ABOUT US

The Coalition For Women In Journalism is a global organization of support for women journalists. The CFWIJ pioneered mentorship for mid-career women journalists across several countries around the world, and is the first organization to focus on the status of free press for women journalists. Our network of individuals and organizations brings together the experience and mentorship necessary to help female career journalists navigate the industry. Our goal is to help develop a strong mechanism where women journalists can work safely and thrive.

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THE FIRST HALF REPORT

This report looks at the threats that women journalists faced during the first half of 2019. The Coalition has been documenting cases since the beginning of the year, focusing on the many perils that women journalists face when they go about doing their jobs. From online harassment to murder, the first half brought with it an unprecedented level of danger and threats for women journalists around the world.

If you would like to request more insight into our findings, or would like to suggest an addition to our work reach out to us at data@womeninjournalism.org. For media inquiries reach out to us at press@womeninjournalism.org.
KEY STATS

OUR DATA SHOWED AN ALARMING NUMBER OF ATTACKS ON WOMEN JOURNALISTS. **ON AVERAGE, A WOMAN JOURNALIST WAS ATTACKED EVERY OTHER DAY DURING H1.**

- 85 CASES RECORDED BY THE COALITION DURING H1
- 35 IS THE NUMBER OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS WHO ARE IN PRISONS AROUND THE WORLD.
- 20% OF ALL CASES HAD TO DO WITH WOMEN JOURNALISTS BEING HARASSED ONLINE.
- 3 WOMEN JOURNALISTS WERE KILLED IN THE FIRST HALF.
The year started with 13 cases in just January. Most notable, around 39% of these cases were related to women journalists being attacked in the field or being stopped from doing their jobs. A case that stood out was that of Shajila Ali Fathima, who was physically assaulted while covering protests in Kerala, India, over the Sabarimala Temple. One more case that we found alarming was that of Madelyn Palmar. She was chased by a tank while trying to cover unrest in Venezuela. Madelyn could be seen hopping over a fence as the tank raced towards her in a video. Around 15.4% of the cases involved arrests, while 7.7% had to do with legal targeting.

In February, the number of cases increased to 17, with online harassment accounting for 35.3% of the cases. This was followed by physical attacks, including sexual harassment and assault, which accounted for 23.5% of the cases. Attacks or impediments in the field stood at 17.6%, and included cases such as that of Ariana Drehsler, who was targeted for simply covering the Migrant Crisis. Legal targeting of women journalists remained a substantial issue at 11.8% of the cases. This was also the month that Rappler’s Maria Ressa was placed under arrest in a move many view as the Duterte regime’s attempt to augment censorship in the country.

March saw another 17 cases, with online harassment (29.4%) continuing to be a large problem for women journalists. Around 17.6% of the cases had to do with women journalists being arrested. The same number were attacked or faced impediments in the field. Over 11.8% faced sexual harassment. An 11-woman team of journalists quit the Vatican’s women’s magazine because of the pressure they faced over their coverage of the sexual abuse faced by nuns. This was also the month that saw Maria Ressa placed behind bars again.

We recorded 11 cases in April. However, despite having a lower number of cases, this was also the month that saw the death of Lyra McKee. The New IRA has taken responsibility for her death. Estonia’s Vilja Kiisler also became the first journalist forced to resign from a major newspaper for her views against Estonian Conservative People’s Party, a far-right party. Around 18.2% involved women journalists being harassed online. Another 18.2% were threatened with violence.
We note that 2019 was off to a rough start with 13 cases recorded for January. A slight uptick was observed in February, as we observed another 17 cases. March experienced another 17 cases, however, the number fell in April to 11. In May, we observed a rise in the number of cases as the total incidents we recorded increased to 17. June saw the fewest number of cases with only 10 incidences.

Two-thirds of all online harassment cases that were observed by The Coalition took place during the first quarter. A similar trend was seen in the context of attacks or impediments in the field, where the first quarter saw more arrests, with almost two-thirds taking place during the first three months.

Legal targeting grew towards the end of the year’s first half.
MOST PREVALENT ATTACKS

Data collected by the coalition shows that an overwhelming number of the cases i.e. a fifth of those recorded (17 cases in total), were related to online harassment of women journalists. The attacks will continue to grow unless social media platforms step up and take active responsibility for the lack of any substantial protective measures. The cases we documented demonstrate that women journalists are under heightened risk online, with many being attacked by trolls and bots as an attempt to censor them and their work.

Another 16 cases had to do with women journalists being attacked in the field or being obstructed from doing their jobs. In many cases, the perpetrators were a part of the state itself. A worrying sign were the 11 cases of legal targeting that we recorded during the first half of the year. That the law is used so frequently to target journalists is both abysmal and dangerous.

This year has seen around 11 arrests, alongside cases of a similar nature. A journalist was imprisoned, two jail terms were upheld, four detainments and two deportations also took place during the first half of the year. We also recorded a single case of threat of detention.

