

December 2023

# Media Situation Report Gender-sensitive reporting in Southeast Asia

# Acknowledgements

The Public Media Alliance (PMA) would like to thank UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and the UNESCO Bangkok Office for their generous support to this project. We also extend sincere thanks to our regional partners, Konde.co of Indonesia and AWARE of Singapore, for their invaluable input, guidance, and support into this important research project.

Particular thanks go to the project facilitator, Dagmar Skopalik, for advising and supporting the project as well as overseeing the research throughout; to consultant Anneliese McAuliffe; and to PMA's staff - Advocacy Coordinator, Desilon Daniels, and Development and Communications Officer, Keiran Turner - for their coordination of the entire project.

A special thank you to all contributing researchers for sharing their expertise and knowledge: Fathimath Leeza, Kayonaaz Kalyanwala, Kimberly Wong, Dr Kosum Omphornuwat, Lee Yoke Mun, and Lestari Nurhajati.

---

Published by the Public Media Alliance

© Public Media Alliance 2023

Ideas and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors; they are not necessarily those of UNESCO, the Public Media Alliance, Konde.co, and AWARE.

**Project Manager:** Desilon Daniels

**Project Coordinator:** Keiran Turner

**Project Facilitator:** Dagmar Skopalik

**Design:** Public Media Alliance

**Cover image:** A bystander gives an interview to news media after a nail bomb blast on May 27, 2013 in Bangkok, Thailand. Credit: 1000 Words / Shutterstock.com

# Contents

<b>Biographies</b>	4
<b>Foreword</b>	6
<b>Introduction</b>	7
<b>Executive Summary</b>	9
<b>Indonesia</b>	
Country overview	12
Representation of women and girls in the media	13
The needs of media organisations	15
Recommendations	19
<b>Malaysia</b>	
Country overview	24
Representation of women and girls in the media	24
The needs of media organisations	27
Recommendations	30
<b>The Philippines</b>	
Country overview	37
Representation of women and girls in the media	37
The needs of media organisations	40
Recommendations	44
<b>Singapore</b>	
Country overview	49
Representation of women and girls in the media	49
The needs of media organisations	53
Recommendations	57
<b>Thailand</b>	
Country overview	65
Representation of women and girls in the media	65
The needs of media organisations	68
Recommendations	71
<b>Surveying the needs of Southeast Asian media organisations</b>	77
<b>Appendix</b>	86

# Biographies

## Researchers



### **Fathimath Leeza**

Ms. Fathimath Leeza, a seasoned broadcasting professional, brings 22 years of experience to the industry. A graduate of Curtin University, she has thrived in a variety of roles, from programme management to data analysis and executive production, at the Maldives National TV and the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development.

Her notable achievements include consulting for broadcasting authorities and successfully securing grants for projects that address societal challenges. In recent years, as a project manager, she has spearheaded international media projects, showcasing her research and analytical skills. Recognised for her contributions to multimedia communications, she actively participates in policy discussions and serves on judging panels. Beyond her expertise in international relations and executive production, she is dedicated to using her skills to continuously improve the broadcasting landscape.



### **Kayonaaz Kalyanwala**

Kayonaaz Kalyanwala is a writer and researcher who specialises in using communications for advocacy. Her passion lies in working with communities to voice their concerns and experiences to the world themselves in order to create programmes and policies that cater to their unique needs.

She has worked with movements at the intersections of community and alternative media, feminist resource mobilisation, and environmental justice. Through her work she hopes to contribute towards a global network of knowledge and resources to build resilient and intersectional social justice movements.



### **Kimberly Wong**

Kimberly Wong is a Senior Research Executive at AWARE\*. With a B.Soc.Sci (Hons) degree in Sociology, she is trained in both qualitative and quantitative research methods. In her current role, Kimberly has conducted research on a wide range of gender issues including workplace discrimination and harassment, coercive control and challenges faced by marginalised groups such as migrant spouses and older women.

She was also heavily involved in drafting AWARE's Omnibus report published in 2021, which was a culmination of the organisation's 36 years of gender research and advocacy efforts.



### **Dr Kosum Omphornuwat**

Dr. Kosum Omphornuwat is the Director of the M.A. Programme in Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies, College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Thammasat University, Thailand.

Kosum's research focuses on female bodies in the media, women's voices, narratives, and

lived experiences, as well as women's and queer movements in Thailand.

Kosum writes a chapter in *Contemporary Socio-Cultural and Political Perspectives in Thailand* (2014). She is the co-author of the book *Strategies to Promote LGBTIQN+ Well-Being in Thailand* (2021).

Kosum graduated with a Ph.D. in Social Sciences from Loughborough University and an M.A. in Journalism Studies from the University of Sheffield in the UK. She received her first degree from Thammasat University, where she studied B.A. in Liberal Arts majoring in English. Kosum recently obtained a Diploma in Clinical Sexology from the Faculty of Medicine at Thammasat University.



### **Lee Yoke Mun**

Lee Yoke Mun is a Project Executive at AWARE\*. Committed to advocacy through research, her work at the women's rights NGO focuses on addressing gender-based violence and issues that low-income women face. Currently, she is researching coercive control and the challenges that transnational families face.

She holds a B.A. in Communications and Sociology with specialisation in Global Sociology from University at Buffalo, SUNY.



### **Lestari Nurhajati**

Lestari Nurhajati is an Associate Professor at LSPR Communication and Business Institute, Indonesia. Her research interests are in the field of media studies, media literacy, media diversity, political communication, journalism, gender, public relations, and more. Her latest research projects include work with the International Media Support, Denmark, and Canvas8, United Kingdom. She has more than 15 years of experience as a journalist, and since 2021 she has served as a board member and Editorial Advisor at Konde.co.

---

\* - AWARE (Association of Women for Action and Research) is Singapore's leading women's rights and gender-equality advocacy group. Since its founding in 1985, it has worked to identify and eliminate gender-based barriers through research, advocacy, education, training and support services.

# Foreword

## Inspiring collaborative change

A first prerequisite for credible and effective reporting on violence against women and girls may be newsroom leadership that is fully committed to support, empower and unite staff against gendered harassment of journalists.

Nearly three-quarters of women journalists surveyed have reported online threats of violence, according to UNESCO.<sup>1</sup> Yet only 25% of the women journalists surveyed reported these online violence incidents to their employers, and only 17% were aware if they had access to legal support.

Thus, in many cases, the onus is placed on women journalists to individually adapt to the psychological and professional impacts of online threats, and to manage their exposure to online harassment.

An underlying presumption in newsrooms of “don’t feed the trolls” may serve to diminish the seriousness of gendered harassment, implying that it is either possible or necessary to ignore online threats, while eliminating available options for responses, according to the UNESCO report.

Some media organisations may be failing to recognise that technology-facilitated gender-based violence against journalists are more intrusive, accessible, realistic, and virally amplified, abetted algorithmically and by the digital platforms that have acted as vectors for abuse.

As exemplars of freedom of expression, media organisations also may hesitate to take actions that restrict abusive speech online:

thus voluntarily upholding a false binary. While freedom of expression is guaranteed under international human rights law, the use of hate speech and threats of violence to limit the speech of others are proscribed under these same international laws.

This report of the Public Media Alliance – supported by UNESCO’s [International Programme for the Development of Communication](#) – contributes to our awareness of a malignance still mingling within all communities, in and beyond Southeast Asia. This report should thus inspire public service media to continue to report more inclusively, build more newsroom diversity, and give platforms to the voiceless, for as long as societies still strive to evolve forward by the better angels of our nature.

### **Jo Hironaka**

Advisor and Chief of Communication and Information  
UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok



---

<sup>1</sup> The findings by the authors of the UNESCO report, ‘The Chilling: What More Can News Organisations Do to Combat Gendered Violence?’ are referred to throughout this foreword. The report can be accessed here: [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/global\\_study\\_chapter3\\_what\\_more.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/global_study_chapter3_what_more.pdf)



# Introduction

The project “Violence against women – Bringing about changes in social attitudes and gender equity through enabling greater media participation” aimed to both examine and reinforce the role of Southeast Asian media in reducing gender stereotyping and fostering changes in social attitudes and mindsets. Targeting five countries – Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand – the project emphasised the importance of ongoing collaboration between gender-focused non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and media organisations in Southeast Asia to ultimately produce more transparent, relevant, responsive, and accessible content on gender issues, especially violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Southeast Asia is a diverse region with varied cultural, sociopolitical, and economic contexts. While the region has made progress in many areas, there are still challenges related to gender equality and violence against women. According to the United Nations,<sup>1</sup> 33 percent of partnered women in Southeast Asia between the ages of 15-49 will experience physical and/or sexual violence from a current or former husband or male partner at least once in their lifetime. Other forms of violence against women and girls – including child marriage and female genital mutilation – also remain issues in the region, with 44 percent of all child brides coming from South Asia while in Indonesia 49 percent of girls under 14 have undergone some form of female genital mutilation.

