Research Article

Defending Women Journalists in the Philippines from Threats and Intimidations

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ABSTRACT

Despite the studies on defending journalism and coming up with various practices to protect journalists, still, the Philippines ranked as the third worst country in impunity versus journalists in the 2016 Global Impunity Index released by the Committee to Protect Journalists. In 2017, 2018, and 2019, it ranked fifth in the same impunity index. Then, the country ranked 7th and was still consistently part of the Top 10 rankings for the past three years, 2020, 2021, and 2022. This shows that the number of threats against journalists remains significant. This study deals with quantitative approaches to determine the threats and intimidations that selected women journalists face and provide course of actions which media companies may use to at least lower the ranking of the country in the impunity index.

Results reveal that the most common threats and intimidations received by the women journalists in line of doing their duty are: blackmailing from sources, threats of physical violence, and public humiliation/ threats to humiliate (even in online platforms). Likewise, women journalists prove that they experience forms of harassments like receiving offers of sexual favors from their sources and employers in exchange of promotion and information privileges. To address these issues, corrective, preventive, and developmental actions are proposed to be implemented in respective media companies. Among these actions, the formation of a gender and development unit, ethics investigation committee, and local cybercrime division in the company are evaluated as the most acceptable and feasible actions for the women journalists. It is imperative that these recommendations be taken seriously and implemented to ensure a safer environment for women journalists in the Philippines and to safeguard the freedom and integrity of journalism in the country.

Keywords: Impunity, Defending women, Intimidation, Protection, Safety, Threats, Women journalists

Introduction

The journalism profession is a very risky job. Whether in news, investigative, feature, or editorial, the fact that the words being published or broadcasted reach many people means that many might be positively or negatively affected with the message being brought to them.

Women play a vital role in the society and their participation in the media varies in unimaginable ways at the turn of the millennium. Across Asia, there has been a progressive and positive growth in the numbers of women in newsrooms, working as freelancers, editors, bloggers, writers, and people of influence (UNESCO, 2016).

Women in the journalism profession are likewise recognized as among the pioneers in changing the global outlook towards societies. The media in the region has grown rapidly in recent years. Women journalists have played a pivotal role in shaping global perspectives and advocating for democracy and freedom of expression, even in the face of formidable challenges (UNESCO, 2016)

However, despite their crucial contributions, women journalists remain one of the marginalized groups in the world, enduring unique forms of adversity in their daily lives. In Asia, men outnumber women when it comes to media- related jobs (Hanan, et al., 2022). Likewise, women in politics and the media often face attacks and harassment with the goal of silencing them. This violence is a significant obstacle to inclusive democracies, hindering women's participation. The issue has worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, with increased incidents of gender-based violence in both public and private spheres. (IWMF, 2022). This further indicates that men are likely to dominate the profession much more than women. Therefore, women are more likely to be attacked or assaulted than their male counterparts. For women journalists and media workers, gender-based attacks continue to be a persistent part of the daily routine of women journalists. These include online attacks on personal features, family, and even personal relationships (Ferrier, 2018).

In the Philippines, it was believed that press of freedom was restored after the 1986 revolution. Despite restoration, the Committee to Protect Journalists has a database which discloses the number of journalists killed in the Philippines from 1992 to 2023. The data shows that for these years, there were 158 reported killings and 2 cases of imprisonment. Among these incidents, 9 were female journalists who lost their lives, and 1 woman journalist was imprisoned Committee to Protect Journalists (2023).

Despite the alarming number of journalist killings, attacks, and unsolved cases, the United Nations introduced the UN Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists, with a focus on addressing the critical problem of impunity. Surprisingly, this initiative remains relatively unfamiliar to Filipino journalists, journalism educators, and students in the Philippines, as reported by the Asian Institute of Journalism and Communication and International Media Support (2019) in the published Philippine Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists.

For the past five years, from 2019- 2023, Philippines is still included in the Top 10 worst countries in the world in numbers of unsolved media killings or the Global Impunity Index. This shows that although major media organizations are working rampantly to protect journalists, their efforts remain invalidated because of the stakeholder's lack of awareness about their campaign. The climate of impunity in the Philippines creates a place where violence and threats against journalists are proliferating.

Thus, to create a national mechanism that would address the protection of journalists, President Rodrigo Duterte signed the Administrative Order no 1. s. 2016 which created a presidential task force who will protect journalists and probe media killings. Moreover, the order was designed to investigate the attacks on media, in what is one of the world's most dangerous countries for the press ("Philippine president forms panel to probe media violence, protect press," 2016). This shows that though the administration faces several issues involving women journalists, it is still particular in handling the threats against those who hold grudges to the journalists. Meanwhile, current President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos declared in 2022 that "During my leadership,

we'll back and safeguard media rights for their effective work. Regardless of challenges ahead, the government is committed to hearing your concerns and addressing your questions" (Parrocha, 2022).

