

## Country Report:

# “Media and Gender in India”

Part of the IFJ Media and Gender in Asia-Pacific Research Project





## Media and Gender in the Asia Pacific Region

### A special report by the International Federation of Journalists (Asia-Pacific)

March 2015

**Project title:** "Research Study on Media and Gender in Asia-Pacific"

**Executing agent:** IFJ Asia-Pacific

**Project locations:** South Asia (India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka); South East Asia (Cambodia, Malaysia); and Pacific (Vanuatu)

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**Images:** Photographs are contributed by the IFJ and affiliates and AFP.

This document has been produced with UNESCO and UN Women support. The views and contents expressed herein are those of the IFJ and can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of UNESCO.

**Published by the International Federation of Journalists**



## Introduction to IFJ gender and media research

This report has been prepared as part of the “Research Study on Media and Gender in Asia-Pacific” project undertaken by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and supported by UNESCO in partnership with UN Women. In line with UNESCO’s Communication and Information Programme for 2014 to 2017, the project comprises research on gender and media conducted in partnership with national stakeholders in seven countries in the Asia-Pacific region (South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific): Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu.

The study included a survey, interviews and case studies of best practices. The survey attempted to trace the patterns of employment and examine the working conditions of journalists, addressing issues such as regular/contract employment, wages, benefits, career opportunities and choices, training, trade union rights, sexual harassment at work and the portrayal of women in the media. Other aspects of the media industry are spotlighted in the report through interviews with media managers and trade union leaders, as well as some case studies.

The survey was posted online, and journalists’ networks and unions were requested to circulate the questionnaire among their members. The Delhi Union of Journalists and the Network of Women in Media in India played an important role in disseminating information about the survey. This report presents an overview of women in the Indian media based on the responses received from female and male journalists in different parts of the country.

## An evolving gender picture in India’s media

Over the past three decades women have entered journalism in India in substantial numbers, making their mark in every form of media: print, radio, television, news agency and internet journalism. While they continue to be a minority, today’s women journalists have both opportunities and visibility in India’s media.

The media is a rapidly growing sector in India, with even daily newspapers registering increases in circulation and revenues, bucking the Western media trend where newspaper readership is falling sharply. According to the Registrar for Newspapers in India, the number of dailies being published in the country rose from 5767 in 2012-13 to 6730 in 2013-14.

The claimed circulation of dailies increased by 17.81 percent during this period. Periodicals too registered similar growth. Most of these publications were in English and the 22 principal languages of the country. Circulation-wise, Hindi language dailies maintained their dominance with 126,477,693 million copies, while English dailies followed with a circulation of 33,148,808 million copies per publishing day.

Today there are 821 satellite television channels, of which 404 are news and current affairs channels while the rest are devoted to entertainment and lifestyle.

Radio was also exclusively state-owned till the mid-1990s, when privately-produced FM radio programming began, initially using time slots leased from the state/public broadcaster and later through independent, commercial FM stations. The private FM radio operators are currently restricted to entertainment programming, with news and current affairs still the monopoly of the official radio network.



In India today, many TV channels, particularly regional language channels, are owned by politicians who are not interested in professional journalism and wish to use media to promote their political and business interests. In some states politicians are trying to corner the entire media space through investments in local language TV channels and cable networks.

Corporate houses have taken over most of the influential English language news and business channels in recent years and the pro-industry bias is increasingly evident. Cross-media holdings are common, with some media groups including radio stations, TV channels, websites and newspapers. Big media houses are diversifying into telecommunications and a range of other businesses. The spectre of media monopolies is raising its head. The revenue model aggressively promoted by some media companies has created a complete dependence on advertising and resulted in the total commercialisation of the media over the past two and a half decades, at the cost of content and editorial independence. Further, much of the print media advertising revenue is cornered by a few big English language newspapers, leading to growing monopolies.

The industry opposes all regulation and raises the bogey of 'press freedom under attack' to combat any attempt by the government to restrict or question its activities. They chant the mantra of 'self-regulation' to thwart any questioning of media biases, excessive sensationalism and other ills. The Press Council of India is limited to the print media and it lacks teeth.

While India's press and television are relatively free, the social media are hamstrung by certain stringent provisions of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which enables the police to arbitrarily arrest people for sending messages that are deemed offensive or false. These provisions are currently being challenged in courts of law.

Free speech is also being hampered by the misuse of defamation laws by media houses, corporates, politicians, etc., who increasingly tend to sue journalists and writers whenever inconvenient truths about their misdoings are exposed. Journalists are increasingly using blogs, websites and the social media to voice grievances against employers and report news about protests or strikes in media companies because of non-payment of wages or arbitrary closures. Such industrial actions are invariably blacked out by the conventional media. Media houses are resorting to defamation notices to censor and counter such charges. In more than one case defamation charges have been brought against women journalists who have alleged sexual harassment in the workplace.

The issue of self-censorship among journalists is a largely unexplored problem in Indian journalism. Many interest groups, including religious groups and organisations, impose extra-legal restraints on journalism. Their tendency to complain about 'hurt sentiments' and their proclivity to take offence at any reference to any ritual, tradition or custom not to their liking is emerging as a big challenge to free speech. A large number of journalists censor themselves either because they fear a backlash or because they are indifferent to the issues involved. This may in part be a function of the poor remuneration the profession offers, as well as the lack of support they can expect from the organisations they work for in moments of professional crisis. Journalists in India will have to strive to assert the right to give offence without which no meaningful journalism can be practiced.

Clearly Indian journalists face many challenges as they work to defend free speech, find means of self-expression, attempt to report on and change complex social realities or quite simply go about earning a decent living. Both women and men need to struggle together if they are to achieve these goals and establish equity in the profession and in the wider world.



**Demographics of Survey Respondents**

The India survey received 138 responses from various parts of the country. Nearly three quarters (73.91 percent) of the respondents were female journalists, one quarter were male (24.64 percent) and a very small number (1.45 percent) identified themselves their gender as ‘other’.<sup>1</sup>

A little more than half the respondents (51.96 percent) belonged to the city of Delhi and surrounding townships. As the capital of India, Delhi has a large number of newspapers, is the headquarters of several TV channels and, consequently, boasts a large number of journalists.

A substantial number of respondents were based in Chennai, followed by Mumbai, Kolkata and Hyderabad. The remaining respondents were spread out over 18 states across the country, including the North Eastern states which often get left out of such exercises.

The fact that no stringers are represented in the sample suggests that the survey mainly reached journalists in relatively big cities, including state capitals, and missed stringers who are usually based in smaller district towns.

Almost all the respondents (99.28 percent) were Indian by nationality and all were working in India.

Over a quarter belonged to the age group of 26-35 years (27.54 percent), while just under a quarter were in the next two age groups: 36-45 (22.46 percent) and 46-55 (23.91 percent). A smaller proportion was below 25 or over 56 years of age.

What is your age?	Total	Female	Male	Other	Percentage	Female	Male	Other
18 - 25	14	12	2	0	10%	85.71%	14.29%	0.00%
26 - 35	38	32	6	0	28%	84.21%	15.79%	0.00%
36 - 45	31	26	5	0	22%	83.87%	16.13%	0.00%
46 - 55	33	20	12	1	24%	60.61%	36.36%	3.03%
56 and above	22	12	9	1	16%	54.55%	40.91%	4.55%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>73.91%</b>	<b>24.64%</b>	<b>1.45%</b>

Over half the female respondents (56.86 percent) were concentrated in the 26-45 age bracket and few were above 56 years of age. In contrast, considerably more of the male respondents (61.7 percent) were in the older age bracket and fewer of them (32.3 percent) were in the 26-45 age groups.

In terms of religious beliefs or otherwise, well over half the respondents (59.42%) identified themselves as Hindu while a substantial proportion (20.28 percent) belonged to other faiths such as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. A considerable number (15.94 percent) declared themselves as either atheist or agnostic, while a few said they could not decide which category to place themselves in since they were products of mixed marriages.

<sup>1</sup> There was perhaps a self-selection process at work, as a large number of male journalists were also sent the survey but did not respond to it, perhaps on the assumption that a ‘gender survey’ is for women rather than men. As a result, the sample is not representative in terms of reflecting the fact that journalism in India is still a male-dominated profession.

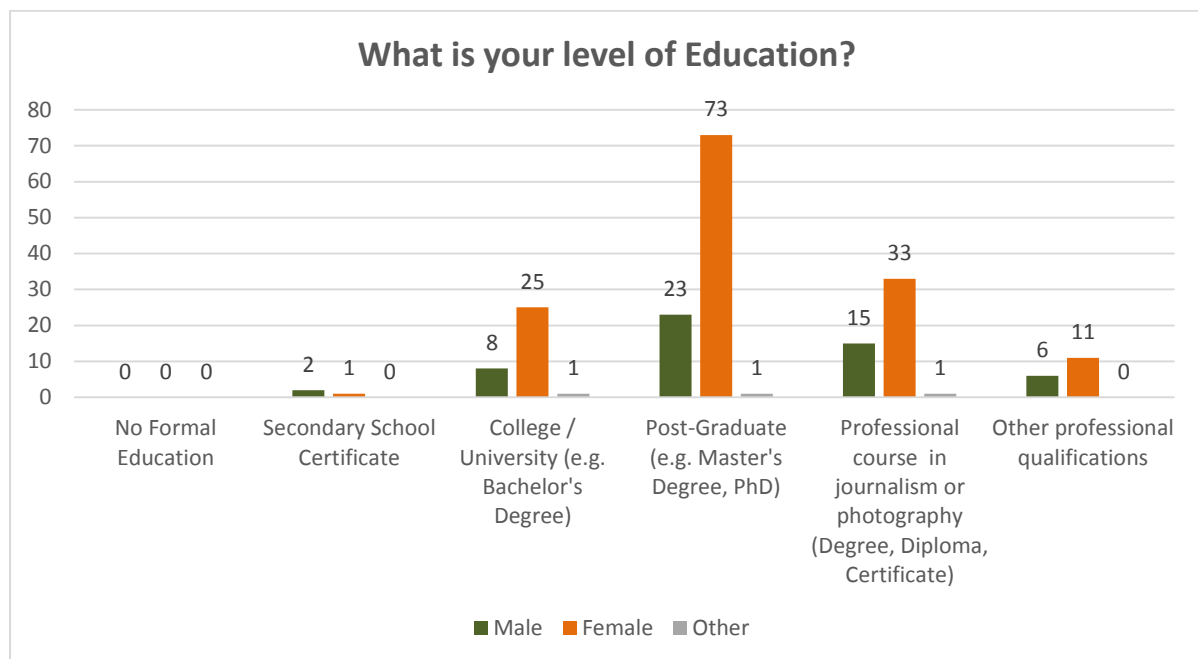


An overwhelming majority of respondents (85.51 percent) indicated that they did not belong to an ethnic/religious minority or caste. Significantly, the sample included only one Dalit<sup>2</sup> although Dalits form around 16.6% (over 200 million) of India's population. This is perhaps indicative of the poor representation of Dalits in the Indian media. Writing about Dalits in the newsrooms of India's media organisations, Robin Jeffrey pointed out in 2012: "There were almost none in 1992, and there are almost none today."<sup>i</sup>

An excellent qualitative study by the Women, Media and News Trust, in 2014 reinforces the finding that Indian journalists usually belong to the Hindu upper castes. The study found that less than a fifth of editorial staff in four states of North India were female and even these were mostly upper caste Hindus with a sprinkling of Muslims. Dalits did not figure at all. The conditions in which these women work, particularly those who are stringers in the district towns, are unimaginable. They face innumerable hurdles because of gender bias, coupled with poor wages and lack of facilities including a poor transport network, lack of equipment and lack of support from colleagues and seniors.<sup>ii</sup>

In the IFJ research, over two-thirds of the respondents (70.29 percent) had a post-graduate degree or PhD. There was little difference in the education levels of male and female respondents, with only slightly more post graduates among women (71.5 percent) than men (67.6 percent).