Studies unequivocally show that violence against women is leading to global systemic inequalities. All sectors, including the media sector, need to take the necessary action in the context of a multisectoral approach to challenge violence against women and changing cultural attitudes that perpetuate negative gender norms.

Meanwhile, the media plays an undeniable role in forming and disseminating perceptions of gender. In recent years there have been initiatives by gender-focused groups and media professionals to address the lack of research and guidelines regarding coverage of women in the media,

women’s issues, and LGBTQIA+ issues. These efforts have started to pave the way for open discussions on the issue of gender-sensitive media coverage, particularly on issues such as violence against women and girls.

The country reports contained herein form part of the efforts to better understand just how the media can support initiatives – and undertake their own – that improve gender representation and alleviate violence against women and girls, and violence against women journalists. It provides a snapshot of the current situation facing the Southeast Asian media on these issues and considers how the media can do better.

This research is particularly significant for providing insight on the prevalence and nature of gender-based violence across five countries while identifying commonalities and differences in the response of media organisations and NGOs. In turn, this can inform targeted interventions and policies tailored to the specific needs of each country, while serving as a catalyst for regional collaboration and an aligning of regional efforts with broader international goals.

The project was split across two key activities:

- A situation report and analysis of gender representation, violence against women and girls, and violence against women journalists across Southeast Asia. Research covered the project’s five target countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.
- A two-day capacity building workshop in Bangkok (October 2023) for journalists and representatives from gender-focused NGOs in the five project countries. This focussed on bolstering participants’ ability to better raise awareness on gender discrimination and gender-based censorship within the media and to develop their skills to combat gender-related issues, including violence against women and girls. The workshop was also used to develop country-specific action plans that would contribute towards more effective and gender-sensitive reporting.<sup>2</sup>

## Process and methodology

The research project commenced in May 2023, employing a multifaceted methodology involving desk research, interviews, and surveys. The initial phase involved the development of an annotated bibliography, serving as a foundational reference point for subsequent analysis.

The desk research component focused on two primary dimensions. First, an in-depth examination to scrutinise the portrayal of women and girls in the media. Researchers delved into training programmes, editorial guidelines, and existing research from both local and international sources. Additionally, a thorough exploration of scholarly articles, studies, and surveys pertaining to the representation of women in the media was undertaken where possible. In some cases, the research extended to encompass reports on ongoing initiatives targeting women and girls in both onscreen and offscreen roles.

Simultaneously, desk research was instrumental in providing a comprehensive overview of the individual countries under scrutiny. This involved an analysis of local conditions, international rankings, socio-cultural nuances, and relevant contextual factors.

Interviews were conducted to provide qualitative insight on the specific needs of media organisations in effectively reporting on gender-based violence and issues related to women and girls. The interviewees included news editors and managers from various media outlets, as well as representatives from gender-focused non-governmental organisations. To garner a holistic perspective, policymakers were also included in the interview process, providing valuable insights into the policy landscape. To protect the privacy of some of those who voluntarily agreed to be interviewed for the research, it was important

keep their identity anonymous and some have been referred to by their job titles only.

The research design also incorporated a survey component, executed by the Public Media Alliance (PMA). The survey targeted journalists from the five project countries. The survey aimed to assess the skills of regional journalists in reporting on gendered issues, identify areas for improvement in coverage, and highlight potential gaps in practice. The survey garnered responses from 40 journalists across the five target countries, with a deliberate effort to ensure a minimum of 75% female respondents, including those who identify as female. In the end, 31 out of the 40 respondents (77.5%) identified as female.

Meanwhile, to streamline the process and enhance efficiency, in-country research was guided by a dedicated research facilitator. This also ensured consistency and coordination across the diverse research area.

This multifaceted approach sought to unravel the complexities of media representation, address the challenges faced by media organisations, and pave the way for deeper understanding of the region's nuanced needs and gender-sensitive reporting.

---

<sup>1</sup> UN Women Asia and the Pacific, n.d.. Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women and Girls. [Online]. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/end-violence-against-women/evaw-facts-and-figures#4> [Accessed 29 November 2023]

<sup>2</sup> Public Media Alliance, 2023. Regional Action Plan: Improving gender sensitivity approaches for media stakeholders in Southeast Asia. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Regional-SEA-gender-action-plans-ENG.pdf> [Accessed 7 December 2023]



# Executive Summary

## Societal Context

This situation report will highlight how gender equality and violence against women and girls are not detached from the societal and political situation of each respective country. This includes political systems, the state of civil society, and the media industry.

The in-country reports highlight how Southeast Asia is one of the most dynamic regions in the world and is, culturally and religiously, extremely diverse. Yet, despite the significant economic progress made in recent decades and the great improvements in education and training, many social, political, and economic inequalities persist.

Furthermore, the countries studied in this situation have significant democratic deficits, especially in terms of political freedom. According to the Freedom House Report 2023 on political rights and civil liberties, the Philippines scored 58/100; Indonesia scored 58/100; Malaysia scored 53/100; and Singapore scored 47/100. These four countries were considered 'partly free', while Thailand - with a score of 30/100 - was deemed 'not free'.<sup>1</sup> Human rights issues have been raised across all five countries, especially regarding women, the LGBTQIA+ community, and ethnic minorities.

In addition, some cultural and religious norms, and deeply rooted patriarchal views and structures, were reported as being among the major obstacles to gender equality and the causes of violence against women and girls. The reports show that gender gaps persist across the region. In the Philippines, for instance, challenges persist despite the country's commendable positions in global gender indices. Here, local issues such as violence against women and restrictions on media freedom showcase the nuanced interplay between formal laws and practical implementation of reforms. In other surveyed countries, limited political rights and civil liberties, along with gender gaps in political empowerment, underscore the need for broader societal changes.

## Southeast Asian media landscape

The media landscape in Southeast Asia is largely dominated by three media types: state-owned media, private commercial media providers, and social media platforms. National public service media (PSM) that are non-profit, accountable to the public, and editorially independent - do not have a presence in region. Attempts to establish PSM in Indonesia in the decade after the fall of former President Suharto, have since been reversed by legal and regulatory restrictions. Thai PBS may be a first example of a public broadcaster with a mission to serve the public with editorially independent content. However, the broadcaster, which is financed by revenue from alcohol and tobacco taxes and sponsorship, has repeatedly faced political pressure.

Successive governments in the region have long been accused of controlling the free flow of information in the name of nation-building and national security, be it through legal regulations, licence restrictions, or publishing rights.

Where private commercial media operate alongside state media, this does not necessarily mean greater media diversity. While the Philippines has a large number of media providers and channels, five family-owned companies dominate the country's media.<sup>2</sup> Media concentration is also considerably high in Indonesia, where eight multiplatform conglomerates are a determining factor in the media market.<sup>3</sup>

The ever-faster development of digital technologies and growing access to the internet, has led to a rapid increase in digital media offers. As such, the use of social media and digital news services has become an integral part of everyday life, with online news becoming the primary news source for 84-88% of media users in the five research countries.<sup>4</sup>

One result of this development is intensifying media competition for financial resources and audience reach. Click-baiting and tabloidisation at the expense of professional journalistic standards - a serious challenge for journalistic

standards – have become common. Furthermore, online communication has proliferated the rapid spread of disinformation, hate messages, and harassment.

When it comes to gender issues, the reports reveal intricate dynamics. For instance, despite a vibrant and diverse media landscape, Indonesian media faces legal and regulatory restrictions that impact press freedom, especially on sensitive subjects like LGBTQIA+ rights. Meanwhile, other countries' reports show that media organisations reflect and perpetuate gender stereotypes, while their role in furthering gender equality is often not explicitly addressed at a policy level.

Nonetheless, across the countries, efforts to improve gender representation show progress.

## Major findings

This situation report analyses gender-sensitivity in current affairs news across Southeast Asia. It contains country reports covering five countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. In each country, research was undertaken over a period of six months (May–November 2023).

The data collection methods were consistent across the countries, and included desk research and expert interviews. Separately, a survey was undertaken with journalists from the five target countries to determine the gaps that may exist within the Southeast Asian media landscape when it comes to reporting on violence against women and girls and gender-related issues, from the perspectives of those on the ground.

