



# Gender-based violence against **female journalists**: A ‘double attack’

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Each year, journalists face threats and intimidation and are even killed for bringing us the truth. Female journalists face an extra risk: that of being a woman. Physical, sexual and online abuse is a daily reality for many female media professionals. This needs to stop.

Brisseyda\* is all too familiar with the challenges of being a female reporter. The 27-year-old TV reporter from El Salvador reports on justice and politics – risky topics for both men and women in the country. The perception by some men that women are more vulnerable can lead to abuse, said Brisseyda.

"They think that women who don't have the backing or representation of a man are vulnerable," she said. "When reporting, people yell at you, or they can attack you."

Once, a senior colleague made sexual insinuations. "When you begin in your career some men think that because they teach you, they have that right," she said.

In March, gang members detained Brisseyda at her house and threatened to kill her. Fortunately, she knew how to respond. Brisseyda followed three security trainings for journalists offered by Free Press Unlimited partner Fundación Latitudes.

"I managed to put into practice a protocol I had been taught and I could escape," she said. "It saved my life."

## A bleak picture

Free Press Unlimited believes that safety is a basic need for independent media. Women, like men, should be able to do their important work free from risk and free from fear. We support women through programmes such as (digital) security trainings and the creation of networks for female journalists.

There is a lot of work to be done: A number of recent reports paint a bleak picture of what female journalists face as part of their work. UNESCO reported that 11 female journalists had been killed in 2017 – the highest number since the UN agency started recording killings of journalists in 2006.

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Women journalists also face sexual harassment and sexual violence. And they are much more likely to experience online harassment than men.

An analysis of 70 million comments left on the Guardian newspaper's website between 2006 and 2016 showed that of the 10 most abused writers, eight were women.

Former UNESCO director-general Irina Bokova called it the "double attack": women are being targeted both for being journalists and for being female.

In a survey among 597 women journalists and media workers by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMMF) and Trollbusters, nearly two thirds said they had been threatened or harassed online at least once. Fifty-eight percent reported they had been threatened or harassed in person and just over a quarter of respondents said they had been physically attacked.

This impacts not only the wellbeing of the women who are targeted – it can affect their coverage: More than a third of those who reported to have been threatened, harassed, or attacked in the IWMMF study said they avoided certain stories. Twenty-nine percent said they had considered leaving their profession altogether.



*Free Press Unlimited partner Fundación Latitudes offers safety trainings to journalists in Central America*

## **‘Somewhere to go’**

Diversity is at stake: when female journalists stop reporting, important stories are no longer told.

Niga Salam is a 21-year-old photojournalist living in Sulaymaniyah, Iraq. She works for Metrography, the only independent photo agency in Iraq and a partner of Free Press Unlimited. Salam believes that as a woman, she is better suited to cover certain topics.

“I’ve been to a woman’s prison and the way they could open up to me about what they’ve been through, problems such as sexual harassment, it’s not simple to explain that to a man,” she said.

But when out reporting, she is not free from fear. “Being a female is dangerous and being a female journalist is more dangerous,” she said. “When I go to work I feel scared that something may go wrong, that there will be problems. If I could be more confident, my focus could be more on my subject.”

Working with Metrography has improved things, she said. “It’s very comfortable for me to go there and talk about my problems ... Now when I think about how something may happen, I know I have somewhere to go and ask for help.”

## #MeToo

Awareness of the issues women journalists face is growing. This year saw a number of prominent sexual harassment cases involving journalists. In April, Japan’s administrative vice finance minister Junichi Fukuda stepped down after allegations of harassment by a female reporter (he denied the accusations.) Female journalists from India took to Twitter in October to call out colleagues and editors for indecent comments and unwanted touching.

But in many cases, threats, harassment and violence go unreported and, as the numbers show, the problems persist.

Mona Magdy Farag Abdelmaksoud is the gender expert for FPU’s Syria programme. She believes everyone can help enhance women journalists’ safety.

“Talking about the importance of safety of women while working in the media, raising the awareness of females who were exposed to danger, asking the world to stop such violations and demanding [fulfillment of] female journalists’ rights to be safe are what we can all do,” she said.

*Find out more about our work to promote safety for journalists [here](#).*

*\* Brisseyda asked to keep her real name concealed for security reasons.*

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