Nearly a quarter of the respondents (24.64 percent) were graduates. A third of the sample had done a professional course in journalism or photography, earning a degree or diploma; in many cases this was in addition to a college degree.



<sup>2</sup> A term commonly used to describe individuals and communities once known as "untouchables" in the Hindu caste hierarchy, who are socially and economically disadvantaged due to continuing exclusion and discrimination despite legal prohibition of such treatment.



## Women freelancing and working late-night shifts

The entry of a large number of women into media was facilitated by the Indian women's movement, which emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s and spurred middle class women to break into new professions.

Newspapers and news agencies slowly opened up to women pouring out of newly-established journalism schools, armed with skills and qualifications. Privately-owned television, a later entrant into the media employment space, was readily able to hire, train and use this talent.

Television had been entirely state-owned until the government of the day introduced a series of economic reforms from 1991 onwards. The growth of cable television networks and satellite broadcasting allowed private and international broadcasters like Star TV, CNN and the BBC to reach expanding Indian audiences. Indigenous, private news channels in several languages began operations from 2003 onwards.

Both Doordarshan (the state/public television network) and All India Radio (the radio equivalent) have a long history of employing women. However, the proliferation of private television channels and radio stations from the 1990s onwards have multiplied job opportunities in the broadcast sector for women, as well as men. Online media's growth and development, including a number of news and current affairs webzines, has also benefited women seeking careers in the media.

Women journalists today tend to be well-educated, with graduate or post-graduate degrees as well as professional qualifications such as diplomas in journalism and/or mass communications. They are found in every type of journalism, ranging from entertainment and lifestyle to political, economic and business, and even sports news.

While more women work in the English press and broadcast media based in large, metropolitan cities, a growing number are also found in Indian language publications and channels, again based mainly in state capitals and other major cities. Even now, however, there are often disparities in the numbers of women working in the English and Indian language publications or channels of the same media house. The difference seems to emanate from the different sub-cultures and attitudes to women among different sections of Indian society. Underlying such variations, of course, is the sub-continent's legacy of feudalism, patriarchy and misogyny which Indian women are still challenging at every level.

A section of relatively privileged women with advantages of class, caste, higher education and/or family/political connections, as well as ability and ambition, has been able to climb up to the top rungs of the profession. However, the majority are concentrated on the middle and lower rungs.

Respondents in the IFJ survey were asked a number of responses as to what motivated them to join the profession. Over two thirds (67.39 percent), irrespective of gender, said their reason for choosing the profession was 'love of journalism.'

The second most popular reason selected by respondents was 'make a difference/call the powerful to account,' with over half the respondents (52.90 percent) selecting this option. Other possible reasons – such as fame, glamour, power, money, family tradition and job security – were cited by very few. Interestingly, the motivations of men and women were quite similar.

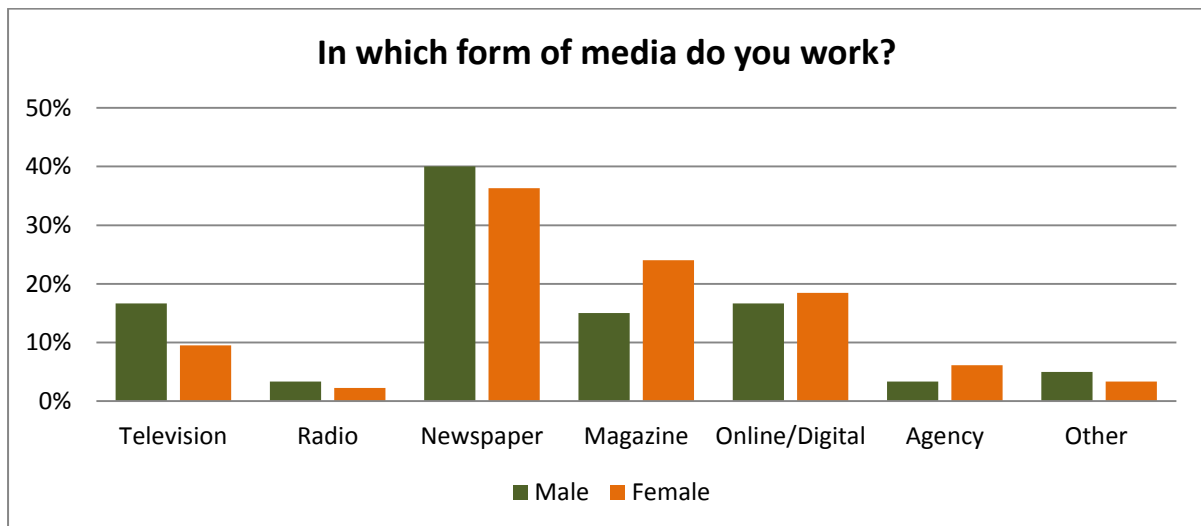


In terms of family support, the majority of respondents (57.97 percent) said their families were positive toward their choice of career, while a quarter (25.36 percent) said their families were neutral in this regard. However, a not insignificant percentage (13.77 percent) of both men and women faced family opposition to their career choice.

Journalists who participated in the survey were working in multiple forms of media, including print, television and online journalism – many, it seems, working in a combination of mediums.

Nearly two-thirds were working in newspapers (65.22 percent), well over a third in magazines (37.68 percent), nearly a third (31.16 percent) in online journalism and about a fifth (20.29 percent) in television. Since the question allowed multiple choices, these figures do not necessarily indicate where the respondents largely work. Respondents may also interpret the question as to where they have worked at different points in the course of their careers.

There was no significant gender difference in mediums, except in the case of magazines, with 42.2 percent of female respondents compared to only 26.5 percent of men. Very few of the respondents worked in radio.<sup>3</sup>



In terms of areas of work within journalism, the survey allowed respondents to select all the capacities they were employed. The largest group was ‘reporter’, representing nearly half (48.55 percent) of respondents. Surprisingly, more than half the female respondents (51 percent) were reporters compared to 44.11 percent of men.

The most significant gender difference was evident in the second most popular category of ‘feature writer’ (36.23 percent of all respondents), with 43.14 percent of the women yet only 17.6 percent of the men. Here, it would appear that the media and editors continue to believe that women are better suited to magazine journalism and feature writing – and is often identified as ‘soft’ news.

According to Chandreyee Ghosh, senior manager, editorial services, of the Kolkata-based Ananda Bazar Patrika (ABP) newspaper group:<sup>4</sup> “Women journalists have a strong presence in the features,

<sup>3</sup> The survey in India did not cover journalists in the state-owned broadcasters and All India Radio has a monopoly in radio news.

<sup>4</sup> The ABP Group is a media conglomerate with 11 publications, three TV news channels, a book publishing business as well as mobile and internet properties.





lifestyle and metro sections of our newspaper. I think they have a knack for these sections. Doing feature-based stories suits women more – makes them more comfortable. The result is that we have 70 percent women in these sections against 30 percent men.”

He said that, overall, the news sections continue to be dominated by men, with male journalists making up 70-75 percent of those covering news. “In the news sections, journalists have to work longer hours and have to run around much more,” she said. “They also have to work late hours and the external environment is not always women-friendly.”

She said ABP has a policy of dropping female staff home after 10pm, as women had a sizeable presence as sub-editors on the news desk and work late shifts up to 3.15am in the morning. This was reflected in the research with a strong proportion of women (28.43 percent) working as sub-editors compared to only 14.7 percent of the surveyed men.

The other categories of work reported by survey participants were editor (34.06 percent) and columnist/opinion writer (28.99 percent).

Far less than ten percent of the respondents reported working as producers, anchors, camera operators or photographers. The low numbers in the first three of these four categories is only to be expected considering that only a fifth of the sample came from the broadcast sector. It is also widely known that photographers in India are still predominantly male.

Interviews with managers reinforced the finding that certain categories of journalistic work are still not easily accessible to women. For example, the country’s largest news agency, the Press Trust of India (PTI), has 19 photographers on the staff – all male. A woman photographer who was hired by PTI in Delhi two decades ago was fired from the job shortly after her appointment. She is still fighting a court case for reinstatement.

Although some TV channels, like NDTV, had taken the lead in hiring women camera operators, most others have not followed suit. “There are no women working in our network as camera men (sic), sound recordists and videographers,” said Shikha Rastogi, vice president and head of the human resources department of the ITV network. “We have no taboo about women working in these areas, but this is one glass ceiling which has still to be broken. I think for women to go around lugging a camera is difficult, especially since it means working at very odd hours. Crowd control is not always in place and for women to go into very crowded areas can become a safety issue. It is the same for sound recordists.”

The vast majority of survey participants (76.81 percent) worked in the English language media while the second largest group (15.94 percent) worked in Hindi and the rest in other languages. The self-selected sample was, therefore, not very representative, considering that India has a large, vibrant media in multiple local languages, chief among them Hindi, which is spoken by 41 percent of the population.

The fact that the survey was online and in English may have been partly responsible for the skew, although most journalists working in Hindi and other Indian languages are familiar with English to some degree and are often expected to translate from English into local languages or use English sources on the Internet.



Just over half (55.80 percent) of the journalists who participated in the survey had full-time, regular employment – 61.8 percent of the men and 53.9 percent of the women.

Almost a third of the respondents (31.16 percent) were freelancers. Interestingly, over three quarters (76.74 percent) of women said they were freelance compared to less than a quarter (20.93 percent) of the men.

What is your work status?	Total	Female	Male	Other
Freelance	43	33	9	1
Full-time contract	11	9	2	0
Full-time regular	77	55	21	1
Other	2	1	1	0
Part-time contract	1	1	0	0
Part-time regular	4	3	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>2</b>

Only 8.69 percent of the sample was on contract. This is despite the fact that as most trade unions in the industry assert that contract employment of journalists has become the norm over the past couple of decades. Journalists with full-time, tenured employment are now largely considered to be in the minority. In PTI, for example, the majority of journalists – 238 out of 350 (68 percent) are on contract. Only 81 (23.14 percent) are permanent employees, while 31 are trainees.