The situation report highlights:

**- The interconnectivity of the issues:** While each country presented unique challenges – from poor adherence and existing policies to politically motivated attacks on journalists – there were significant overlaps between the issues. Notably, there was interconnection relating to the representation of women and girls with persistent stereotypes; harassment and violence against women journalists, both online and offline; a lack of consistent and clear reporting standards and mechanisms regarding gender issues; the rise of social media and the associated challenges to women, LGBTQIA+ people, and ethnic minorities;

and the need for journalistic training, across all levels of a newsroom.

**- The need for collaboration:** Each researcher determined that collaboration among stakeholders was paramount for success, especially regarding the intricate interplay of media and gender issues. In their recommendations, the researchers called for varying forms of collaboration to address regulatory restrictions, improve press freedom, and challenge gender stereotypes present in the media. Among the identified stakeholders were governments, media regulators, media outlets, advocacy groups, and civil society. It was noted that initiatives fostering dialogue and partnerships can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable media landscape.

**- The need for further research:** Researchers noted that extensive and comprehensive research and data on gender representation in the media, violence against women and girls and female journalists, is lacking in the Southeast Asian context. This also applies to the responsibilities of media organisations in covering gender. The scarcity of existing research, statistical surveys and the respective monitoring, underscore the urgency for thorough investigations into these critical areas across the five countries studied. By addressing these gaps, scholars, policymakers, media houses and media practitioners can gain deeper insights into the nuanced challenges, allowing for the development of targeted interventions and evidence-based strategies to foster positive and lasting change in the region.

**- The need for wider social change:** The researchers noted that achieving meaningful progress requires wider social change across the five countries. While legislative strides and policy changes are essential – and there has been progress in some of the countries in this regard – broader societal shifts are imperative to challenge deep-rooted gender norms perpetuated by the media.

## Key recommendations

Consequently, the most essential recommendations can be summarised as follows:

### 1. Prioritise training for journalists and editors

Implementing comprehensive training programmes for journalists and editors is crucial to foster improved gender-sensitive reporting. This involves educating media professionals on the nuances of gender representation, promoting inclusivity, and cultivating an understanding of the impact language and framing can have on perpetuating stereotypes. Developing guidelines specifically tailored to gender coverage further reinforces the commitment to balanced and unbiased reporting.

### 2. Develop safety training for journalists and harassment protocols

Prioritising the safety of journalists is paramount. Newsrooms should introduce training programmes that address the unique challenges faced by journalists, especially regarding gender-based harassment. By establishing clear and effective protocols for handling harassment cases, newsrooms can better ensure a safe working environment. This recommendation aims to mitigate risks and protect journalists from intimidation, thereby safeguarding their ability to report freely.

### 3. Intensify research on gender representation in the media and the portrayal of violence against women and girls

To address the gaps identified in the research, there is a need to intensify efforts in collecting data on gender representation in the media. This includes ongoing research initiatives, surveys, and studies to continuously monitor and analyse how women and girls are portrayed in media content. A comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is crucial for implementing informed

strategies and interventions.

### 4. Increase collaboration with NGOs and audience engagement

Enhancing collaboration between media organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and actively engaging with the audience are pivotal steps. Partnering with NGOs allows for a more coordinated approach to tackle gender stereotypes, human rights issues, and promote press freedom. Additionally, involving the audience in discussions and initiatives helps build awareness and encourages a collective effort in challenging and transforming societal norms.

### 5. Engage stakeholders to influence policy commitments

Multisectoral engagement, including stakeholders such as governments and media institutions, is key to influencing policy changes. Stakeholders should encourage commitment to gender equality policies within institutions to foster an environment that supports inclusive and equitable representation. It is essential that advocacy and collaboration are used to drive systemic change at both the governmental and organisational levels.

The media plays an undeniable role in forming and disseminating perceptions of gender. In recent years there have been initiatives by gender-focused groups and media professionals to address the lack of research and guidelines regarding coverage of women in the media, women's issues, and LGBTQIA+ issues. These efforts have started to pave the way for open discussions on the issue of gender-sensitive media coverage, particularly on issues such as violence against women and girls.

---

<sup>1</sup> Freedom House, 2023. Freedom in the World 2023: Marking 50 Years in the Struggle for Democracy. [Online]. Available at: [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW\\_World\\_2023\\_DigitalPDF.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf) [Accessed 1 December 2023]

<sup>2</sup> Media Ownership Monitor, n.d. Philippines. [Online]. Available at: <https://philippines.mom-gmr.org/en/owners>. [Accessed 29 November 2023]

<sup>3</sup> Masduki, Leen D'Haenens, 2022. Concentration of Media Ownership in Indonesia: A Setback for Viewpoint Diversity International Journal of Communication 16(2022), 2239–2259. Available at: <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/17769>. [Accessed 29 November 2023]

<sup>4</sup> Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2023. Digital News Report 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2023> [Accessed 29 November 2023]

# Indonesia

By Lestari Nurhajati

## Country Overview

According to Freedom House's 2023 'Freedom in the World' report, Indonesia is deemed as 'partly free' with a score of 58/100.<sup>1</sup> The score shows that the country is considered to have sufficient freedom and has a "political right" score of 30/40 and a "civil liberties" score of 28/60. However, with a population of 273.8 million people<sup>2</sup>, the Indonesian state still has various problems related to human rights that need to be overcome.

In particular, women and LGBT+ people were highlighted as facing discrimination, attacks, and harassment, with Sharia-based ordinances in many districts disproportionately being enforced against women and LGBT+ people. Ethnic minorities are also targeted: "Some national laws and numerous local ordinances discriminate against women either explicitly or in effect. LGBT+ people suffer from widespread discrimination, inflammatory and discriminatory rhetoric from authorities, and attacks by hard-line Islamist groups. Ethnic Chinese, who make up approximately 1 percent of the population, are vulnerable to harassment."<sup>3</sup> This reality is juxtaposed to women enjoying full political rights, with political parties being subject to a 30% gender quota for candidates and steering committees. Nonetheless, "women remain underrepresented in electoral politics."<sup>4</sup>

Indonesia possesses a vibrant and diverse media landscape, though it is not without its troubles. According to Media Landscapes, the lack of special permissions to establish media organisations or become a journalist has led to a large number of media outlets – an estimated 47,000 media by 2017. Of this figure, up to 2,000 were printed media, 1,166 radios, 674 televisions, and 43,300 online media.<sup>5</sup>

The level of media professionalism is at odds with the large number of media outlets, with only 16% (321 print media) qualifying as professional media. For online media, only 0.5% (211 outlets) were regarded as professional. For journalists, there were 100,000 estimated workers by 2017,

with 11% being categorised as professional journalists.<sup>6</sup>

According to Freedom House, Indonesia's media landscape faces legal and regulatory restrictions that hamper press freedom – notably when covering sensitive subjects including LGBT+, organised crime, sexual assault and corruption.

Indonesia ranks 87th out of 146 countries in the World Economic Forum's 'Global Gender Gap Report 2023,'<sup>7</sup> a rise from 92/146 in 2022.<sup>8</sup> An index score of 0.698 indicates significant gender gaps in health, education, economic participation and opportunity, and political engagement.

Referring to the Gender Inequality Index (GII), 2021 Indonesia was ranked 114th out of 191 countries surveyed.<sup>9</sup> In 2021, Indonesia's score was 0.444, which indicates a reasonably high level of gender inequality, especially in health and political engagement. Indonesia dropped from its 2020 score of 0.447 (Ranked 107 out of 165).<sup>10</sup>

The condition of gender inequality in Indonesia is also evident in existing media coverage as noted in the 2020 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) report.<sup>11</sup> The report highlights several issues of gender representation in Indonesian media that still need attention, including:

- 1. Inequality in the number of women in editorial positions and media leadership.** The GMMP report shows that only about a third of all leadership positions in the Indonesian mass media are held by women.
- 2. Gender stereotypes in the news.** Women are still portrayed in the media in traditional roles or sexual objects, while men are often portrayed in more dominant and powerful roles. This reinforces existing gender views in society and can influence people's perceptions of women and men.
- 3. Lack of representation of women in the news.** Women only appear in about 30% of national news and 23% of local news.

The GMMP however highlights some positive

changes in gender representation in, such as the increasing number of women as sources, writers, and journalists. This shows that efforts to create balanced gender representation in the Indonesian mass media are ongoing.

Meanwhile, the strengthening of conservative Islamic groups in Indonesia has seemingly played a role in the media's approach towards women. For example, the media's tendency to make films showing the role of women as domestic figures who are subservient to their husbands, has resulted in a gender-based reductionism in which women are portrayed as weaker, irrational, and emotional beings (Abdullah & Osman, 2018).