But media organizations, including the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP), have expressed concerns about the lack of transparency in the current administration. According to Len Olea, the secretary of NUJP as cited in Muller (2022), obtaining statements from the government has become increasingly difficult. Even reporters within the Malacañang press corps, who are government-accredited journalists, face challenges in accessing information that previous administrations would typically provide. Olea also highlighted the well-funded troll army and the use of disinformation by government agencies to spread falsehoods and demonize legitimate sources of information as significant challenges. The need for various communities to collaborate in combatting disinformation and preserving the integrity and credibility of journalism has become crucial.

Despite the consistent ranking in recent years, with the Philippines maintaining its 7th position in the global impunity index for 2020, 2021, and 2022 according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (2023), the threat against Filipino journalists remains significant. More commonly, only the killings, missing, and imprisoned were reported in an international scale. This study deems that it is equally important to identify the threats and intimidations that women journalists experience and come up with actions that would mitigate such attacks.

This descriptive study entitled Defending Women Journalists in the Philippines from Threats and Intimidations sought to 1] identify the threats and intimidations experienced by the women journalists; 2] determine how often and from whom do they receive such threats and intimidations; and 3] evaluate developed preventive, corrective, and developmental mechanisms for defending women journalists in the Philippines.

Methods

In this study, the researcher employed descriptive research methods to analyze data collected from women journalists. The snowball purposive sampling technique was utilized, involving referrals to expand the sample. The study initially started with seven targeted participants, each of whom subsequently referred additional women journalists they knew from various media organizations in the country.

To ensure ethical considerations were addressed, the researchers prioritized the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Names and the media organizations to which they belong were not disclosed in the study to safeguard their identities and prevent potential harm.

To facilitate data collection, a survey questionnaire adapted from Civic Action Resources (2016), focusing on the working conditions of women journalists in Pakistan, was modified to align with the experiences of women journalists in the Philippines. The questionnaire comprised three parts: 1] demographic profiles of the participants; 2] the intimidations and threats experienced by the women journalists; and 3] an evaluation of proposed mechanisms that could be implemented in their respective media companies and the country.

For data analysis, the researcher employed descriptive statistics, including frequency counting, percentages, and rankings, to ensure accurate results. Additionally, a Likert scale method was used to gauge the participants' opinions on the proposed mechanisms. The utilization of an online platform proved advantageous, facilitating easy access and retrieval of responses while maintaining participant anonymity and confidentiality.

Result and Discussion

Thirty seven women journalists participated in this study, with the majority hailing from Luzon (34 from Luzon, 2 from Visayas, and 1 from Mindanao). Approximately half of the participants fell within the age range of 40-49 years old. Of the participants, 28 were affiliated with print media, while 9 worked for online news platforms.

Most of the participants held regular or permanent positions. Additionally, participants from print media had extensive experience, surpassing fifteen years in the field, whereas those from online media platforms had less than ten years of experience. Data collection was facilitated through the distribution of a Google Form to a network of women journalists, who subsequently shared the survey link with their colleagues, ensuring a diverse and representative sample.

These demographic characteristics provide insight into the profile of women journalists in the Philippines, which can inform targeted support and interventions to address their specific needs.

The field of journalism is evolving and the responses of the women journalists are substantial to describe how they are treated in this kind of industry in the country. The following are the findings concerning the threats and intimidations experienced by the participating women journalists.

Table 1. Multiple response frequency and percentage distribution on the threats and intimidations experienced by the participants in relation to their work

INTIMIDATIONS AND THREATS	FREQUENCY Max N= 37	PERCENTAGE	RANKING
Abuse of power and authority	14	37.83%	4
Attempts to damage reputation/honor	14	37.83%	4
Insults or criticism published online	8	21.62%	8.5
Name calling or insults	10	27.03%	7
Public humiliation/threats to humiliate	14	37.83%	4
Threats of job loss if pregnant	8	21.62%	8.5
Threats of physical violence	18	48.64%	2
Blackmailing from sources	**20**	**54.05%**	**1**
Digital Threats	12	32.43%	6

Table 1 shows that 54.05% of women journalists who participated in the study experienced blackmailing from sources. This type of intimidation and threat ranked as number 1 in this study. Sources usually include tipsters, government officials, people involved in the news, witnesses, wire services individuals quoted, and other providers of news. This also includes being red-tagged by the government.

Likewise, data also reveals that 48.64% of women journalists receive threats of physical violence. Abuse of power and authority, attempts to damage reputation and honor, and public humiliation/ threats to humiliate are also being experienced by the women journalists.