This skew in the sample may reflect the limited outreach of unions and associations to contract employees and/or the insecurity among contract employees that makes them reluctant to take the risk of participating even in an anonymous online survey.

Respondents were asked about the size of the organisation they were employed in and results showed they were evenly spread out across various sized outlets. This included small companies employing 0-100 staff (33 percent); medium of 100-1500 staff (35 percent); and large 1500+ (31 percent). There were relatively more women (37.10% of female respondents) in the smaller organisations employing up to 100 people compared to men (25 percent). In the largest organisations employing 1500 or more, the proportion was reversed, with more men (37.5 percent of male respondents) compared to women (29.03 percent).

The journalists who responded to the survey had several years of experience behind them, with nearly two-thirds (65.94 percent) reporting that they had been in the profession for over a decade. While an overwhelming majority of the men (85.29 percent) had worked for over ten years, a smaller proportion of the women (58.82 percent) had done so.

Almost a fifth (19.57 percent) of the respondents had three to ten years' experience and close to a quarter of the women (24.50 percent) in the sample fell into this category. The rest of the respondents (14.49 percent) had been in the profession for less than three years.

Asked about their present career status, a significant number (41.30 percent) of the respondents said they were 'senior'. The next largest group (26.81 percent) of respondents said that they were



‘mid-level’. While 22.46 percent indicated that the question did not apply to them, a small section (9.42 percent) said they were ‘junior’.

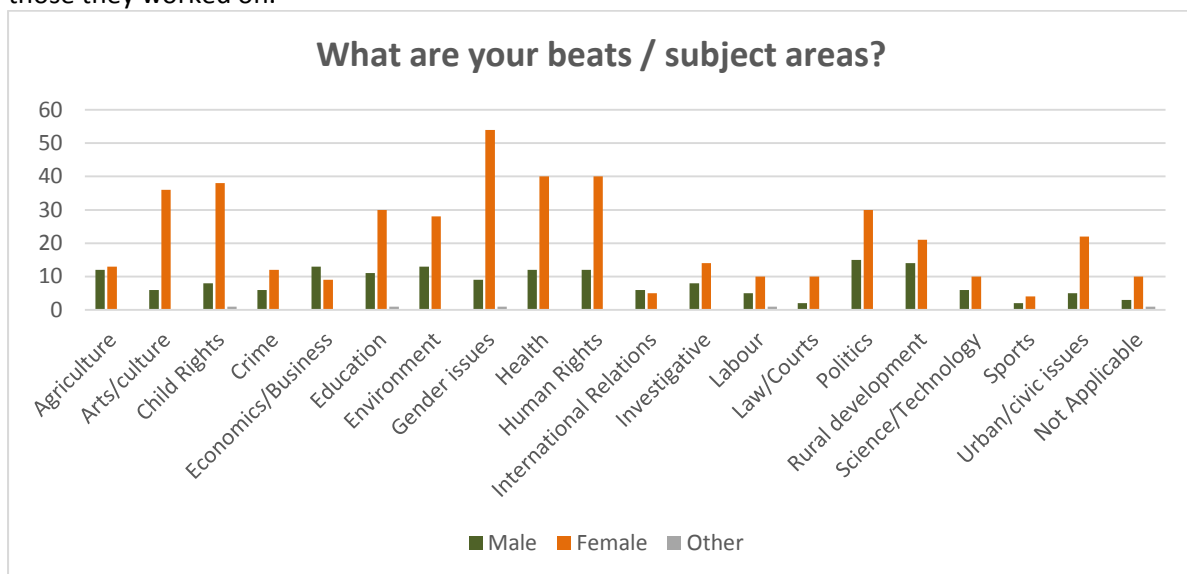
Fewer of the women had reached senior level (39.21 percent) compared to 47.06 percent of men, but this finding could be due to the fact that more women in the sample belonged to the younger age group.

In terms of employment adverse, some limited freedom is available at work when it comes to choosing areas of work and reporting beats. Nearly half (47.10 percent) of the respondents felt they could choose their own beats, while others (39.13 percent) said they could choose them ‘to some extent’. A small percentage (13.77 percent) said they had no opportunity to choose their beats. These reflected generally across genders also.

Half the journalists participating in the survey (50.72 percent) said they could determine the content of their work ‘most of the time’, while nearly a third (31.15 percent) said they could do so ‘to some extent.’ A smaller number (15.22 percent) had the luxury of ‘always’ defining their own work.

Less than a quarter (23.91 percent) of the respondents felt they were able to influence coverage of news and views in their organisation most of the time, while a much larger number (43.48 percent) said they could influence it ‘to some extent.’

A long list of beats/subjects was included in the questionnaire, with respondents free to mention all those they worked on.



Women seem to be represented in all the subject areas defined, but their numbers are mostly found (starting from the highest) in gender issues, health and human rights (equal), child rights, arts/culture, politics, urban/civic issues and rural development. They are barely represented in sports and marginally more in agriculture and international relations. Labour and crime followed at a slightly higher rate.

Men were most represented (from the highest) politics, rural development, economics/business, agriculture, health, human rights and education.



Close to half of all respondents covered gender issues (46.38 percent), around a third covered health and human rights (both selected by 37.68 percent), child rights (34.06 percent), politics (32.61 percent), arts/culture and education (both 30.43 percent). The subjects covered by the least number of respondents were sport (4.35 percent), international relations (7.97 percent) and law/courts (8.70 percent). The pattern may be at least partly due to the preponderance of women in the sample.

When asked about the percentage proportion of women working in their department, the greatest number (29.47 percent) of those who answered the question said women comprised 21-50 percent of their department. Another quarter (25.26 percent) said women comprised less than 5 percent of staff, 17.89 percent said women comprised between 5-20 percent and 16.84 percent said women comprised 51-75 percent of staff. Interestingly, 7.36 percent of respondents said women comprised 76-100 percent of staff.

Over a quarter of men and women that responded to this question (27.08 percent) rated their chances of advancement in their respective organisations as 'excellent' or 'very good.' The rest said they were 'good' or 'fair,' with a few (14.89 percent) rating them as 'poor.' There were only minor differences in the responses of men and women.

A national survey of women journalists working in the print media was conducted by the Press Institute of India for the National Commission for Women in 2003. It surveyed a total of 410 women, 190 from the regional language press and 220 from the English press.

Some of the major concerns that emerged from the study were: job insecurity (because in many places journalists were employed like daily wage labour and had to sign a muster roll at the end of the month to get a pittance as wages); the contract system of employment; neglect of maternity and childcare provisions; and sexual harassment. A clear division was visible between employment in English dailies and other Indian language dailies, with wages and working conditions being much better in the former. Similar concerns had been expressed by many among the approximately 200 women journalists from different parts of the country working in different languages who were interviewed during 1998-99 for the book, *Making News: Women in Journalism*.<sup>iii</sup>

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## Woman in the line of fire

Tongam Rina, Associate Editor of the *Arunachal Times*, was accustomed to riling up the powers-that-be with her column "*Ringside View*". She did not pull her punches while taking on the mining mafia, corrupt government officials, high-handed politicians and armed insurgent groups active in Arunachal Pradesh, a state in India's north-east.

Death threats, intimidation and pressures were a daily feature of life in this frontier state. The presence of several hundred armed insurgent groups, together with heightened lawlessness, including murderous attacks on the press, prompted the government to grant journalists licenses to hire armed bodyguards.

Rina, however, continued to write about controversial issues, including one potentially explosive environmental story on the proposed 150 dam projects. Her forthright opposition to the project angered powerful opponents in the pro-dam lobby, which tried all means to silence her – from bribes and threats to intimidation and ransacking of her office. But none succeeded and Rina continued her mission of truth-telling on this and other contentious issues. As president of the



Arunachal Pradesh Union of Working Journalists (APUWJ), she also took up issues on behalf of the union.

But on July 15, 2012, Rina, then aged 32, almost paid for her courage and determination with her life. Unidentified armed men ambushed her outside her office in the capital Itanagar and sprayed bullets into her stomach. Some of the gunshots grazed her spine and left her critically injured.

Rina's shooting became a landmark case to test the prevailing impunity of those who attack journalists. Inaction from the police was highlighted, since prompt action on their part could have prevented the murderous attack. Indeed, she had reported the threats to her person and ransacking of her office in April that year, but her complaint was not acted upon.

It later turned out that two of the men who shot her point blank were connected to the vandalising of her office three months earlier. State authorities were lax in carrying out their Constitutional mandate to protect journalists who uphold the freedom of the press in the face of great risks.

Staunch support from the media house she worked with ensured that the issue was kept alive. Protesting against the shooting of its associate editor, the *Arunachal Times*, in an unprecedented move, suspended publication on June 17, 2012. Subsequently, the paper and its website carried a daily reminder of the number of days since Rina was shot, to highlight the fact that her assailants were yet to be brought to justice. It was this sustained pressure that ensured that the case did not join the ranks of the hundreds of unsolved attacks on journalists in the North East.

The police investigation dragged on and it was only in February 2013, after the APUWJ and the Arunachal Press Club demanded a 'white paper' on the status of the inquiry, that the police increased the reward for information from Rs 200,000 (USD 3,224.77) to Rs 1 million (USD 16,123.85).

Speaking at a meeting on journalists' safety in Shillong, Meghalaya, in July 2013, the president of the Arunachal Press Club, Taba Ajum, said: "Physical security is one of the most critical issues for journalists in the North East, where we have to constantly look over our shoulders and operate in an atmosphere of threat. In fact, after Tongam Rina was shot, the state government has even issued gun licences to journalists to protect themselves."

In June 2013, the police identified the weapons used in the shooting and also charge-sheeted three of the accused. The main accused, Yumlang Achung, who wanted to harm Tongam Rina for not highlighting him and his organisation's activities in her newspaper, surrendered to the police in September 2013.

When interviewed for the IFJ research Rina, who is still recovering from her injuries after extensive treatment overseas, said: "Journalists in the north-eastern region of India are the most courageous. With few exceptions, most are there because of the love of the job, considering the fact that they are among the most low-paid media workers in the country and also work under tremendous pressure. In Arunachal, even though facilities are abysmal and working conditions are atrocious. Many young people are still choosing to join the profession, which is a good sign."

The fact that, despite low salaries, insecurity and poor working conditions, young north-easterners are continuing to be drawn to an obviously hazardous profession is due in no small part to feisty role models like Tongam Rina.



In recognition of her contribution to upholding press freedom, Rina was listed as one of '100 information heroes' honoured by Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontier-RSF) on 3 May 2014. She is the first Indian journalist to find a place on this list.