## Representation of women and girls in the media

### Portrayal of women and girls in media

Despite the large number of media in Indonesia, the representation of women and girls in Indonesia is still inferior. Women and girls are portrayed across news, commercials, television programmes, and films but research shows that they are often ignored in news programmes or only appear in small numbers (Hutami & Syafirah, 2018; Santi, 2019; Aspinall, White & Safirani, 2021). In addition, the representation of women and girls in Indonesian media is often stereotypically limited to roles such as mother, wife, or sexual object (Watie, 2016; Astuti, 2016; Farihah, 2016; Yuliantini, 2021). When women and girls are represented in Indonesian media, patriarchal and conservative religious values are typically adopted and displayed. This leads to gender inequality and decreased access for women to be involved and represented equally in the media.

The issue is worsened by the poor regulation of media in television and radio. Studies show that the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI) have overlooked the issue of the strengthening of patriarchy across television adverts, soap operas, and radio broadcasts (Safira, 2017; Savitri, 2018). In addition, women in advertisements on television are still displayed as objects of sexuality and physical attractiveness, not people who possess intellectual potential. (Zarra, 2022).

### Depiction of VAWG

Media has legitimised gender biases by accepting the exploitation of females' physical appearance as normal and acceptable. Research used by Gunawan (2020) highlights the case of Baiq Nuril Maknun, a woman who was a victim of sexual harassment yet was prosecuted for defamation. Over the course of 2018-2019, Indonesian media outlets covered the case extensively albeit with differences: Koran Tempo, the most liberal newspaper, employed empowering language to describe Nuril. Representing conservative media, Republika avoided discussing social and legal issues and placed Nuril in a traditionally feminine role. Meanwhile Kompas, a moderate media outlet, raised the issue of law and female independence. The diversity of the findings implies that interested parties strongly influence news content and notably how they are represented when they experience violence.

The way Nuril's case was covered is not an isolated incident. Research has shown that victims of violence have been portrayed negatively, as guilty parties, described with disrespectful and trivial language, and presented in unbalanced ways that harm women (Indrasty, 2017; Nurhajati, 2019).

According to Siti Mazumah, Director of Legal Aid at the Indonesian Women's Association for Justice (LBH APIK), news reporting on violence against women and girls has improved in recent years, with a decrease in "misogynistic reporting or cornering of women victims" and the inclusion of women's perspectives. However, misogynistic views are still ever-present. Siti highlighted that when there are discussions surrounding domestic violence, blame is often placed on women in such cases, with the violence attributed to factors such as women not serving their husbands. Siti further emphasised that women are frequently held responsible, even in situations where jealousy or affairs are involved, with a common narrative being that women failed to maintain household integrity, leading to violence or wrongdoing by their partners. Even in cases when violence extends to children, the woman is still blamed. While she noted a recent decrease in news stories that explicitly blame and objectify women, she nonetheless acknowledged the normalisation of violence against women. In



contrast, when violence happens to men, it is framed differently, not attributing blame based on physical appearance but treating it purely as a crime or criminal offence.

In 2020, Konde.co – an Indonesian media outlet focused on the perspectives of women and minorities – conducted a study, “Media Reporting on the Draft Law on the Elimination of Sexual Violence and How Consistent is the Media in Reporting Sexual Violence?”<sup>12</sup> The study set out to analyse the news content of three online media (Okezone, Tribunnews, and Kompas.com) over the period of July to August 2020. The Draft Law on the Elimination of Sexual Violence (RUU P-KS) was withdrawn in July 2020. The three online media outlets were selected based on their top three positions on Alexa, a global website ranking system.

The research found that the media was inconsistent in reporting the issue of sexual violence from the perspective of justice for victims, and still made use of sensationalism in their writing. News about the Bill accounted for less than 3% each month, with stories that were typically normative and that did not provide education to the public about its importance.

The study also found that the sources used in reporting on the Bill were not diverse and were dominated by the People’s Representative Council (DPR), the government, the Ministry of Women Empowerment And Child Protection (PPPA), and state institutions. Sufficient space was not provided for the voices of sexual violence advocates or women activists. “When we look at the news about sexual violence, the media is good at reporting sexual violence that occurs against children from the perspective of child victims. However, the media still ignores women’s perspectives. This can be seen from the sensational diction and adds to the violence for the female victims,” the researchers reported.

Results further showed that the media outlets would write positively for events that were monitored by the public, such as through social media and institutions that advocate the issue of sexual violence. On the other hand, for events not monitored by the public, such as the issue of sexual violence in general, the media would publish sensationalist content against women who are victims of sexual violence.

“From these results, Konde.co sees that the media does not yet have an agenda for reporting on sexual violence. If there is an issue that is hot in the public, then the media will write about it, but if it is not popular or viral in the public, then the media will report it badly.”

In a February 2023 press release, the Press Council said it was committed to presenting internal regulations for preventing and handling sexual violence:<sup>13</sup>

**“The Press Council will facilitate the formation of guidelines for reporting sexual violence as a reference for every journalist in writing news related to incidents of sexual violence. This idea stems from concerns regarding the findings of content analysis carried out by the Press Council in the press data collection stage and has been followed up through research into reporting on sexual violence, especially in cyber media.”**

The mention of cyber media is noteworthy in the Indonesian context as there is similarly an element of victim-blaming for women and girls who experience violence. In a November 2023 article calling on social media platforms to take regulatory steps to mitigate the spread of non-consensual intimate content, the organisations Konde.co and Remotivi noted the case of celebrity Rebecca Klopper.<sup>14</sup> Klopper, whose intimate video was shared online by an ex-boyfriend without her consent, subsequently held a press conference to apologise – despite being the victim herself.

“Like other cases of sexual violence against women. The victim blaming narrative easily targets victims of the spread of non-consensual intimate content. [...] In cases like this, the public, the police and the media usually immediately focus on who the victim and perpetrator are. Even with treatment that mostly blames the victim. In fact, for crimes committed in the digital space, we should also point the finger at social media platforms for responsibility,” the organisations said.

#### **Shortcomings within Indonesian newsrooms**

Research shows that news content tends to follow a pattern of male-dominating power, and that gender discrimination is compounded by the



small number of women journalists and editors in the mass media, a lack of understanding of gender affirmations, placement of journalist coverage, and a double burden that falls on female journalists (Pratiwi et al., 2021).

Stellarosa and Silaban (2019) similarly reported that male journalists are still dominant in the media and that few female journalists are at the top of management, face discrimination in the workplace and do not receive the same treatment or benefits or health facilities such as the provision of lactation rooms. Although female journalists have fought for gender equality, the deeply embedded patriarchal culture can make women, especially married ones, lose their enthusiasm and professionalism to reach the top ranks within media.

Newsrooms that are not gender sensitive are one of the issues experienced by many online media today. The editor-in-chief's policy and journalists' limited knowledge of gender-sensitive reporting methods are also widely discussed in various studies in Indonesia.

In her insights, Sonya Helen Sinombar, a senior editor at Kompas newspaper, delves into the intricacies of gender-sensitive reporting challenges within her newsroom. She emphasises a crucial hurdle related to the completeness and accuracy of information. The impediment, she clarifies, does not originate from editorial directives against covering specific topics, but rather from the journalists' struggles in acquiring comprehensive data. This challenge poses a dilemma for editors who are hesitant to publish incomplete news. Sonya underscores the importance of journalists maintaining persistence in gathering facts and data directly from the field.

Another significant challenge Sonya highlights is the difficulty in conducting interviews with victims. In such cases, the inherent complexity arises from the reluctance of sources, often victims, to share their experiences. Establishing trust becomes pivotal, and Sonya suggests the necessity of robust validation tools, such as police reports or expert opinions, to substantiate the veracity of the reported cases.

Betty Herlina, Founder and Editor-in-Chief of Bincangperempuan.com sheds light on distinct challenges in gender-sensitive reporting and draws attention to the misconception that

discussing women's empowerment immediately brands journalists as feminists. The ultimate goal is not for women to dominate, but to achieve equal representation and discourse in public spaces.

Betty articulates challenges related to attracting readership. In a media landscape often prioritising business, articles addressing women's issues may struggle to gain page views. She notes the dynamics of her platform's readership, consisting mostly of organic readers actively seeking content about women. However, the challenge arises when attempting to broaden the audience beyond those who intentionally seek such content.

She also addresses the scarcity of gender-specific data, particularly in the areas of family planning and abortion. The lack of comprehensive data makes it challenging to construct informed narratives around these issues. Additionally, Betty highlights the difficulty in finding female sources willing to speak on these topics, further limiting the depth and breadth of the reporting.

## The needs of media organisations

To analyse both the challenges and opportunities related to gender issues in the Indonesian media landscape, five interviews were conducted including with representatives from a female focused NGO, a senior editor at a newspaper, an editor-in-chief at a non-profit media organisation, a director of a women's association, and a manager of news at a public television channel. These interviews are featured alongside desk research of pertinent impediments and gaps that exist within media organisations and the wider media landscape in Indonesia.