The high prevalence of blackmailing from sources and threats of physical violence highlights the urgent need for measures to protect women journalists in their interactions with sources and in their workplace.

Table 2. Multiple response frequency and percentage distribution on the kinds of harassments experienced by the participants

HARASSMENTS	FREQUENCY N=37	PERCENTAGE	RANKING
Sexual favor in exchange of promotion and privileges	**10**	**27.03%**	**2**
Physical contact or malicious touching	8	21.62%	4
Overt sexual advances	6	16.22%	5.5
Use of objects, pictures, letters or written notes with bold persuasive sexual under-pinning and which create a hostile, offensive or intimidating	4	10.81%	7

HARASSMENTS	FREQUENCY N=37	PERCENTAGE	RANKING
work or training environment which is annoying or disgusting to the victim.			
Sexual favor in exchange of promotion	6	16.22%	5.5
Unwelcome, improper or any unnecessary gesture of a sexual nature	**10**	**27.03%**	**2**
Suggestive expression or lewd insinuation	**10**	**27.03%**	**2**

Though this study reveals that the forms of harassments presented to the women journalists were minimal compared to the population of participants, harassments are still existing. Sexual advances are still proliferating. Most of the harassments experienced are sexual favours in exchange of promotion and privileges, unwelcome, improper, or unnecessary gesture of a sexual nature, and suggestive expression or lewd insinuation. All forms of sexual harassments are declared unlawful by the country. The Anti- Sexual Harassment Act of 1995 values the dignity of every individual regardless of gender.

Although the prevalence of harassment is relatively low among participants, the persistence of sexual advances and sexual favor in exchange for promotion is concerning. These behaviors must be condemned and addressed.

The existence of unwelcome and improper gestures, suggestive expressions, and lewd insinuations underscores the importance of enforcing anti-sexual harassment laws to create a safer work environment.

Table 3. Multiple response frequency and percentage distribution on the sources of threats and intimidations experienced by women journalists

SOURCE OF THREATS AND INTIMIDATIONS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	RANKING
Employer	12	32.43%	2
News Sources	**20**	**54.05%**	**1**
Colleagues	6	16.21%	3

The table above shows that 54.05% of the women journalists experienced threats and harassments from news sources. Even if the news sources are the top providers of threats and harassments, it is likewise alarming to see that six of them were threatened/ harassed by employers. This result highlights a critical need for media organizations to establish safeguards and mechanisms to protect their journalists. Employers must take proactive measures to ensure a safe and respectful workplace for all employees.

In order to defend the journalists from these kinds of threats, intimidations, and harassments, three types of actions or mechanisms were presented by the researcher to the women journalists. These are 1] preventive actions, which can be done personally and inside the newsrooms before any conflict arises; 2] corrective actions, which can be done immediately by the employers to solve cases and when the conflicts already arose; and 3] developmental actions, which have long term effects and national coverage or scope.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics on the evaluation of the women journalists on the acceptability and feasibility of the proposed preventive actions

PREVENTIVE ACTIONS	MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION	MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
1. Trainings for safety and self- defense.	4.71	Very much acceptable	4.82	Very Much Feasible

PREVENTIVE ACTIONS	MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION	MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
2. Promoting gender equality in the newsroom.	4.47	Acceptable	4.53	Very Much Feasible
3. Providing bodyguards, cell phones, and material support.	4.53	Very much acceptable	4.71	Very Much Feasible
4. Placing local cybercrime division for journalists in the newsroom.	4.824	Very much acceptable	4.59	Very Much Feasible
5. Coordinating with UN Women for trainings to prevent gender- based violence inside and outside the newsroom.	4.23	Acceptable	4.06	Feasible
GRAND MEAN	**4.55**	**Very Much Acceptable**	**4.53**	**Very Much Feasible**

Table 4 shows that placing local cybercrime division for journalists in the newsroom, providing bodyguards, cell phones, and material support, and conducting trainings for self-defense are actions which are very much acceptable for women journalists. They are also the actions considered very feasible to be done in the newsroom or media company.

Women journalists find preventive actions like providing training for safety and self-de-fense, promoting gender equality in the news-room, and offering bodyguards, cell phones, and material support very acceptable and feasible. Implementing these measures can enhance journalists' safety.

Likewise, the positive response to placing a local cybercrime division in newsrooms suggests that this approach could help combat online threats effectively.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics on the evaluation of the women journalists on the acceptability and feasibility of the proposed corrective actions.