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## More women bosses but board representation remains low

Approximately two-thirds of the survey respondents answered the set of questions on women in management roles in media houses. Overall, a third of respondents (33.33 percent) said they had women represented at the executive level.

In terms of 'top level management', for example board, executives, chief financial officers (CFOs) and general managers, more than half of respondents (53.33 percent) who answered this question estimated that women comprised less than ten percent. Another 16.66 percent said women comprised 10-25 percent and 11.11 percent said the proportion of women was between 25-50 percent. Only a small minority (5.55 percent) said over half the top managers in their companies were female. Another 13.33 percent didn't know about the composition of top level management in their organisation.

The Global Media Monitoring Project 2010<sup>iv</sup> reported similar findings to the IFJ research and attributed the unexpected result to more women being directors in family-owned media companies. In this context, it is perhaps significant that while the CEOs of India's two leading newspaper groups are both women, they are also the owners of these companies, one by virtue of being the widow of the last owner, the other because she is the daughter of the last owner (who had no male heir).

At senior editorial levels, most respondents (52.80 percent) put the figure at less than ten percent, a fifth (20.22 percent) put it between 10-25 percent, and 12.35 percent put it at 25-50 percent.

A quick look at the management structures of some leading Indian media companies reflects this reality. The chairperson of Bennett, Coleman and Company Ltd, which owns the Times Group, the largest chain of newspapers, several television channels and other properties, is a woman but she plays a minimal role in the running of the conglomerate.

The company's 11-member board of directors includes two other women. Of the 12 senior managerial positions, only one is held by a woman. Among the 11 editorial heads, two are female. HT Media, which owns a large newspaper group that publishes the *Hindustan Times*, the Hindi language daily *Hindustan*, the *Live Mint* (in collaboration with the *Wall Street Journal*), is headed by a woman chairperson, Shobhana Bhartia who owns the company. But none of the other seven directors on its governing board are women. Worse, there is not a single woman in the 27-member 'leadership team' of the company, which includes its top editors.

PTI's 15-member board of directors does not include any women either. The nine-member senior management staff includes one woman, who is the chief administrative officer. ABP has one woman on its eight-member board of directors. Only two of its nine top managers are women.

But it is clear from the research that women are far more likely to be found in middle-level editorial positions. Nearly a third (30.77 percent) of survey participants who answered these questions said women held 25-50 percent middle level editorial positions such as senior editor, chief of



correspondents, feature editor, foreign editor etc. Interestingly, an equal number said women held less than ten percent of these jobs. Just over a fifth of respondents (21.98 percent) estimated that women held 10-25 percent of middle level editorial jobs.

What percentage of middle level editorial positions are held by women in your media organization?	Total	Female	Male	Other
Less than 10%	28	22	6	
10-25%	20	15	4	1
25-50%	28	18	10	
More than 50%	7	4	3	
Don't Know	8	6	2	
No Answer	47	37	9	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>2</b>

It is important to note that while media companies are increasingly employing female journalists, these women generally form a small minority in the establishment as a whole.

The gender division of labour plays out in a strangely sub-continental fashion, with middle class women being permitted entry in formal sector employment while working class women are not. For instance, women are never employed as blue-collar workers in the printing press of a newspaper establishment. Men dominate the work sphere even in white collar jobs, such as clerical and financial functions, and in the advertising and circulation departments. In television, too, some categories of work appear practically reserved for men, particularly technical work such as that of camera persons, sound recordists and videographers.

As a result, for many years the few women in the editorial sections were a visible minority and also a target for comment, speculation and sometimes harassment. This situation prevails even today in many of the state capitals and small towns, even though women journalists are now employed in far larger numbers in the metropolitan cities.

Some companies currently report that up to 20-30 percent of their staff is female. According to ITV's Rastogi: "Presently we employ around 750 full-time staffers. The breakup is 70 percent men and 30 percent women."

In the ABP group, too, according to Ghosh's estimates, the male-female ratio is 70:30. PTI's Senior Human Resource Manager, Hirok Chowdhury, says that of the total of 350 journalists employed in the news agency, 80 (22.86 percent) are female.

### **Regularly denied leave, including maternity leave**

Journalism has never been considered a well-paid profession in India. Although the situation has improved in recent years, the few editors and anchors who earn huge salaries are still the exception. The monthly professional income of survey respondents ranged from less than US\$80 to more than US\$800 with a quarter of all respondents (24.64 percent) saying they were in the highest category.

The fact that nearly ten percent (9.42 percent) said they earned less than US\$80 (Rs 4960) is a shocking indicator of the poor wages/remuneration paid to some workers. An equal percentage of



male and female respondents fell into this low-income bracket, which is below the official minimum wage even for clerical workers in India’s capital city, which is approximately USD 182 per month.

The survey revealed a substantial section of journalists (38.41 percent) earned less than US\$400 per month while the greatest proportion of respondents (24.63 percent) earned US\$401-600 a month. In the higher income bracket, 12.31 percent earned US\$601-800 a month while another large group (17.39 percent) earned between US\$80-250 a month.

What is your monthly professional income? Please use this site to convert currencies if you don't know your currency in dollars.	Total	Female	Male	Other
Less than US \$80	13	10	3	0
US \$80 - \$250	24	19	5	0
US \$251 - \$400	16	10	5	1
US \$401 - \$600	34	27	7	0
US \$601 - \$800	17	15	1	1
More than \$800	34	21	13	0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>2</b>

An equal proportion of men and women (38.24 percent) earned less than US\$400. But in the highest bracket, a divide became obvious with only 20.58 percent of all women surveyed earning over US\$800, compared to 38.23 percent of all men.

Wages in the industry vary hugely, depending on the media genre, the media company, the journalists’ skills and experience and other factors. However, it is a widely acknowledged fact that journalists are, on the whole, poorly paid knowledge workers who generally earn less than college lecturers, doctors or lawyers. Many stay in the profession because they love the work (as respondents’ answers show) and not because of the remuneration.

Freelancers face special problems with regard to payment: for example, they are generally paid for contributions two to three months late and sometimes not at all. As one journalist complained: “I did not get any remuneration for 40 percent of my freelance assignments!”

Historically, the situation of the average journalist was so difficult that in the post-independence years that journalists banded together, formed unions and lobbied for the enactment of a law to ensure better wages and working conditions, both for themselves and for other newspaper employees.

The Indian Parliament enacted The Working Journalists Act in 1955. Subsequently, the government appointed successive Wage Boards to fix pay scales for employees in different categories of newspapers and periodicals. This ensured Wage Board pay scales were enforced where unions were strong.

In the post-1991 period of economic restructuring, when the Murdoch philosophy prevailed, leading newspaper groups began to bypass the Wage Board by appointing journalists on contracts. A carrot





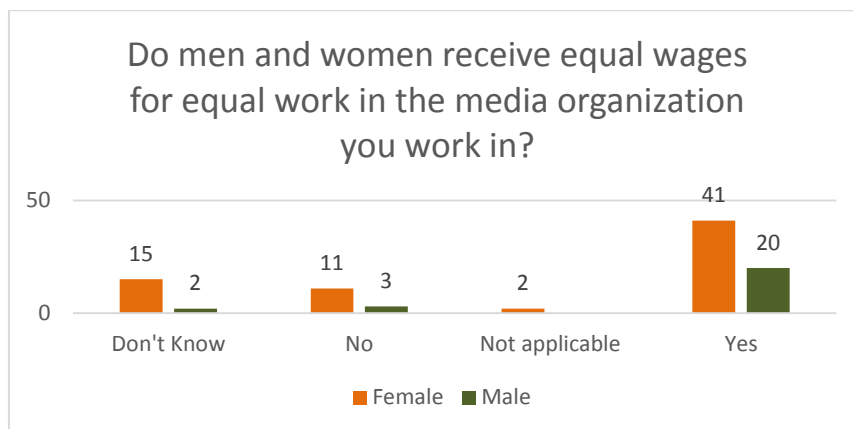
and stick policy was adopted, with many journalists being lured to sign short-term contracts for higher salaries instead of regular appointments and fixed wages.

Today, contract employees are insecure and many are afraid to join unions. Too often young journalists are hired with contracts providing wages lower than pay scales prescribed by the latest Wage Board.

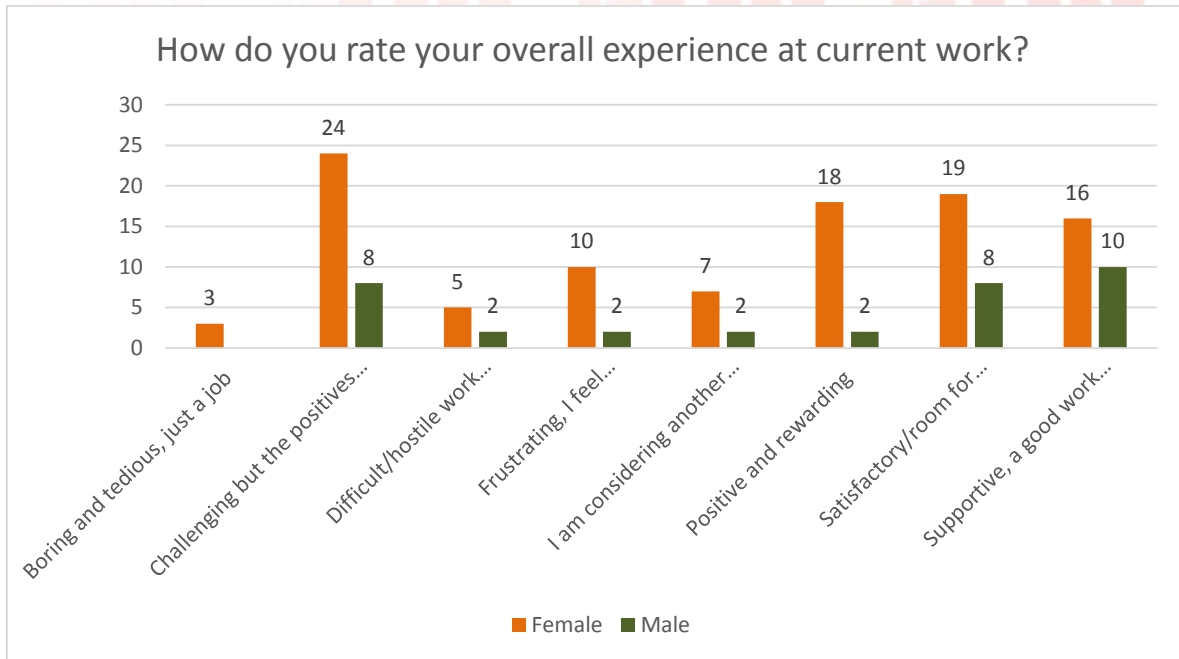
Low wages apart, the profession is an insecure one, with newspapers, magazines and television channels frequently suffering losses and shutting shop or downsizing. Sometimes due wages are not paid when a person quits work or is dismissed or retrenched. Those who go to court to get little justice in India’s slow and complicated legal process.