## Poor adherence to policies and codes

In Indonesia, four journalist organisations are officially registered at the Press Council. These are the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI); the Indonesian Photo Reporters; the Indonesian Television Journalist Association (IJTI); and the Indonesian Journalists Union (PWI). All journalist organisations have regulations and codes of conduct, although the Code of Ethics for Journalists comes from the Press Council.

Despite this official journalistic code of ethics, in practice there are still many violations committed by journalists and allowed by media managers, especially in reporting on women and girls issues. For example, there are still many journalists who are not gender-responsive and commit infractions such as publishing the addresses of workplaces, places of school, and residences of victims of violence (Astria, Nuzuli & Handayani, 2021). Meanwhile, for the issue of reporting on violence to girls, the media largely focuses on the sadism of the perpetrators, the exploitation of the victim's body, and the chronology of events in language that is too vulgar – and not on the girls and their situation (Herlina, 2018).

In response to the low levels of gender-sensitivity of journalists and media in reporting on women and girls, several organisations initiated a compilation of modules and disseminated them to journalists. In 2017, the "Guide to Journalists with Women and Children Perspective" was published by Yayasan Bursa Pengetahuan Kawasan Timur Indonesia (BaKTI)<sup>15</sup> with support from the Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (MAMPU). In the same year, in collaboration with PWI, the Ministry of Protection and Empowerment of Women and Children issued "In the Name of a Fact, Gender Responsive Reporting Guidelines, Reporting Guidelines, Print, Electronic, and Online Media."<sup>16</sup> Still, in the same year, AJI Makassar published "Guide for Journalists in Reporting Children's Issues," which followed the 2016 publication of "Seeing Women from Behind the Editor's Desk (Guide for Journalists)."<sup>17</sup> Unfortunately, the two books published by AJI Makassar are not easily accessible to journalists. On the other hand, for journalist organisations, there remains "sectoral egos" who have pushed back against using guidelines produced by different organisations.

Muhammad Yusuf, TVRI Executive Producer of News and Current Affairs, said, "We don't have a book guide yet internally, but we use P3SPS [Broadcasting Code of Conduct and Broadcast Program Standards] by KPI. So when we go to the field, the point is in research; we try our best to do research. Later, if we meet a female resource person who is difficult to get, yes, we usually offer to blur her visual, and her voice is reduced like a Micky Mouse's voice. Usually, the source

person wants it too."

Betty (Bincangperempuan.com) also explains: "We have SOP [Standard Operating Procedures] [and we] also have regulation of sexual harassment [...] but we do not have guidebooks. But indeed we have emphasised that our products must meet the journalistic code of ethics." She also said that there is a media advisor who provides feedback on sensitive issues, while an NGO's resources and material will also be consulted.

Whilst the government and regulators produce codes and ethical guidelines it appears that an accessible guide to using them may be of value to the media industry in addition to cross collaboration for detecting of any bias when reporting on sensitive issues.

Fajri Fatmawati, General Manager of Femini.id, in their interview discusses how all members of media workers from journalists to photographers need to have access to training but often the NGOs do not have capacity or the finances to be able to offer it for free.

Various initiatives to conduct reporting support and training on gender-sensitive reporting have been carried out by organisations such as AJI and the Journalist's Union for Diversity (SEJUK).<sup>18</sup> These initiatives must not only continue to be supported by various stakeholders but must consider other vulnerable groups. Notably, SEJUK in April 2016, proposed the News Coverage Guidelines for Diversity Issues to the board of the Press Council during an open discussion event. According to SEJUK, the need to formulate guidelines stemmed from the "dysfunctional" way Indonesian media reported on diversity issues, including religious and racial diversity. "This dysfunctional media problem continues to occur because there is no more serious political agenda in newsrooms regarding professionalism, impartiality, and independence," SEJUK reported.<sup>19</sup> The guidelines were subsequently proposed and submitted to the Press Council for discussion and ratification by SEJUK, AJI, IJTI, and AMSI (the Indonesian Cyber Media Association).<sup>20</sup>

However, despite work on the guidelines dating back to 2016, the Press Council only issued the guidelines as an official regulation in November 2022.<sup>21</sup>

### The rise and struggles of women's media

There are many media outlets in Indonesia that engage in women's rights and equality. In April-May 2023, Konde.co conducted a mapping of women's media in Indonesia and invited almost every online media concerned with women's issues to be involved in a discussion forum. Fifteen online media were present: Konde.co, Digital Mama, Katong NTT, Bincang Perempuan, Srikandi Lintas Iman, Suluh Perempuan, Femini, Live Bengkulu, Tentang Puan, Perempuan Berkabar, Mubadalah, Bincang Muslimah, Perempuan Berkisah, Tungku Menyala, and Jalastoria (one print media and one radio followed suit).

Konde.co published its findings with support of the Google News Initiative<sup>22</sup> and noted that while several studies have been conducted on the role of female journalists in developing gender policies in mainstream media, there has yet to be research on how journalists build alternative women's media. The findings showed that women's media in Indonesia face various challenges, including uneven representation, stereotypes that narrow views of women, and the dissemination of inaccurate information (Nurhajati et al, 2023; pp. 25).

Other key research findings were:

- **Difficulty in changing editorial culture.** Mainstream media admitted that it was difficult to change the existing editorial culture.
- **Difficulty in maintaining business.** Media houses reported that maintaining their media business was a major issue and face financial problems, especially in the case of print. Their problems are compounded by a decline in advertising revenue as well as changes in business models.
- **Alternative women's media in particular are working with limited resources.** As a result, the newsrooms are flexible, with editors also working as journalists and vice versa.
- **Mainstream media's adoption of women's issues.** Mainstream media outlets have also started to open their own special channels for women's issues on their websites. However, they face the same challenges as newly emerging online media, including

trouble with gaining readership, finances, and maintaining a critical attitude.

### The role of online media

There are many media outlets in Indonesia that engage in women's rights and equality. In April-May 2023, Konde.co conducted a mapping of women's media in Indonesia and invited almost every online media concerned with women's issues to be involved in a discussion forum.

It is undeniable that it is more effective and efficient if efforts to strengthen reporting on the rights of women and girls are carried out intensively through online media. Media consumption patterns in Indonesia are currently trending towards a rise in the popularity and fame of online media outlets. This is because mass media consumers are largely monopolised by the digital native generation (Kristiyono, 2015; Kusuma, 2016; Qorib, 2020). However, television is also still one of the popular sources of news and information for Indonesian people (Hidayat, 2016; Abdullah & Puspitasari, 2018; Handayani & Merdekawati, 2019).

Online media's popularity is reflected in advertising spending. Advertisements in online media account for 15% of advertising spending in Indonesia. In comparison, 7% of advertising is spent in print and radio media. In Indonesia, television still surpasses all other media; television recorded advertising spending worth USD 19.2 billion or around IDR 287.82 trillion until the end of 2022, with 78% of the market.<sup>23</sup>

Although there are several alternative media, especially online media, that are very concerned about gender equality issues, the online mainstream media that are most widely accessed by the Indonesian people (based on similarweb.com), such as Detik.com, Kompas.com, Tribunnews.com, Pikiranrakyat.com, and Suara.com, still need attention, especially in the newsroom system and its field journalists, who must be encouraged to pay attention to gender-sensitive values.

Research has shown how online spaces are increasingly becoming unsafe for women. During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were 30 cases of online violence against women in Indonesia in March and April 2020 alone.<sup>24</sup>

**“Many forms of online sex-based violence exist and most of them aim to intimidate, humiliate, and dominate women. Some of them are online sexual harassment, fear of sharing personal content with exploitation themes, dating violence, and online extortion. Surprisingly, not all women in Indonesia understand and report these forms of violence to the National Commission for the Protection of Women or related agencies due to the lack of information and socialisation from local governments during the pandemic. As a result, this issue marks a long list of solutions involving governments and the private sector to make online violence worse.”**

### Safety of women journalists

Unfortunately, there are still many cases of violence against women journalists, both internally and when reporting. Research conducted by Suprihatin & Azis, 2020 found that victims who experienced verbal abuse led to physical abuse. From the impact aspect, women journalists said that they experienced trauma, although not prolonged, and stated that they chose not to pursue the case they experienced to the realm of law.

Fajri (Femini.id), said that a colleague of hers has experienced sexual harassment in the working world: “This happened, but it’s not in my media. The perpetrators are mostly from among ourselves, from among journalists themselves. From the editorial circle of the office and the journalist’s friends, many of them. And we only discussed it yesterday, so I remember it very well. The forms vary; it can be physical abuse, words, including through WhatsApp messages, friends [and] outside parties cannot help directly because the problem becomes very closed, and psychologically must also be very disturbed. There are also from the [sources]; if here, it is more physical. The source persons are government people, as well as the police officer.”