Women journalists also had to face a considerable number of physical threats, including sexual harassment. We recorded 12 cases that put women journalists in physical danger due to their work.
A BRIEF OVERVIEW

THE 5 WORST COUNTRIES ACCOUNTED FOR 41.2% OF ALL CASES RECORDED DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE YEAR.

We looked at multiple kinds of threats against women journalists around the world. We found that some areas had a higher prevalence of risk as opposed to others.

Almost a quarter of all the attacks and threats that we documented took place in South and Southeast Asia. South Asia itself accounted for 20% of the incidences recorded.

We observed that Europe saw its fair share of attacks and threats to women in journalism, with over a quarter of all cases originating from the continent (24.7%). It is pertinent to note that several of these attacks originated in Eastern European countries.

The Middle Eastern region accounted for 17.6% of the cases we recorded, whereas the Americas accounted for 14.1% of the global pool. We observed that a majority of these cases, however, took place in North America, with two exceptions - one in South America and another in Central America.
We recorded around 13 cases in India, the highest number of all the countries in this report. The year was off to a tumultuous start with the Sabarimala Temple protests. The issue spilled over from the later parts of 2018, where we had also recorded several attacks on women journalists. In particular, we noted the case of Shajila Ali Fathima, who was attacked while covering the protests. Videos and pictures showed her in tears as she continued to record the events with her camera.

Barkha Dutt’s online harassment in February stood out because of the sheer volume of abuse she received, alongside Twitter’s refusal to take any serious action against culprits. While Barkha’s account was suspended for outing her attacker, Twitter continues to ignore volumes of attacks on its platform against women journalists. Her case was part of 16.7% of cases where women journalists faced online harassment in the country.

The data collected by The Coalition shows that 25% of the cases from India had to do with women journalists being attacked while at work or impeded during duty. Another 25% were physically assaulted while doing their jobs, and 16.7% faced physical or sexual harassment. A worrying observation is that at times the complaints of physical assaults or harassments were against the very men that worked with the women in question. This is not only owed to the misogyny and sexism prevalent in newsroom within the country, but is a clear sign of a lack of policy on the matter. Organizations need to do more to address this.
Press freedom is a growing concern when it comes to the United States. An overwhelming 28.6\% of the cases we recorded during the first half of the year involved women being attacked or impeded while trying to do their jobs. A similar number of women journalists faced online abuse or harassment because of their work (28.6\%).

The abuse that women journalists face is not just limited to the journalists from the country. For instance, on January 1, Iranian journalist Marzieh Hashemi was detained without charge. The journalist reported being forced to remove her Hijab and being fed non-halal food. She was released after 10 days in custody.

A worrying issue is that of security officials detaining or impeding the work of journalists looking into the Migrant Crisis. Ariana Drehsler was detained by Customs and Borders Protection under the pretense of security, however, the move was more focused on her reporting around the issue.

Donald Trump’s tussle with journalists, especially women of colour, has been repeatedly observed by The Coalition. On January 1, he tweeted against Gillian H. Turner, tagging the wrong woman in the process. Any time Trump tags a journalist in a tweet he puts them at the forefront of a barrage of abuse online. The administration’s treatment of journalists is alarming.

The growing trust issues that the public has developed in terms of journalists have led to attacks, such as the one on Meaghan Mackey on January 1. She was covering a drug overdose in Chico, California before being physically attacked by a bystander. A video released about the incident shows Mackey’s camera falling to the ground, while she herself can be heard screaming in the background.

Sexism and misogyny are alive and well in the United States and Jenny Ravalo and Talia Jane are proof of the extent to which women journalists have to tackle sexual harassment. On March 25, Jenny was kissed on the mouth by Kubrat Pulev during an interview after his win. While on May 5, Talia shared screenshots of a conversation with Mike Rosenberg (formerly with the Seattle Times). In the chat, Rosenberg quickly moves from professional advice to sexually explicit texts, without prompt from Talia.
Iran's treatment of women journalists continues to worsen every day and the first half of 2019 was no different. Anything critical of the state faces clampdown, often immediately.

On January 9, Sanaz Allahyari was arrested alongside her husband for covering strikes and protests. She also looked at the mistreatment of workers in jail.

In May, we recorded three different cases, starting with the arrest of Marzieh Amiri, who was reporting outside an intelligence police station in Tehran and was taken into custody and held without charge for several days.

On May 12, Hengameh Shahidi's jail term was upheld. Hengameh was sentenced to 12 years and nine months over security charges. She was targeted for her criticism of Iran's judicial system.

Narges Mohammadi has been in prison since 2015. Narges was returned to jail soon after a medical procedure, where she had no access to any medical care.