While the Labour Courts are in a mess, lawyers are notorious for extracting large sums from desperate workers. At least one survey respondent wrote: “I did not get full pay or full settlement after leaving the job. The court cases are going on with no gain...”

Two thirds (65.26 percent) of the respondents who ventured to comment on whether men and women get equal wages in their media organisation seemed to believe that they do. Only 14.73 percent said they didn’t.



Asked to rate their workplace experience, the largest group of respondents (23.19 percent) said it was ‘challenging but the positives outweigh the negatives,’ while 20.29 percent opted for ‘satisfactory/room for improvement.’ One third large group (18.84 percent) said it was ‘supportive, a good work atmosphere’ and a smaller number (14.49 percent) reporting it as ‘positive and rewarding.’ On the other hand, a substantial number were evidently unhappy, selecting options such as ‘difficult/hostile work atmosphere,’ ‘frustrating,’ ‘boring and tedious’ or ‘considering another profession’. Significantly, this group accounted for nearly a quarter (23.19 percent) of all respondents.



Respondents were questioned about the types of allowances and/or employee benefits they were entitled to. Over a third said they had access to annual pay increases (38.40 percent), a provident fund (39.13 percent) and travel allowance (38.40 percent), while considerably less had access to medical benefits (28.98 percent), house rent allowance (28.26 percent) and annual bonuses (23.19 percent). Only 20.28 percent reported access to health insurance and even fewer said they were provided with accident or life insurance or pension.

Many of these benefits are mandated by law but, obviously some organisations flout labour laws as quite a few respondents pointed out in their responses:

- *No Provident Fund for the four years I have been working here. It's a scam.* - Male
- *Provident Fund deducted from salary but never submitted to the government. When that came undone, 'Tax Deducted at Source' was, well, deducted from our salaries but not submitted to the tax authorities.* - Male

The Provident Fund is mandatory for most organisations, with both employee and employer expected to contribute equal amounts each month to the fund in order to create a long-term corpus that can be used after retirement. Unfortunately, some organisations do not participate in this effort to create a safety net for employees with some rogue organisations swallowing up these funds.

In some cases other facilities are not provided. One journalist reported that they were not given any travel allowance, not provided medical insurance and not given transport home at night. Below are a sample of further responses:

- *My medical insurance claim was rejected on the ground that they consider claims for only one illness once in a person's lifetime.* - Male

Another complained that wages and increments were low and promotions not easy to obtain. One person included the telling comment: "No promotion during the last ten years." Another said:

- *We are entitled to annual increments but they are not commensurate. For many years, regardless of gender, we used to get only three digit increments. I also believe that because I*



*have sought and got transfers within the organisation, I have been denied promotions and continue to be a junior by rank. - Female*

The workplace facilities that seem to be generally available are separate toilets for women and men, security in the workplace and transport after late shifts. Crèches are virtually unheard of – with only 5 respondents saying that had access to a crèche. Only 21 people had access to safety equipment.

What facilities are currently available to you in your workplace?	Separate toilets for women and men	Staff lounge / dormitory	Prayer room	Transport after late shifts	Childcare facilities	Security at your workplace	Safety equipment
Male	23	8	1	14	2	20	11
Female	56	8	1	27	3	47	10
Total	79	16	2	41	5	67	21

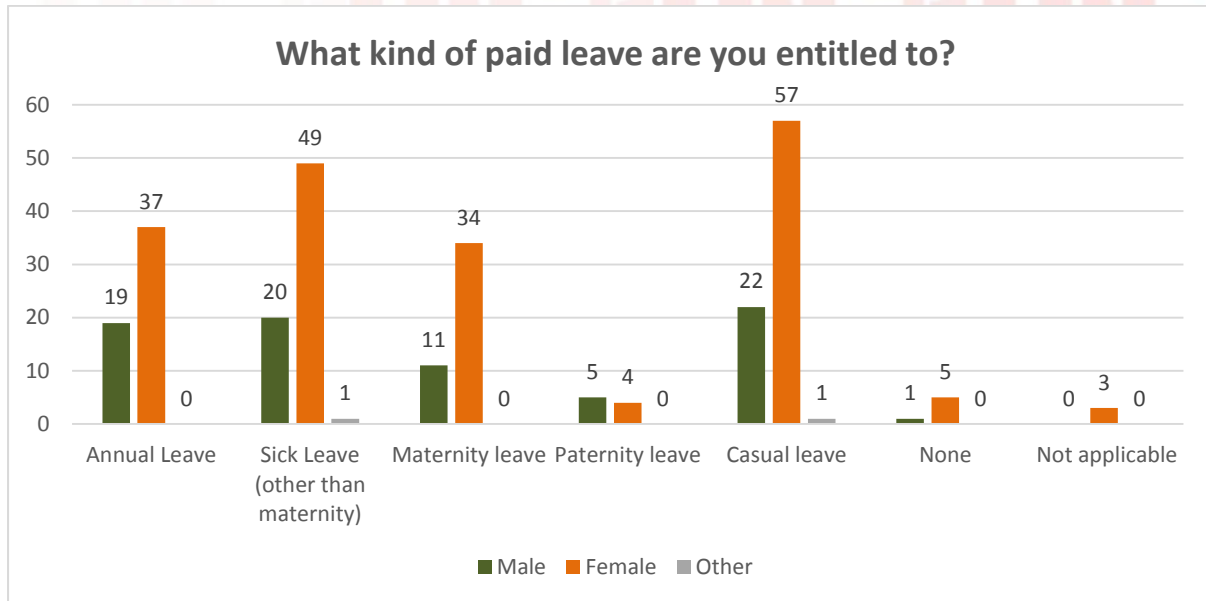
The practice of providing night transport to women (and even men) – especially after the last shift – has been in existence (at least in large media houses) since at least the late 1990s. In the past, a major reason for not employing women journalists was the requirement of late evening assignments and work on the night shift.

Today, with many news desks dominated by women for whom working at night is normal, companies usually provide transport, though some companies still avoid assigning women to the late night shift.

According to Rahul Shivshankar, editor-in-chief of English news TV channel NewsX: “Women employees do not work in the night shift between 10pm to 8am in the morning. But if there is a breaking story and they have to work late hours, they are all provided with a drop-off facility. The company has, at considerable expense, purchased its own fleet of cars and hired full-time drivers who drop each employee to her home after 9pm. Since we work out of Noida (on the outskirts of Delhi), we have to be doubly cautious.”

ABP’s Ghosh highlighted the additional precautions taken by the company: “The last person to be dropped home by the office cab is never a woman. It is always a man. If we need to re-route the taxi to ensure this, it is done.”

Both regular employees and those on contract seem to be entitled to various kinds of paid leave. More than half the respondents (57.97 percent) were entitled to casual leave and (50.72 percent) were entitled to sick leave. Less than half (40.57 percent) were entitled to annual leave.



In a shocking revelation, less than a third (32.60 percent) said they were entitled to maternity leave – this also represented just over half of regular employees (55.55 percent). Significantly, a few respondents (4.3 percent) said they got no paid leave at all and only 6.5 percent had access to paternity leave. Nearly a fifth (18.11 percent) of all respondents said they had been denied leave that they were entitled to.

For those employed in media organisations was a question on their views regarding leave and re-entry into the workplace after childbirth. A small minority (7.97 percent) described the situation as ‘excellent,’ while a fifth of the respondents (20.29 percent) termed it ‘good’. A smaller number (16.67 percent) said it was ‘acceptable.’ At the same time, a few (5.80 percent) said the chances of re-entry were ‘poor’ or ‘non-existent’ (7.25 percent).

Many women themselves find it hard to juggle careers and childcare. At a workshop on gender harassment organised by the Delhi Union of Journalists (DUJ), a participant described the agony of having to leave a breastfeeding baby to travel out of town on an assignment. The experience is familiar to many in the profession and the difficulties of combining marriage and parenthood with work push some to drop out of the profession.

According to some respondents, there are employers who deny medical leave or refuse to pay for it:

- *Had health issues, yet boss was unwilling to give me leave because of staff crunch. Had to leave job.*
- *I suffered an illness but was not given compensatory off.*
- *Right now I need to be on leave due to some lower back pain but have been asked to join duty. Many workplaces are under-staffed to save on personnel costs. When work pressures are high people tend to be denied leave or they offer to pitch in and work extra hours and days.*

Respondents’ comments on leave and the reasons for denial were also revealing:

- *I have been working here for more than four years. I have accumulated 130 days of leave, none of which, I've been told, can be encashed.*
- *If there is no work you can take leave, otherwise no leave.*



- *On account of the crisis, the management prefers to keep a tight hold on leave.*
- *Excessive work load for the team.*
- *Leave in lieu of Sundays worked have often been disregarded.*

Another person put the blame on an individual rather than the system by simply stating, “Arrogant editor.”

Arbitrary denial of leave was also common, forcing women to choose between pursuing a career and honouring family commitments. A woman journalist narrated how her leave to attend the wedding of a close family member was suddenly cancelled on threat of dismissal. Work in television news is particularly demanding, as this journalist’s experience illustrates:

- *When I worked for a leading television news agency as their chief of bureau I was often denied paid leave on the excuse that it was a busy time, there was no substitute, etc. Often, the number of days of leave was also reduced: if I asked for 15 days off, only ten would be sanctioned. Even weekly days off were not respected. It was a 24x7x365 days on-call job. I was on call when on leave and it was mandatory to keep the mobile phone on around the clock. Even on weekly days off, receiving 10-15 work calls was the norm.*

The arbitrary attitude of some management was summed up in yet another comment:

- *In an earlier organisation I worked in, I was threatened with dismissal after I protested against not being granted annual leave.*

In such work environments, seeking leave for further education or training is generally an unheard of luxury. One journalist had been refused study leave, another had been granted some unpaid study leave but eventually had to quit work to continue her education.

Less than a third of the respondents to this question (30.43 percent) said their workplaces offered opportunities for training/professional development. A larger number (33.33 percent) said such opportunities were not available to them. The remaining (5.07 percent) said the question was not applicable to them.

Nevertheless, well over half the survey participants (61.59 percent) said they had participated in or been offered training through work or other avenues, while a substantial number (38.41 percent) had not had such opportunities to improve their skills.

The latter were extremely vocal about the reasons for being denied opportunities for training and professional development, suggesting that media managements in India do not believe in offering training, whether it is on-the-job or mid-career. One respondent suggested that opportunities are even fewer in Indian language media. Another said no such initiatives were encouraged at the institutional level and even those who were keen to go for training on their personal initiative were often dissuaded from doing so.

One respondent pointed out that the company does not invest in people for two reasons: “The cost of such investment and the apprehension that it would be wasted if employees left their jobs and joined competitors.”