A similar situation was also told by Sonya Helen Sinombar, Senior Editor of Kompas newspaper: “I remember women journalists experiencing harassment and violence in many ways, including when reporting. Some time ago, for example, Metro’s journalist friends, both women and men,

were harassed and ridiculed by radical groups. If there is the issue of sexual harassment outside, I often hear, then there is a young journalist: one time she was reporting at night wanting to find a public figure. Suddenly, she came home and told me that this public figure asked to meet alone in a hotel or somewhere. There are indications of harassment from the way this person stares at her. It’s already strange. I happened to know a colleague of this political party figure, and I also called asking for a call to be conveyed to the person concerned not to disturb my colleague.”

Betty (Bincangperempuan.com) when discussing journalist safety reported that they prioritise emotional and physical well-being but lack detailed safety manuals. Betty collaborates with women and child protection organisations to uphold ethical standards in reporting. Although they haven’t measured the impact quantitatively, Betty noticed indirect influence, with others referencing their articles and images for women’s issues in Bengkulu. However, they lack detailed analysis of their coverage’s frequency or its impact.

The experiences of the interviewees are echoed in separate reports from local and international organisations.

In 2021, PR2Media<sup>25</sup>, an institution that focuses on research and advocacy for regulation and media regulators, issued the Module on Preventing and Overcoming Violence against Women Journalists. In 2023, PR2 Media and AJI also published a research report on Sexual Violence against Indonesian Women Journalists.<sup>26</sup> The research showed that of 852 female journalists from 34 provinces in Indonesia, 82.6% (704) of respondents had experienced sexual violence throughout their journalistic careers.

Similarly, 2022 research from Internews on violence against female journalists in Indonesia<sup>27</sup> highlighted the findings of a survey of 1,256 respondents and six interviews of female journalists across 191 cities. The findings underscored a pervasive issue of violence against female journalists - a staggering 85.7% reported experiencing violence during their journalistic careers, with 70.1% facing a dual threat of digital and physical violence. Notably, offline body-shaming comments (59%) and online disturbing/harassing comments (48%) emerged as the most prevalent forms of violence across both domains.

The research further showed that, in response to these challenges, 52% of respondents opted to report incidents to superiors or co-workers, while 29% sought help from relevant organisations, such as journalist associations. Additionally, 10% chose to file lawsuits. "Other responses were to solve the problem independently, such as through personal confrontation, direct rebuke, discussions, counterattacks, recounting to relatives, and writing articles," the report said.

The survey also sought suggestions for supporting tools and assistance to prevent or address violence. Training emerged as the most recommended solution (40%), followed by guidelines or modules on preventing and overcoming violence (29%), legal aid or assistance (23%), and psychological assistance (7%).

Meanwhile, the research's interviews with six

female journalists revealed disturbing instances of sexual violence perpetrated by sources in both digital and physical domains. Digital forms ranged from seductive messages to explicit photos sent via messaging apps, while physical violations included unwanted touching, hugging, and inappropriate proposals. Non-sexual violence often stemmed from the journalists' reporting activities, with instances of death threats received via various channels, including direct messages, telephone calls, and social media.

Although the survey data did not strongly correlate violence to specific reporting topics, the interviews highlighted that female journalists face increased vulnerability when covering risky issues, particularly those related to gender, sexuality (LGBTQIA+), and the environment.

---

## Recommendations

Indonesian stakeholders should adopt human rights-aligned policies, provide gender-responsive training, and advocate for government and media institutions' active support in promoting gender-sensitive journalism.

**1**

### **Adopt policies aligning with Indonesia's human rights standards**

Media outlets should adopt policies aligning with Indonesia's human rights standards, specifically emphasising non-discrimination against women and women's groups. Given the media's role as a non-discrimination campaigner, guided by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), it is crucial for media organisations to develop a comprehensive guidebook on human rights and gender issues. This should include specific guidelines on how to ethically cover news related to violence against women and girls. The development of such guidelines and policies should be developed and/or supported by the Press Council and the official journalist organisations, the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI); the Indonesian Photo Reporters; the Indonesian Television Journalist Association (IJTI); and the Indonesian Journalists Union (PWI).

**2**

### **Prioritise education and training**

Newsroom decision-makers and journalists should prioritise undergoing education and training on gender-responsive reporting and patriarchal issues. To empower media newsrooms with diverse perspectives, media organisations – whether individually or collaboratively – should conduct regular workshops on gender issues, particularly focusing on journalists working in areas such as criminal and justice reporting.



## 3

### Advocate for influence

Stakeholders should advocate for increased efforts in influencing government bodies and independent institutions linked to the media, such as the Press Council and the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (KPI), to actively support gender equality initiatives and the upholding of a high quality of gender-sensitive journalism. The existing gaps in these institutions' commitment to gender equality must be acknowledged and stakeholders must encourage them to play a more proactive role in advancing these efforts.

---

## Research References

- Abdullah, N., & Mohamed Osman, M. N. (2018). Islamisation in the Indonesian media spaces new sites for a conservative push. *Journal of Religious and Political Practice*, 4(3), 214-232.
- Abdullah, A., & Puspitasari, L., 2018. Media televisi di era internet. *ProTVF*, 2(1), 101-110.
- Artini, Nurhajati, L., Hartiningsih, M., 2017. Atas Nama Sebuah Fakta, Panduan Liputan Responsif Gender, Pedoman Liputan, Media Cetak, Elektronik dan Online. Kementerian Perlindungan dan Pemberdayaan Anak Perempuan dan PWI.
- Aspinall, E., White, S., & Savirani, A., 2021. Women's Political Representation in Indonesia: Who Wins and How?. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 40(1), 3-27.
- Astria, K. K., Nuzuli, A. K., & Handayani, F., 2021. Etika Jurnalistik, Perempuan dan Pemberitaan Pelecehan Seksual di Media Online. *Ishlah: Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin, Adab Dan Dakwah*, 3(2), 191-199.
- Astuti, Y. D., 2016. Media dan Gender (Studi Deskriptif Representasi Stereotipe Perempuan dalam Iklan di Televisi Swasta). *Profetik: Jurnal Komunikasi*, 9(2), 25-32.
- Dewans Pers, 2023. Dewan Pers akan Fasilitasi Pembentukan Pedoman Pemberitaan Kekerasan Seksual. Online. Available at: [https://dewanpers.or.id/assets/documents/siaranpers/2023-02-08\\_Siaran\\_Pers\\_-\\_Dewan\\_Pers\\_akan\\_Fasilitasi\\_Pembentukan\\_Pedoman\\_Pemberitaan\\_Kekerasan\\_Seksual.pdf](https://dewanpers.or.id/assets/documents/siaranpers/2023-02-08_Siaran_Pers_-_Dewan_Pers_akan_Fasilitasi_Pembentukan_Pedoman_Pemberitaan_Kekerasan_Seksual.pdf)
- Fariyah, I., 2016. Seksisme perempuan dalam budaya pop media Indonesia. *PALASTREN: Jurnal Studi Gender*, 6(1), 223-244.
- Freedom House, 2021. Freedom of the World report. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/freedom-world/2021>
- Freedom House, 2023. Freedom of the World report. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/freedom-world/2023>
- Gunawan, A., 2020. The Case of Criminalized Victim Baiq Nuril: A Narrative Case Study of Female Representation in Indonesian Media.
- Handayani, F. P., & Merdekawati, I., 2019. Kebijakan penggunaan media online website Kompas TV dan Youtube untuk menyalurkan konten "eksklusif digital" Kompas TV. *Jurnal Kajian Jurnalisme*, 2(2).
- Herlina, O., 2018. Pemberitaan Kasus Kekerasan Terhadap Anak Dalam Media Online: Studi Kasus Kompas.Com Dan Sindonews.Com. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi AKRAB*, 3(2). Available at: <https://ojs.akrb.ac.id/index.php/ojs2021/article/view/4> [accessed 28 Novemebr 2023]
- Hidayat, Z., 2016. Dampak Teknologi Digital Terhadap Perubahan Konsumsi Media Masyarakat. *KOMUNIKOLOGI: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Komunikasi*, 13(2).