Iran's harassment of women journalists is so prevalent that representatives from BBC's Persian service took the issue to the UN Human Rights Council, slamming the country for its role in the abuse.
Turkey’s crackdown on journalists and journalism itself is unknown to no one. Its treatment of women journalists continues to worsen with time. The year started with the arrest of Pelin Ünker, who was targeted over her coverage of the Paradise Papers. Our Member Ans Boersma was also unnecessary detained and then abruptly deported despite lack of evidence of any wrongdoing. Ans wasn’t allowed to return to her home or take any of her things, and was sent back to Holland with nothing but a knapsack.

On May 10, Zeynep Kuray was detained alongside Irfan Tunccelik as they covered the ongoing hunger strike over the isolation of Öcalan. On the same day, Canan Coşkun was also taken into custody.

Turkey’s censorship didn’t stop at journalists covering protests. Authors Elif Shafak and Ayşe Kulin were also targeted through legal actions because of social media campaigns against their novels and their discussion of child abuse.

One June 26, the prosecution asked an Istanbul court to sentence Beritan Canözer for 15 years in jail. Beritan had also been covering a protest when she was taken into custody for being “too excited”. Authorities want to charge her for being a member of a terror organization.
Online campaigns against women journalists continue to cause serious damage. Often these campaigns can be linked back to the state, and are being used as a measure to silence journalists.

Journalists in Pakistan are battling a number of problems. The country’s media industry in general has taken a serious hit because of steps taken by Imran Khan’s government to cut media funding substantially in the name of austerity. Media houses are routinely firing journalists by the dozen, and this has impacted many people’s ability to pursue good journalism. In many cases, this has resulted in extremely censorship policies, adopted to appease the government and ensure that whatever little funding is available is acquired.

The climate of censorship is also directly linked to the growing attacks on press freedom in the country. Journalists and bloggers have been targeted both online and offline. In some cases, threats of violence are also made towards the journalist and their families. Last year, we reported on the growing threats against women journalists because of the upcoming election - anyone reporting negatively on Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) or in favour of any other party was targeted.

The prevalent rhetoric places journalists under labels such as “traitor”, essentially using their reporting against them. Our Member, Senior Journalist and Anchor Gharidah Farooqi experienced a barrage of abuse in March this year after she reported that New Zealand’s Christchurch attacker had visited Pakistan. This was used to not only discredit her but also label her an enemy to Pakistan.

Barely a week later, an entirely false narrative was released against our Member, Senior Journalist Marvi Sirmed. She was accused of promoting incest in Pakistan, and bringing poor families to the country’s capital as a means to entice them. Her personal data, including her address, phone number, pictures, and more was released online. The account behind this campaign was heavily dressed in images of the ruling PTI - we also found one account that belonged to a party member.

We recorded one more case where a journalist received death threats and was subjected to psychological abuse. Her home was visted by members of Pakistan’s military.
This is the number of women journalists currently languishing in prisons around the world. The number of women journalists being imprisoned for their work has been on a steady rise in the last couple of years.

The countries responsible include Turkey, Iran, China, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, Vietnam and Syria.

**THE WORLD'S TOP IMPRISONERS OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS**

- **29%** of women journalists are in Turkish prisons. Around 10 women are currently in captivity only because of their work as journalists; censorship has touched extremes in recent times in Turkey. During the first half, the country was the largest jailer of women journalists.

- **23%** are have been imprisoned in Iran. The oppressive regime is known for its anti-women policies, and this extends to women journalists who are trying to do their jobs. Eight women journalist are currently stuck in jail in the country.

- **20%** are in Chinese prisons. China has developed a reputation for its clampdown on free voices. It is not surprising that it is one of the top three countries to imprison women journalists. Around seven are currently stuck in the country.
KILLED IN H1 2019

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, over 15 journalists have been killed in 2019 so far. Of that, our data shows that 20% were women.

**LYRA MCKEE**
**KILLED IN CROSSFIRE ON APRIL 18**

Lyra McKee was shot dead while observing riots by the New IRA. Her killing was called a “terrorist incident” by the Police Service of Northern Ireland that the New IRA accountable for the heinous act. The attack was aimed at the police, but the 29-year-old became a target instead. The New IRA later admitted responsibility of killing McKee and offered “full and sincere apologies” to the slain journalist’s family and friends.

**MINA MANGAL**
**GUNNED DOWN ON MAY 11**

Journalist and political adviser, Mina was shot dead in Kabul in daylight. She had taken to social media just days before the shooting to tell her followers that she feared for her life. Her family believes that she was killed by the same people that had previously kidnapped her, which includes her former husband. The group, which had been arrested, managed to bribe their way out of detention. Mina was known for her work as a presenter on a local channel.

Norma Sarabia was murdered in the south-east city of Tabasco. Two masked men shot Norma numerous times outside her home making her the sixth reporter to be killed in Mexico in 2019. Norma was associated with a local newspaper Tabasco Hoy for 15 years and was based in Huimanguillo as its correspondent. She was also known to contribute to other local outlets and was revered as a devoted journalist in the city.