Employees are sometimes discouraged from taking advantage of training programs offered by external agencies though one respondent said that she was not given leave to attend a three-day training workshop in another city to which she had been invited by an NGO.



Less than a third (31.88 percent), of the respondents said training or professional development had been provided by an employer. A smaller number (14.50 percent) identified NGOs as likely providers of such opportunities. The local trade union and the IFJ were cited by far fewer respondents: 7.25 percent and 5.07 percent respectively.

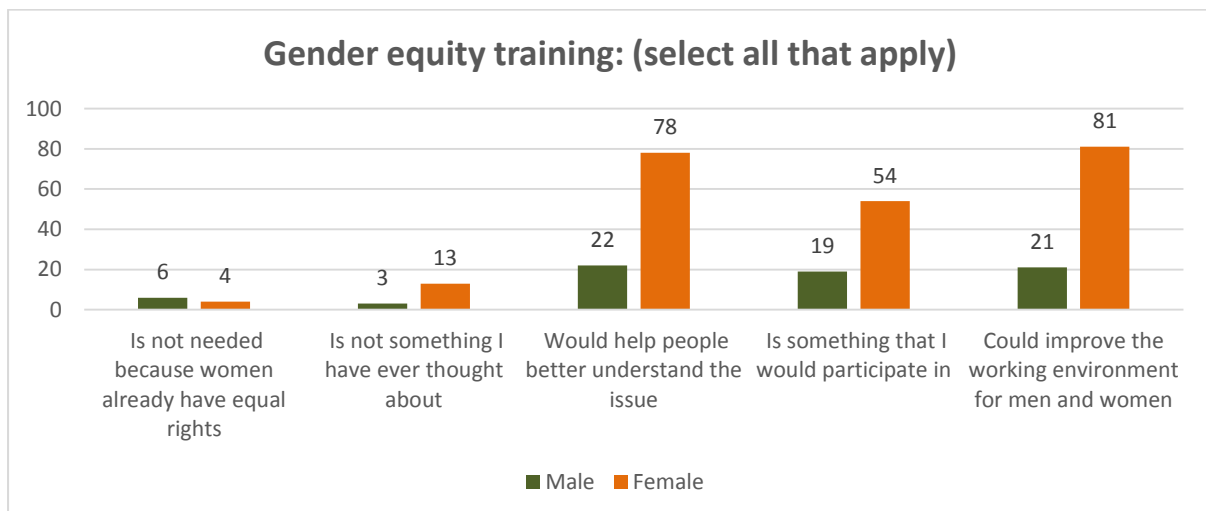
Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of survey participants (90.58 percent) had never received any form of safety training. The few who did were trained by an employer, NGO, union or the IFJ.

Despite the growing recognition across the world that reporters require safety training because of the risks they may encounter in the field, India’s media does not seem to place this as a propriety whether in places recognised as conflict areas or while reporting on controversial issues that involve mafias of various kinds or threaten to expose corrupt political leaders. There is no doubt that journalists in conflict areas are particularly vulnerable. Among them are the few intrepid women who write and report from such areas.

When asked to select their views on ‘gender equity training’, most respondents welcomed the idea with over three quarters (75.36 percent) saying it ‘could improve the working environment for both men and women’. Another (73.19 percent) said it ‘would help people better understand the issue’.

More women (79.41 percent) felt gender equity training ‘could improve the working environment for men and women. Men felt most strongly (64.70 percent) that gender equity training ‘would help people better understand the issue’.

More than half the respondents (52.90 percent) said it ‘is something I would participate in’ – a response almost equally divided between the men and women. Another 11.59 percent of all respondents confessed it ‘is not something I have ever thought about’ – interestingly more women (12.74 percent) said this than men (8.82 percent).



A small number of respondents (7.25 percent) evidently believe it is not necessary ‘because women already have equal rights.’



## Time to rethink the approach to women in unions

The overwhelming minority of survey participants from media organisations (16.53 percent) were a member of a workers union. Of the 121 respondents who answered this question, a large number of respondents (30.58 percent) said they were not union members and an even larger number (31.40 percent) said no union existed.

Managements today discourage union formation and few employees are willing to risk their jobs by leading or joining a struggle to form a union. The political climate is adverse, with successive governments becoming increasingly anti-labour.

Quite often the media workers themselves assiduously promote the free market economy and black out or downplay labour issues and people's struggles. Some journalists collude in this process while others lack the influence and authority to change these views and priorities.

However, just over half the respondents (51.45 percent) were members of a national union or a media/journalism association outside the organisations they worked for. An almost equal number (48.55 percent), including freelance journalists, were not members of any such body.

More men (28 percent) were members of workers unions than women (12.63 percent) and more men (55.44 percent) were members of national unions or media associations than women (49.01 percent).

At a leadership level, more women in the survey group (16.9 percent) were officials and office bearers in a national union or association than men (4.23 percent).

But having said that, more than half of all respondents (52.90 percent) did not think women are adequately represented/visible in unions. Another large chunk (36.23 percent) said they did not know, only a few (8.70 percent) said their representation and visibility was enough.

Union leaders agree that more women need to be active in their organisations. However, at the 'plant union' level the core support for unions comes from blue collar employees rather than white collar journalists. Many of the latter are indifferent, if not hostile, to trade unions. Blue collar employees are overwhelmingly male and shopfloor level unionising usually involves fraternising and drinking with the boys, activities which many of the latter themselves would see as culturally unacceptable for women.

The overwhelming majority (65.22 percent) of survey participants supported quotas for women in unions or proportional representation in leadership, while the rest either opposed it (21.01 percent) or did not have an opinion on this (13.77 percent).

Asked for their views on how unions or journalists' organisations could promote gender equity, more women (26.47 percent) thought unions 'could improve their work on gender equity'. Another strong proportion (20.58 percent) thought unions 'should adopt a national gender equity policy'.

More men (23.53 percent) thought unions 'should work with media employers on joint strategies on gender equity'. Overall, more men and women (28.26 percent) also agreed with this approach, but also called on unions to do more. A fifth of respondents agreed unions 'should adopt a national gender equity policy'.



The Federation of Press Trust of India Employees' Unions, one of the strongest unions in the media industry, has an all-India membership of 900 (out of the total staff of 1153). According to M.S. Yadav, who heads the organisation, only 150 of the members are female. The Federation has an elected national council of 44 members, of whom only two are women.

Yadav says there had been as many as ten women on the national council in the past and regrets the falling numbers. He attributes the decline in women's representation to the general lack of interest in trade unionism among younger people, especially the young women who have been entering the organisation in larger numbers over the past decade.

While women had been more active in the union earlier, he says, the new generation is ambitious and seem to feel that they have more to gain by siding with the management against the union. The contract system of employment makes it easy for managers to give arbitrary salary hikes to favoured employees, while those on Wage Board pay scales get fixed increments. He points out that several women in his organisation have got themselves substantial pay increases by currying favour with the management. He also complains that the system of hiring contract employees rather than permanent workers has weakened the union.

The PTI Federation encourages contract workers to join the union and currently 180 of them are union members. However, contract workers depend on management for both contract renewal and pay raises, which tend to be based on arbitrary decisions.

"The regular, permanent workers are paid according to Wage Board pay scales and their increments are fixed accordingly but a manager can authorise three times the normal increase to a favoured contract worker. Some journalists figure out that they can earn much more by siding with management against the union," says Yadav.

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## **DUJ leads on women in decision-making roles**

In the past two decades, more and more women have entered journalism in India. While this is not reflected in unionisation in most states in the country, in the case of the Delhi Union of Journalists (DUJ), born on May 1, 1949, a somewhat different picture emerges.

Over the years, a conscious effort has been made to change the representation of women journalists in both the executive committee and office bearers of the DUJ and also the DUJ National Council. Its latest list of office bearers includes a female president, Sujata Madhok.

But Madhok is not a first for the DUJ. In the late 1970s, the DUJ elected a female general secretary, Madhumita Majumdar of the Indian Express, and it was under her leadership that the DUJ organised its first national media convention. The DUJ has subsequently had a woman vice-president, elected from the Urdu and other Indian languages category.

When the journalists' movement was united in Delhi in the 1950s, the first treasurer elected to any journalist body was Kamala Mankekar and in subsequent years the DUJ had one of its best treasurers, now a senior manager in the PTI, Padma Alva, who made the organization virtually self-reliant.





“While the DUJ president this time is a woman, women constitute a good chunk of the executive committee as well,” said general secretary SK Pande. “Moreover, half of those elected from Delhi for the IJU National Council are women. Significantly, with this the DUJ has become the first mediapersons’ organisation in South Asia to elect 50 per cent of women to a national level organisation.”

Incidentally the new President has been associated with the DUJ in various capacities and is now the chair of the Gender Equity Council which is co-chaired by another woman, Anjali Deshpande, as well as the male general secretary, SK Pande. Among the secretaries elected for the second time to one of the three secretarial posts is a woman, TK Rajalakshmi.

In the 11-member national council, 5 elected are women. Six members elected to the executive committee are women.

As more women entered journalism from the 1980s onwards, partly inspired by the women’s movement that emerged in India in those years, the DUJ first formed a women’s sub-committee which was eventually replaced by a gender equity council comprising an equal number of men and women in 2010. Since then, the DUJ has raised questions about women’s issues in the media, including depiction and representation. The consciousness in the organisation emerged from dealing with conditions of service, some sexual harassment cases and cases of denial of maternity leave, with the organisation even managing to enforce it in a few cases in the 1980s.

Since 2007, the DUJ has celebrated International Women’s Day each year to raise key issues pertaining to women in the media. Occasionally seminars have been held on gender issues in media. However, the union believes the degree of unionization of women in the profession as a whole needs to be increased.

The DUJ itself has still a long way to go. Contractualisation has taken a heavy toll on its membership. Clubs and forums for women are becoming more popular among newcomers as they provide an escape from the humdrum of 24x7 journalism.

“There is a pitfall, a tendency to sometimes make it a men vs women issue, while many problems that confront the newspaper industry have to be fought hand in hand,” said SK Pande. “For instance, the system of exploitative contracts is a problem that confronts both male and female journalists. It is an all India trade union issue to be fought both at the national and state level. It has to be linked with the general struggle against the contract system of employment which, as even the Press Council has opined, constitutes a danger to the freedom of the press. Questions such as ‘Whose freedom, whose media?’ need to be asked in the present globalised, internationalized, Murdochised information order, just as much as questions about women’s role and status within this Murdochised media.”

It’s true that some women journalists have chosen to join networks such as the Network of Women in Media, which draws its membership from all over India, has an informative website and chapters in several places. In Delhi, women journalists set up the Indian Women’s Press Corps two decades ago as a club and recreation space which also facilitates the work of reporters by holding regular press conferences. Many women consider it more rewarding and also safer to be active in such spaces rather in trade unions where their jobs may be at risk.