- Hutami, M. F., & Sjafirah, N. A., 2018. Framing media online Tribunnews. Com terhadap sosok perempuan dalam berita video pornografi Depok. *Jurnal Kajian Jurnalisme*, 2(1), 25-43.
- Indrasty, R., 2017. Gender dalam kasus kekerasan terhadap perempuan di media online: studi kualitatif analisis wacana dalam peristiwa pembunuhan Eno di Pojosusel. com edisi Mei 2016 (Doctoral dissertation, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung).
- Konde.co, 2020. Media Reporting on the Draft Law on the Elimination of Sexual Violence and How Consistent is the media Reporting Sexual Violence? [Online]. Available at: <https://www.konde.co/2020/12/riset-konde-co-media-melakukan-sensasionalisme-dan-tidak-konsisten-dalam-beritakan-isu-kekerasan-seksual.html/>
- Kristiyono, J., 2015. Budaya internet: Perkembangan teknologi informasi dan komunikasi dalam mendukung penggunaan media di masyarakat. *Scriptura*, 5(1), 23-30.
- Kusuma, S., 2016. Posisi media cetak di tengah perkembangan media online di Indonesia. *Jurnal InterAct*, 5(1), 56-71.
- Murtiningsih, B. S. E., Advenita, G. M., & Ikom, S., 2017. Representation of Patriarchal Culture in New Media: A case study of News and Advertisement on Tribunnews. com. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 8(3), 143.
- Nurhajati, L., 2019. Indonesia: Diversities and media discrimination. Book Chapter: Transnational Othering—Global Diversities: Media, extremism and free expression. Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Nurhajati, L., Afrida, N., Aini, N., 2023. Mapping the Condition of Women's Media in Indonesia. p25. Available at: <https://www.konde.co/2023/06/riset-konde-co-tentang-pemetaan-kondisi-media-perempuan-di-indonesia.html>.
- Pratiwi, H. D., Sunarto, S., & Lukmantoro, T., 2021. Diskriminasi Gender terhadap Jurnalis Perempuan di Media. *Interaksi Online*, 9(3), 111-125.
- Qorib, F., 2020. Pola Konsumsi Media pada Generasi Milenial Kota Malang. *Ultimacomm: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 12(1), 53-71.
- Safira, A., 2017. Perceptions of Islamic advertising held by Indonesian Muslims. Available at: <http://researcharchive.vuw.ac.nz/handle/10063/6758>.
- Santi, E. T., 2019. Representasi citra politisi perempuan di parlemen (Analisis framing dalam pemberitaan Voaindonesia. Com dan Mediaindonesia. Com). *DIALEKTIKA KOMUNIKA: Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi dan Pembangunan Daerah*, 7(2), 22-32.
- Savitri, E. D., 2018. Wacana Ekspresi Kritik Sosial Masyarakat terhadap Sinetron melalui Meme Internet. *IPEK Journal of Proceedings Series*, (5), 13-21.
- Stellarosa, Y., & Silaban, M. W., 2019. Perempuan, media dan profesi jurnalis. *Jurnal Kajian Komunikasi*, 7(1), 97-109.
- Suprihatin, S., & Azis, A. M., 2020. Pelecehan Seksual Pada Jurnalis Perempuan di Indonesia. *PALASTREN: Jurnal Studi Gender*, 13(2), 413-434.
- United Nations Development Programme, n.d. Gender Inequality Index GII). [Online]. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>
- United Nations Development Programme, 2021. Human Development Report 2021/2022. [Online]. Available at: [https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf\\_1.pdf](https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/global-report-document/hdr2021-22pdf_1.pdf)
- Who Makes the News, 2020. Global Media Monitoring Project. [Online]. Available at: [https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GMMP2020.ENG\\_FINAL\\_.pdf](https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GMMP2020.ENG_FINAL_.pdf)

- Watie, E. D. S., 2016. Representasi Wanita Dalam Media Massa Masa Kini. *Jurnal The Messenger*, 2(2), 1-10.
- World Economic Forum, 2022. Global Gender Gap Report 2022. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022>
- World Economic Forum, 2023. Global Gender Gap Report 2023. Available at: [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2023.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2023.pdf)
- Yuliantini, M. F., 2021. Ketimpangan gender di layar perak: Representasi perempuan di film terlaris Indonesia. *Umbara*, 6(2), 78-93.
- Yayasan Bakti, 2017. Panduan Jurnalis Berperspektif Perempuan dan Anak. Available at: [https://pintarmampu.bakti.or.id/sites/default/files/dokumen/panduan%20jurnalis-EDIT\\_0.pdf](https://pintarmampu.bakti.or.id/sites/default/files/dokumen/panduan%20jurnalis-EDIT_0.pdf)
- Zarra, Z. A. V. M., 2022. KESETARAAN GENDER DALAM PERSPEKTIF MEDIA IKLAN: Kesetaraan Gender Dalam Perspektif Media Iklan. *Jurnal Komunikasi Pemberdayaan*, 1(2), 104-112.

---

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Freedom House, 2023. Freedom of the World report. [Online]. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/freedom-world/2023> [accessed 24 November 2023]

<sup>2</sup> Population Stat, n.d. Indonesia Population. [Online]. Available at: <https://populationstat.com/indonesia/> [accessed 24 November 2023]

<sup>3</sup> Freedom House, 2023. Freedom of the World report. [Online]. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/indonesia/freedom-world/2023> [accessed 24 November 2023]

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Media Landscapes, n.d. Indonesia. [Online]. Available at: <https://medialandscapes.org/country/indonesia> [accessed 23 November 2023]

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> World Economic Forum, 2023. Global Gender Gap Report 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023/> [accessed 24 November 2023]

<sup>8</sup> World Economic Forum, 2022. Global Gender Gap Report 2022. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2022/> [accessed 24 November 2023]

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Development Programme, n.d.. Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII> [accessed 20 November 2023]

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Development Programme, n.d.. Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2020. [Online]. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII> [accessed 20 November 2023]

<sup>11</sup> Who Makes the News, 2020. Global Media Monitoring project 2020. [Online]. Available at: [https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GMMP2020.ENG\\_FINAL20210713.pdf](https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GMMP2020.ENG_FINAL20210713.pdf) [accessed 20 November 2023]

<sup>12</sup> Konde.co, 2020. Riset Konde.co: Media Lakukan Sensasionalisme dan Tidak Konsisten Beritakan Isu Kekerasan Seksual. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.konde.co/2020/12/riset-konde-co-media-melakukan-sensasionalisme-dan-tidak-konsisten-dalam-beritakan-isu-kekerasan-seksual.html/>

[accessed 23 November 2023]

<sup>13</sup> Dewan Pers, 2023. Dewan Pers akan Fasilitasi Pembentukan Pedoman Pemberitaan Kekerasan Seksual. [Online]. Available at: [https://dewanpers.or.id/assets/documents/siaranpers/2023-02-08\\_Siaran\\_Pers\\_-\\_Dewan\\_Pers\\_akan\\_Fasilitasi\\_Pembentukan\\_Pedoman\\_Pemberitaan\\_Kekerasan\\_Seksual.pdf](https://dewanpers.or.id/assets/documents/siaranpers/2023-02-08_Siaran_Pers_-_Dewan_Pers_akan_Fasilitasi_Pembentukan_Pedoman_Pemberitaan_Kekerasan_Seksual.pdf) [Accessed 24 November 2023]

<sup>14</sup> Konde.co. Social Media Platforms Must Take Responsibility in Preventing the Dissemination of Non-Consensual Intimate Content. [Online]. Available at <https://www.konde.co/2023/11/platform-sosmed-mesti-ikut-tanggung-jawab-cegah-penyebaran-konten-intim-non-konsensual.html/> [accessed 22 November 2023]

<sup>15</sup> BaKTI, n.d.. Guide to Journalists with Women and Children Perspective. [Online]. Available at: <https://bakti.or.id/>

<sup>16</sup> The Ministry of Protection and Empowerment of Women and Children, n.d.. Gender Responsive Reporting Guidelines, Reporting Guidelines, Print, Electronic, and Online Media. [Online] Available at: <https://www.kemenpppa.go.id/>

<sup>17</sup> The Alliance of Independent Journalists, n.d.. Akun Resmi Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI) Kota Makassar website. Available at: <https://makassar.aji.or.id/>

<sup>18</sup> SEJUK, 2021. Training & Story Grant untuk Mahasiswa Kalimantan Timur: Menciptakan Ruang Aman Keberagaman di Media. [Online]. Available at: <https://sejuk.org/2021/12/24/training-story-grant-untuk-mahasiswa-kalimantan-timur-menciptakan-ruang-aman-keberagaman-di-media/> [accessed 23 November 2023]

<sup>19</sup> SEJUK, 2016. Dewan Pers Godok Pedoman Meliput Isu Keragaman. [Online]. Available at: <https://sejuk.org/2016/04/12/dewan-pers-godok-pedoman-meliput-isu-keragaman/> [accessed 23 November 2023]

