while trying to conduct an interview and didn't know I was standing in their way. . . Also getting pushed off in the most embarrassing way by one of Ooni's men or guards in white, while trying to interview him and he didn't even caution him. It was so shameful. These two incidents were at public events and not one person reprimanded the aides or even told me 'sorry.'"

"Security men trying to twist my arm and take my phone from me at a trending story scene in Sheraton (Hotel) because they didn't want us to record, and I was filming secretly. I had to scream at them and shout the whole

place down to attract attention to them so they would leave me, but no one came to my rescue not minding I was female. I basically had to use my instincts to save myself."

"Sometimes, stories of public interest that portray government negatively never saw the light of the day. I often resort to sending them to other mediums using pen name."

"When I was to get married, because of my job they said I cannot stay with my husband, as female journalist people see you as prostitute. Because of your appointment with men and how you go about your assignments."

"My bag containing my documents, ATM cards and a large sum of money was snatched from me on my way to work sometime last and I went to the nearest police station to report it and the policemen said I must pay before they can give me police extract and I actually paid 2,500 after someone intervened" – Anonymous.

"The major threat I have faced in the course of my work as a journalist, was threat to my life by two public officers, one a commissioner then in the Delta state government, and the other a member of the Delta state House of Assembly. Whereas the commissioner was irked by my refusal to date him, and threatened shoot me, should he ever hear that I was dating any person in the state, the House of Assembly member however threatened to shoot me for reporting about his sack as a member of the Delta state House of Assembly by the court of appeal sitting in Benin."

Recommendations

About twenty-five (25) key points were recommended by the women under survey, the expectations common to them all have been distilled as vital to the safety of female journalists in Nigeria. There were three consensus recommendation by female journalists who responded to the survey. They are:

1. A basic welfare package which would prioritise insurance scheme, adequate salaries, sleep- over facilities, adequate transportation home, and prompt payment of local and other transport allowances. This recommendation seems to be the result of bitter personal experiences.

2. The creation of safe reporting platforms for women; forums and safe places where rights of women can be defended.

3. Closely linked to the second recommendation, is a call for pressure groups for female journalists to be created and if they are already in existence, to be reinforced and widely publicised.

4. Training on confidence-building, safety tips, and provision of resources for mental health and post-traumatic therapy.

5. Capacity building on safety protocols.

6. Creation of safety desks in media organisations.

7. Legislation on the safety and protection of female journalists.

8. Educating the public on why female journalists should be exempted, if adequate protection cannot be guaranteed.

9. Regular security briefing for travel advisory.

10. Workplace safety by media houses that can address sexual harassment and intimidation.

Conclusion

The safety of journalists across the world is increasingly a concern as impunity for deliberate violence against journalists is on the rise. The safety of female journalists is even jeopardised because of the physiological and emotional vulnerabilities of the gender. Female journalists have been targets of molestations and humiliations in the hands of security personnel and governments while covering events.

They have also suffered from inadequate welfare from employers as well as sexual harassment from colleagues and superiors which hamper their work.

There is a particularly strong call by a large section of female journalists in Nigeria, who took part in the survey, on two pivotal needs. One, is the need to rally as a pressure group to defend the rights of female journalists caught in the oppressive web of state actors. The second need, is for employers to provide security, decent sleeping accommodation or effective transportation when female staff are on night shifts, to safeguard their lives.

A fitting conclusion in this wise, is this quote, taken from one of the respondents to the survey is that *"Employers should make better provision for their employees especially female journalists"*. A sub theme to this is that employers should show more empathy, solidarity and better resolve in conflict resolution in allegations of harassment against their female employees.

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