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## A club of their own

A small bungalow in the heart of New Delhi houses a rather special place. It is the Indian Women's Press Corps (IWPC). The IWPC was set up in October 1994 by a group of leading women journalists who had the political clout to get a government-owned bungalow allotted for the purpose of establishing a separate club for women working in media.

The 20 founding members felt that while the male-dominated Press Club (just a mere stone's throw away) had its uses, most women journalists would welcome a space of their own. There they could determine the atmosphere and activities, build contacts and network.

With the objective of professional growth and empowerment, the IWPC held regular interactions with leaders from all spheres of life. Since the club is based in India's capital, over the years it has hosted presidents, prime ministers and speakers of parliament. There have also been political leaders from both India and other countries, Nobel laureates, chief election commissioners and a long line of distinguished men and women. In recent years, the IWPC's office bearers have been actively organising regular press meets with politicians, bureaucrats and celebrities, enabling members to access and cultivate the powerful - otherwise not be so easily available to individual journalists.

A registered non-profit society, the IWPC holds annual elections for its managing committee. A small team of full-time staff maintain the premises and the managing committee organises an annual fund-raising cultural event. The proceeds help to pay salaries, rent and other bills. Funds are also raised by hiring out a small hall for press conferences and other activities.

With a dining hall, a reading room, a room for press conferences and other facilities, the IWPC makes life a little less stressful for journalists chasing deadlines all day. Women drop in for a bite, for a short wait between assignments and events they have to cover, to refresh before stepping before the cameras.

A giant TV screen on the dining room wall provides updates of news all day, ensuring that journalists can keep up with events and developments even as they eat, drink and socialise. 'Sources' are often invited for a bite and a bit of information. Two or three computers with internet connections are available for those researching and filing stories. The facility is particularly useful for freelancers who generally do not have offices in the centre of the city to file stories.

Members keep an eye on the kitchen and at various time they even step in to teach the cooks their own favourite recipes.

Although the IWPC is essentially an apolitical organisation, press statements are occasionally issued on matters concerning the media. Membership is currently around 600, with the organisation keeping in touch with members through a website and e-mail. Although IWPC membership was open to women journalists across India, over the years, its membership base has become restricted to the national capital region.

Of course, some women journalists still oppose the notion of a separate women's club. Unlike the Press Club, which is largely a watering hole, the IWPC never acquired a bar license. Some women still prefer the Press Club for the wider networking options that it offers and some are even contemptuous of what they perceive as a cloistered women-only 'zenana' at IWPC.



With many of the founders retired or no longer participating in the club's activities, there has been a move to enrol more women from the growing Indian language press and the mushrooming TV channels. The ambience now reflects some of these changes. But, change or not, for many journalists the IWPC serves as a second home.

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## **Sexual harassment: A big story ignored within media**

Some recent cases of sexual harassment in the industry have broken the silence around the issue. Women are finally beginning to talk about it openly.

The survey questionnaire defined sexual harassment broadly to include not only physical advances and contact but also sexual demands, sexually coloured remarks, display of pornography, etc.

Although more than half (55.80 percent) of survey participants said they had not witnessed sexual harassment at the workplace, it is significant that a substantial number (44.20 percent) had.

Female respondents and those identifying themselves as 'other' were asked if they had personally experienced sexual harassment. While nearly half of them (49 percent) said they had not, as many as eighteen persons (17.31 percent) said that they had. A substantial proportion (33.65 percent) said they had experienced workplace harassment but it was not sexual in nature.

In most cases, the perpetrator was a superior at work (66.66 percent) or a colleague (55.55 percent).

The majority of those who had experienced sexual harassment had confided to friends or colleagues/superiors. Only 5.5 percent complained to a gender or sexual harassment committee and 11.11 percent to their unions. The three respondents (16.66 percent) who had kept quiet gave various reasons for their silence, including shame/embarrassment or anxiety about the impact on their job or other negative repercussions. Two of the three said they had dealt with it themselves.

The Indian media has extensively covered issues of violence against women, including sexual harassment. So managements cannot but be well aware that the law relating to sexual harassment in the workplace puts the onus on employers to prevent or punish such behaviour and, in this context, requires them to put complaints committees in place.

Although the survey question about the existence of complaints committees in media workplaces applied only to the 95 respondents who are employed in media organisations, 116 survey participants answered it. While 43.97 percent said their office had a sexual harassment policy/official complaints cell, an almost equal number (41.38 percent) said theirs did not. Some respondents (14.66 percent) did not know if such a policy or mechanism existed, while the rest said the question did not apply to them.

Respondents were asked to give their views on a variety of measures that could effectively combat sexual harassment.

In order of priority, women chose 'awareness-raising with men', 'effective complaints mechanism' and 'awareness-raising with women'. Lower in priority was 'stronger laws' and 'punitive measures'.



Men on the other hand chose 'awareness-raising with women' is first priority, then 'awareness-raising with men' and 'effective complaints mechanism'.

Only a few cases of sexual harassment in media workplaces have come out into the open over the years. Most women do not speak up against or complain about such behaviour.

The arrest in December 2013 of Tarun Tejpal, the high profile editor of the magazine *Tehelka*, following a complaint of rape made to the publication's managing editor by a woman reporter the previous month, shocked the country and brought the issue of sexual harassment in the media into the spotlight.

Another case came to light when in 2014 a young anchor of the television channel, India TV, swallowed poison in a suicide bid at the office, allegedly because she was harassed and pressurised by her bosses to go out with some influential men and fired when she refused. After some initial reports all TV channels kept silent on the matter -- such blackouts are common in the news media where employer solidarity is very strong.

In yet another 2014 case, the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Sun TV was arrested after a woman journalist working in a Malayalam channel run by the group filed a sexual harassment complaint against him. She filed the case five months after resigning from her job, when the COO withheld all her dues. Two other senior officials were also charged in the case. The COO was booked under various sections of the Indian Penal Code and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. This is the second high profile case of alleged sexual harassment in the group. A Sun TV news editor was arrested earlier in 2014 on a similar complaint lodged by an anchor of the Tamil channel.

At a DUJ workshop on Gender and Media held in September 2014, supported by the IFJ, several women spoke openly about the sexual harassment they had faced and the ways in which they had dealt with it, ranging from protest resignations to simply laughing off the advances. However, media companies tend to deny the existence of sexist bias or harassment and HR managers generally claim that if they receive complaints of that nature they talk to the individuals concerned and sort out the matter 'amicably.'

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## A women's network in progress

- *A young journalist shares the experience of persuading an international media outlet to hold back her significant story, based on an exclusive, potentially explosive interview, until she had helped the vulnerable interviewee secure police protection.*
- *Another young journalist shares links to her several features on different aspects of the flood crisis in Assam (north-eastern India) which had otherwise received inadequate media attention.*
- *An older journalist thanks a senior colleague for having shared information that enabled her to attend the media session of an international conference on water and sustainable development saying, "This is another example of the strength, cooperation and good will our network encourages among members."*



All three posts were greeted with appreciative comments from journalists located in different parts of the country, working in a range of media in various languages: a typical week on the e-group of the Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI).

The NWMI is a 12-year-old association that provides a forum for women in media professions to share information and resources, exchange ideas, uphold media standards and ethics, and promote gender equality within the media as well as society.

The informal collective emerged through a long, slow, participatory, bottom-up process of network building that built upon earlier initiatives by media women in different parts of India.

In the first phase (2000-2002), three regional workshops sought to determine whether or not women journalists across the country really wished to come together and, if so, for what purpose and towards what end. The subsequent first national workshop brought over 100 media women from 16 states and the national capital together to discuss a variety of issues relating to the media, as well as to decide on the character and form of the proposed network. The NWMI was collectively conceptualised, unanimously endorsed and formally launched on 30 January 2002.

Launched in 2003, the NWMI website ([www.nwmindia.org](http://www.nwmindia.org)) has slowly evolved into an interesting, useful and effective platform that seeks to promote both professional and personal enrichment. A national e-group was set up after the annual meeting in Hyderabad in 2005 and has become an active forum for discussions on the media, gender and much else. The NWMI also has a Facebook page and a Twitter handle.

Local networks that have emerged in a number of cities have established a pattern of periodic meetings and occasional special events such as film screenings, seminars, exhibitions and music performances. It was understood from the beginning that local networks would be autonomous and free to evolve their own identities, structures and modes of functioning, as well as their own priorities and programs.

Many local groups have their own e-groups. Through their informal association with the national network, members of local groups have the benefit of being loosely connected to a larger community of colleagues across the country, gaining strength, confidence and, occasionally, actual benefits from each others' knowledge and experiences.

The NWMI has established a pattern of more or less annual national gatherings in different parts of the country (venues so far have been Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Pune, Imphal, Kozhikode and Ahmedabad). Each meeting is planned and organised by volunteer members of local networks, who somehow make the time and summon up the energy and enthusiasm to do so in the midst of their own professional work and other preoccupations.

Participants pay for their own travel to the meeting venue and also contribute registration fees towards expenses (which are kept to a minimum by using relatively inexpensive facilities for both the meeting and accommodation). Many also volunteer to pay extra fees to facilitate the participation of women working in grassroots community media who require such assistance. Local networks often make financial contributions towards the expenses of these meetings – sometimes from their own meagre resources, at other times through voluntary contributions from individual members – as a token of support and solidarity.

One way in which the NWMI intervenes publicly in affairs relating to the media in general, and the media and women in particular, is through the statements issued from time to time on various



matters of concern, ranging from questionable media coverage of particular events and issues to instances of professional and sexual harassment in media workplaces, and questions of safety on the job. The network has also made submissions on certain important media matters to the Press Council of India, a self-regulatory body meant to preserve and protect journalistic ethics and standards in the print media.

Members of the network have been involved in practical efforts to improve media coverage of issues such as sexual violence and to encourage the incorporation of a gender perspective into coverage of all events and issues. Such efforts range from workshops in media houses to a blog examining media coverage of elections from the gender point of view and a book on how to practice journalism as if gender mattered.

The NWMI is still very much a work in progress. Since it is a collective endeavour – informal, decentralised and non-hierarchical, with no office-bearers or funds – its evolution and potential impact depends on the participation and contribution of everyone involved.

Ultimately, the network strives to fulfil a wide variety of concerns, needs and interests – both personal and professional – as it evolves into an organisation that serves the interests of its members, at one level, and promotes ethics, responsibility and social consciousness within the media, at another.

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## Gender equity policies needed

According to *The Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media*, in 2011 women occupied one-fifth (21 percent) of the governance positions in Indian news companies, some of them by virtue of the fact that their families owned the enterprise.<sup>v</sup>

While women held only 13.8 percent of positions at top management level, they were somewhat better represented in senior management (23.3 percent) and middle management (18.3 percent). Approximately a quarter of the positions at the junior and senior professional levels were occupied by women: 25.5 percent and 28.4 percent respectively. However, they held only 7 percent of the jobs in the technical production category and even fewer (4.7 percent) of those in production and design. In sales, finance and administration women held only 11.4 percent of the positions. Only 29 percent of the 17 news companies reported about in the survey said women who take maternity leave were likely to get their jobs back when they returned to work.