CORRECTIVE ACTIONS	MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION	MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
1. Conducting dialogues.	4.29	Acceptable	4.12	Feasible
2. Resolving media disputes.	4.24	Acceptable	4.06	Feasible
3. Creating an Ethics investigation committee.	4.65	Very much acceptable	4.41	Feasible
4. Providing immediate legal support and aide.	4.41	Acceptable	4.35	Feasible
5. Developing emergency response programs.	4.35	Acceptable	4.12	Feasible
GRAND MEAN	4.38	Acceptable	4.21	Feasible

Table 5 reveals that creating an ethics investigation committee is the only corrective action which is very much acceptable for most women journalists who participated in this study. Moreover, the rest of the actions are acceptable and feasible.

The high acceptability of creating an ethics investigation committee indicates that women journalists believe this can be an effective means to address harassment and ethical violations.

The feasibility of implementing these corrective actions demonstrates that media organizations can take immediate steps to resolve issues.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics on the evaluation of the women journalists on the acceptability and feasibility of the proposed developmental actions

DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIONS	MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION	MEAN	VERBAL INTERPRETATION
1. Prosecuting suspects	4.65	Very much acceptable	4.47	Feasible
2. Advocating for better legislation in the country	4.12	Acceptable	4.29	Feasible
3. Revising and strengthening the Journalist's code of ethics	4.41	Acceptable	4.53	Very Much Feasible
4. Putting into law the formation of gender and development unit in the news room	4.82	Very much acceptable	4.65	Very Much Feasible
5. Initiating a national protection mechanism to eradicate impunity for attacks against journalists	4.29	Acceptable	4.47	Feasible
GRAND MEAN	**4.46**	**Acceptable**	**4.48**	**Feasible**

This table shows that on a national scale, putting into law the formation of gender and development unit in the newsroom and media organizations garners the very much acceptable and very much feasible evaluation of the women journalists.

The strong support for putting into law the formation of a gender and development unit in newsrooms and media organizations suggests a need for legal measures to ensure gender sensitivity and safety. Advocating for better legislation and initiating a national protection mechanism are also seen as feasible approaches to address the broader issues faced by women journalists.

These implications indicate the urgency of addressing threats, harassment, and workplace safety for women journalists in the Philippines. Media organizations, government authorities, and industry stakeholders should take proactive steps to implement the recommended actions and create a safer and more inclusive environment for women journalists.

When asked for recommendations, some of the statements of the journalists include: "Proper implementation of the current law to defend not just women but all journalists who are experiencing injustices. We do already have the Presidential Task Force on Media Security but it isn't enough to be the watchdog, especially if it can be selective. We can recommend higher penalty for those who will violate journalists' rights. In other words, end impunity." "Not only protection from intimidation, threat and harassment but also protection from abuse being committed by employers on labor laws." "Teach state forces to respect and give fair judgment on women journalists." "Institute a national protection mechanism to address impunity for attacks against women journalists." "There must be a safe gender-sensitive investigative procedures."

In summary, this study reveals an urgent need for immediate action to protect women journalists in the Philippines. Alarming statistics, including threats, blackmail, and harassment, call for swift collaborative efforts among media organizations, government authorities, and industry stakeholders. Ensuring the safety and well-being of women journalists is paramount to preserving media integrity and fostering a more inclusive society. In addition, the topmost recommended actions include providing training for the safety and self- defense of women journalists, offering bodyguards, cell phones, and material support, establishing a

local cybercrime division within newsrooms, creating an ethics investigation committee, revising and strengthening the Philippine Journalists' Code of Ethics, and enacting legislation to establish gender and development units within newsrooms.

Conclusion

The findings from this survey of 37 women journalists in the Philippines reveal several critical conclusions regarding the challenges they face in the media industry. Blackmailing from sources emerges as a pervasive issue, shedding light on a concerning trend within the industry. Additionally, the persistence of threats of physical violence and the experience of sexual advances underscore the urgency of addressing safety and gender-related concerns.

These threats, intimidations, and harassments are primarily sourced from within the journalism community, specifically news sources, and occasionally, even employers. These findings highlight the need for comprehensive measures to safeguard the well-being and dignity of women journalists working in the field.

In response to these challenges, the study proposed three categories of actions, all of which garnered positive responses from women journalists. These actions were not only considered acceptable but also feasible to be implemented by media organizations. Notably, the formation of a gender and development unit, the establishment of an ethics investigation committee, and the integration of a local cybercrime division within media companies garnered high levels of support.

In sum, these findings present the urgency of addressing issues related to threats, harassment, and safety within the media industry in the Philippines. The proposed actions represent promising steps toward creating a safer, more equitable, and inclusive environment for women journalists. It is essential for media organizations, industry stakeholders, and policymakers to heed these conclusions and work collaboratively to ensure the protection and well-being of women journalists, ultimately fortifying the integrity of journalism in the country.

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