So how can India's media begin to think about addressing gender equity given the realities revealed in the IFJ research and other major studies?

When asked about gender policies, close to half the respondents (43.16 percent) said their organisation did not have a gender policy. Over a quarter (28.42 percent) said they did.

So would a gender policy contribute to gender equity? Two thirds (67.37 percent) of the India respondents in the IFJ research thought so. Just over a quarter (27.37 percent) had no fixed view, and a small number 5.26 percent said no, evidently unconvinced it would help.

Looking to ways of improving gender equity at work, respondents were given a range of strategies and provisions to choose from. They could choose as many or as little as they liked.



What strategies or provisions do you think would improve gender equality in your media or workplace?	Female	Male	Other	Total
ILO maternity/paternity leave conventions	10	6	0	16
Dignity at work policy	38	16	1	55
Pay audits	15	4	0	19
Health and safety audits	11	5	0	16
Flexible work options	21	7	0	28
Sexual harassment policy	16	11	0	27
Equal opportunity or gender equity policy	38	13	2	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>214</b>

The largest number of respondents by a strong margin (25.70 percent of all responses) opted for ‘dignity at work policy’ and/or ‘an equal opportunity or gender equity policy’ (24.76 percent). This was followed by ‘flexible work options’, ‘sexual harassment policy’ and ‘pay audits’.

The top two responses were also reflected among men and women. Those defined as ‘other’ in the survey chose ‘equal opportunity or gender equity policy’ and ‘dignity at work policy’.

Women were least in favour of ILO/paternity leave conventions, health and safety audits and pay audits. Men were least in favour of pay audits, health and safety audits and flexible work options.

‘ILO maternity/paternity leave conventions’ and ‘Health and safety audits.’ Next came ‘pay audits’ followed by a ‘sexual harassment policy,’ ‘flexible work options,’ an ‘equal opportunity or gender equity policy’ and a ‘dignity at work policy’ (in that order).

Among the strategies that would make a difference to gender equity issues, respondents were again given an opportunity to select answers in order of preference.

The top answer across all genders was ‘having more gender sensitive men in the media at every level’ and ‘affirmative employment strategies’ (both 23.07 percent). This was followed by ‘having more women in decision-making roles’ (20.32 percent).

More women felt ‘affirmative employment strategies’ and ‘more women in decision-making roles’ was the way to go. This compared with men who chose ‘more women in the media at every level’ and ‘more gender sensitive men in the media at every level’.

### **An abysmal picture for women in media stories**

Although the focus of this survey was on working conditions in the media, journalists who participated in it were also asked a few questions about the gender quotient in news coverage.

Survey respondents were asked to give their opinion on depictions of women in news content – and to select their top four answers.



The most commonly agreed depiction by both men and women was overwhelmingly that of women as ‘victims’ (21.73 percent). This was followed by ‘sexual objects’ (17.21 percent), ‘negatively stereotyped’ (11.77 percent) and ‘family figures’ (13.94 percent).

Overall, it presents a pretty grim picture. The lowest proportion, just 2.17 percent, thought women were depicted as ‘equal citizens’.

Smaller numbers felt they appeared as ‘survivors’ (10.68 percent). While less than ten percent of the respondents said they were portrayed as ‘weak and timid’ (8.33 percent), few chose any of the positive options, with only 6.34 percent saying they were shown as ‘experts/leaders’ and even fewer saying they figure as ‘heroes’ (3.08 percent).

So how can the media change this story? Among the measures respondents chose were ‘enforcement of guidelines on gender equity’ (28.72 percent), ‘more gender sensitive male journalists and editors’ (26.50 percent), ‘more women in decision-making roles’ (24.30 percent), and ‘more women journalists and editors’ (20.44 percent).

Interestingly, more men (36.95 percent) thought the answer lay in ‘more women journalists and editors’. Women alternatively, were more agreed that ‘more women in decision-making roles’ (27.27 percent) was the way.

It is evident that gender stereotypes prevail in media content despite the rising numbers of women in the profession and the frequent debates on these issues.

Several interesting alternative models of media work have been experimented with in India, especially at the grassroots level. There is, for instance, the rural women’s newspaper, *Khabar Lahariya*, now published in six dialects prevalent in northern India, through which 40 rural women were trained and now function as intrepid journalists.

Another example is the community radio run by rural Dalit women under the auspices of the Deccan Development Society in the southern state of Andhra Pradesh. Such publications and radio stations, many of them run by women, flourish in many languages in different parts of the country.

Women’s Feature Service is a different but related initiative, aiming to highlight issues related to gender and development and bring ordinary women’s experiences, concerns and views into the mainstream media.

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### **Foregrounding women’s perspectives**

The Women’s Feature Service (WFS) is a unique enterprise dedicated to reporting and writing on development-related issues from a women’s perspective.

It commissions, produces and sells features and opinion articles to the mainstream press, largely in India. WFS focuses on many of the development concerns that the commercial media in search of sensational news tend to ignore and downplay, such as maternal mortality or rural healthcare.





By offering attractive writing and well-packaged stories, backed by solid analysis, WFS tries to find or create space in the media for such neglected areas and problems.

The stories are written by a network of freelancers. While many of them are based on information sourced from a variety of organisations, including NGOs and women's groups, they are written by competent journalists who try to provide an objective assessment of the subject.

WFS markets its stories and photographs by flagging them on its website and by directly contacting media clients. The WFS website also posts some NGO news.

What started out in 1978 as a UNESCO-sponsored project of the Inter Press Service (IPS) was conceived as a news agency for the Third World. The thought was that if IPS focussed on events and issues concerning developing countries, WFS was meant to provide women from the 'Third World' a voice within that space.

It began with a handful of small regional offices in strategic countries in Asia, Africa, North America and Latin America, from where coordinators commissioned and edited features written by freelance women journalists. The articles were sent to the central office for final edits and distribution. Spanish language features originating in Latin America and French features produced in Francophone Africa were translated into English.

In 1991, WFS decided to go independent, snipping off the umbilical cord connecting it to IPS in order to strike out on its own, with support from organisations such as UNIFEM (the predecessor of UN Women).

The service relocated from the IPS headquarters in Rome to New Delhi, where it is registered as a non-profit society. Once split from the IPS wire service, it had to create its own marketing network for selling features to newspapers and magazines. Technological developments came to its aid, enabling it to switch to new options for communication such as fax and the Internet.

In India the all-woman WFS team was at that time a rarity in the media. It managed to create a small market, mainly among Indian language newspapers based and circulated in different parts of the country. Similarly, WFS offices in other countries built up local markets and raised local resources for some of the activities they conducted.

International WFS teams covered a series of United Nations conferences, particularly in the run-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, producing daily tabloid-size newspapers that covered conference news and enabled delegates to keep track of simultaneous events in different spaces. WFS also branched out into video and radio production.

Its strength has been its ability to produce unique stories from developing countries, told from a women's perspective. This is evident in the choice of subjects that reflect the concerns of ordinary people, the gender-sensitive approach, the focus on women as actors, the deliberate attempt to quote female sources, the spotlight on women's and people's movements wherever they exist, and the attempt to get grassroots reports from the field rather than depend on secondary sources.

Topics range from surrogacy and sex selective abortion to women's role in electoral politics, women's rights within marriage and families, the incidence of violence against women, women living



in conflict zones, women as producers of food and creators of crafts, as scientists and entrepreneurs, as human rights defenders and champions of the environment, and the list goes on.

But the main weakness of the WFS is its continuing inability to create a sustainable revenue model, its high costs and its dependence on the donor community.

When funds began to dry up in the late 1990s, WFS lost its 'international' flavour, was forced to close its regional offices and reinvent itself as a largely Indian network. The Philippines network, which was set up in 1985 as a non-profit corporation, also went independent and produces and sells its own features and has to its credit a website and a host of publications.

The very fact that the WFS has been able to survive in India and continues to make a unique contribution to Indian media, producing and marketing well-researched, high quality features that offer a progressive perspective on a spectrum of issues, is highly creditable. Additionally, it fosters a network of women freelancers, holds capacity-building workshops, trains young talent and encourages them to work in areas vital to the progress of both women and society as a whole.

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## Conclusion

The media continues to grow in India and women are increasingly making up a strong component of the industry. Yet to make their voices heard and defy stereotypes, increasingly they are having to work differently. Women are increasingly more educated than their male counterparts, yet they have to work as freelancers and in smaller organisations, while men work in full-time regular roles in large media houses. Women are taking on new medias such as the online sphere to have their voices heard, while men remain in traditional roles such as television, radio and newspapers.

As women attempt to overcome the challenges facing them, they are continuously confronted with obstacles that hamper their best efforts. Facilities such as childcare and maternity are only available to a minimal few, and the leave and re-entry schemes available for women after childbirth are average. Women want to work yet their role as mothers' works to their detriment. Employers are not working to improve this situation, instead using it as an excuse to exclude women from the workforce.

Decision-making positions are out of reach for many women, and although some do make it to the top and there are incremental changes taking place, they are occurring too slowly for real change to be made.

Historically, unions have worked hard to improve the working conditions of journalists and media workers, while facing a hostile environment. However, increasingly they are losing their role within the media landscape as younger journalists, who are more often than not women, have a lack of interest. Unions need to work to improve their perception and what they do for women journalists to ensure they stay relevant and have a role in India's growing media landscape.




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<sup>i</sup> Jeffrey, R. 2012, "Missing from the Indian newsroom," *The Hindu*, 9 April 2012, viewed 15 December 2014, <<http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/missing-from-the-indian-newsroom/article3294285.ece>>.

<sup>ii</sup> The Women, Media and News 2014, *Conversations with women journalists in small-town India*, Khabar Lahariya, New Delhi, viewed 15 November 2014, <<http://khabarlahariya.in/docs/Zile%20ki%20Hulchul%20web.pdf>>.

<sup>iii</sup> Ammu, J. 2000, *Women in Journalism: Making News*, Konark Publishers, New Delhi.

<sup>iv</sup> Global Media Monitoring Project 2010, *Who Makes the News?*, World Association for Christian Communication, Canada, viewed 20 December 2014, <[http://whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/website/gmmp\\_reports/2010/global/gmmp\\_global\\_report\\_en.pdf](http://whomakesthenews.org/images/stories/website/gmmp_reports/2010/global/gmmp_global_report_en.pdf)>.

<sup>v</sup> Byerly, CM. 2011, *Global Report on the Status of Women in News Media*, International Women's Media Foundation, Washington, viewed 11 November 2014, <<http://iwmf.org/pdfs/IWMF-Global-Report-Summary.pdf>>.