<sup>20</sup> Republik Merdeka, 2021. Guidelines for Reporting Diversity Issues. [Online]. Available at: <https://rmdl.id/info/pedoman-pemberitaan-isu-keberagaman> [accessed 23 November 2023]

<sup>21</sup> Dewan Pers, 2022. Peraturan Dewan Pers Nomor: 02/Peraturan-DP/XI/2022/Tentang Pedoman Pemberitaan isu Keberagaman. [Online]. Available at: [https://dewanpers.or.id/assets/documents/peraturan/2301130511\\_2022-Peraturan\\_Dewan\\_Pers\\_02\\_Peraturan-DP\\_XI\\_2022\\_Tentang\\_Pemberitaan\\_Isu\\_Keberagaman.pdf](https://dewanpers.or.id/assets/documents/peraturan/2301130511_2022-Peraturan_Dewan_Pers_02_Peraturan-DP_XI_2022_Tentang_Pemberitaan_Isu_Keberagaman.pdf) [accessed 23 November 2023]

<sup>22</sup> Konde.co, 2023. Riset Konde.co tentang Pemetaan Kondisi Media Perempuan di Indonesia. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.konde.co/2023/06/riset-konde-co-tentang-pemetaan-kondisi-media-perempuan-di-indonesia.html/> [Accessed 23 November 2023]

<sup>23</sup> Databoks, 2022. The Largest Value of Advertising Spending in Indonesia in the Asian Market in 2022. [Online]. Available at: [Nilai Belanja Iklan di Indonesia Terbesar se-Pasar Asia pada 2022 \(katadata.co.id\)](https://katadata.co.id) [accessed 23 November 2023]

<sup>24</sup> Eva, S.G., Eroding online Violence Towards Indonesian Women During Covid-19, *KELUWIH: Jurnal Sosial dan Humaniora*, Vol.2(2), 90–95, October 2021.

<sup>25</sup> PR2Media, et al, 2023. Modul Mencegah dan Mengatasi Kekerasan terhadap Jurnalis Perempuan. [Online]. Available at: <https://pr2media.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Modul-Mencegah-dan-Mengatasi-Kekerasan-terhadap-Jurnalis-Perempuan.pdf> [accessed 23 November 2023]

<sup>26</sup> PR2Media, et al, 2023. Sexual Violence Against Female Journalists in Indonesia. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Research\\_report\\_on\\_sexual\\_violence\\_against\\_female\\_journalists.pdf](https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Research_report_on_sexual_violence_against_female_journalists.pdf) [accessed 23 November 2023]

<sup>27</sup> Internews, 2022. Violence Against Female Journalists in Indonesia. [Online]. Available at: [https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Violence-Against-Female-Journalists-In-Indonesia\\_web.pdf](https://internews.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Violence-Against-Female-Journalists-In-Indonesia_web.pdf) [accessed 23 November 2023]



# Malaysia

By Fathimath Leeza



## Country Overview

### Freedom Assessment

According to Freedom House's 2023 'Freedom in the World' report, Malaysia is categorised as "partly free" with an overall score of 61/100.<sup>1</sup> The assessment further reveals that political rights and civil liberties in the country are rated at 22/40 and 31/60, respectively. Notably, there has been a modest improvement of 2 points in the overall score since 2022.

Malaysia ranked 113 in the Reporters Without Borders (RSF) annual Press Freedom Index 2022, with the country's top score revealed at 73 for the year 2023.<sup>2</sup> This indicates an exponential progress, compared to the country's best ranking of 101 in 2020.

### Gender Equality Evaluation

The Global Gender Gap Report from the World Economic Forum in 2023 places Malaysia 102nd among 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index (GGI).<sup>3</sup> Although this represents a slight improvement from the 2022 ranking of 103rd, Malaysia still trails behind many of its counterparts. Notably, within the East Asia and Pacific region, Malaysia ranks 13th out of 19 countries across four key indicators: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. On a positive note, Malaysia is among secures a place among the top 25 countries in the Education Attainment category for females. However, the data indicates that women perform less favourably in the other sub-indices, with the Health and Survival sub-index recording a score of 0.956 and the Economic Participation and Opportunity sub-index scoring 0.738. Malaysia achieves an alarmingly low score in Political Empowerment, at 0.1.

The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2021, indicates a steady decline in Malaysia's gender gap at 0.228.<sup>4</sup> This still placed Malaysia as the country with the third lowest<sup>5</sup> gender gap in the

East Asia and Pacific region.

### Legislative Progress

Malaysia took a significant step towards addressing gender inequality with the passage of the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act (ASHA) on July 20, 2022, in the House of Parliament. Despite being described as 'not-perfect',<sup>6</sup> this legislation aligns with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It is noteworthy that Malaysia officially acceded to CEDAW in 1995, albeit with reservations to certain articles.<sup>7</sup>

Still and regrettably, women in Malaysia often find their potential to participate in society and achieve autonomy and independence stifled by pervasive gender stereotypes. These stereotypes perpetuate the notion that women are primarily followers and supporters rather than leaders or equal partners in society. Such beliefs limit women's role to the domestic sphere, and results in unequal burden of responsibility for home and family for those who pursue careers. This creates systemic gender inequalities and hinders women's opportunities to develop their leadership and decision-making skills in the public domain.

## Representation of women and girls in the media

### Portrayal practices/stereotypes of women and girls

Over the past five years, Malaysian media has displayed a complex blend of evolving portrayals and persistent stereotypes of women and girls. A possible contributing factor and significant concern is the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within media organisations.

A 2020 report by the National Union of Journalists and International Federation of Journalists Asia-Pacific, based on a survey of 240 Malaysian media personnel, revealed disparities

in gender representation. While women held executive roles, they were underrepresented in senior editorial positions such as director, bureau chief, and editor. Despite 83.3 percent of respondents reporting women in high-ranking roles, top editorial positions had a lower proportion of women compared to men (Dzulkifly, 2021).

Several television dramas and advertisements often depict women in traditional roles of domestic help, a wife or a mother, and are portrayed as submissive and engrossed in common family affection and duties (Ibrahim et al., 2017). The gender imbalance in editorial leadership positions may contribute to the perpetuation of such stereotypes.

Persistent stereotypes remain a challenge, where women are frequently depicted as emotionally fragile, overly emotional, or dependent on men for decision-making. Such stereotypes can undermine women's perceived competence and leadership potential. They also shape societal perceptions and limit the aspirations of young girls, emphasising the need to challenge stereotypes at multiple levels within the media industry (Shamim & Hassim, 2021).

Moreover, within the realm of advertising, instances of sexist language and objectification of women's bodies persist. Such instances are often seen in slogans or copy that imply a woman's value is inherently linked to her physical appearance. In some cases, women's entire personhood is disregarded, as their faces are cropped out or only specific body parts are featured within advertisements. An illustrative example of this issue occurred with the local company, Firefly Airlines, which repeatedly employed these tactics. The controversial Firefly Airlines advertisement elicited substantial public outcry<sup>8</sup> due to its utilisation of sexist imagery and suggestive taglines.

When the subsidiary of Malaysian Airlines repeated this advertising strategy in 2017, posting a similar type of "eye-grabbing"<sup>9</sup> campaign, it prompted not only harsh criticism from the social media users, but criticism from Siti Zailah Mohd Yusoff, a Member of Parliament<sup>10</sup> from the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS). She went so far as to call upon the Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development to ban all forms of advertisements that focus on women's body

parts, asserting that such objectification was unacceptable.

Experts emphasise the importance of women being part of the political leadership, not only because they make up about 50% of voters and the population, but because having enough numbers of women in decision-making positions also benefits the economy and society.

Nonetheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that the political landscape in Malaysia remains afflicted by deep-seated sexism. A compelling illustration can be found in the media coverage of the candidates for the 2023 General Election, where the proportion of female candidates falls significantly below 30%. In this context, the emphasis in reporting tends to prioritise the physical appearance of these candidates over their qualifications and leadership capabilities. This troubling trend is further exacerbated on various social media platforms, where certain posts engage in the unsavoury practices of policing and objectifying these public figures, often subjecting them to body shaming and derogatory comments (Hamzah et al., 2023).

Moreover, should these women candidates succeed in securing parliamentary seats, they continue to be confronted with sexist remarks and discriminatory treatment from their fellow members<sup>11</sup>, underscoring the persistence of gender bias in the political sphere.

### Reporting on violence against women and girls

The Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP)<sup>12</sup> 2020 highlights a concerning pattern in Malaysian media, indicating a tendency to label female subjects as victims more frequently than their male counterparts. The analysis, based on 281 data samples drawn from print, television, radio, and online sources, highlights a prevalent trend of assigning victimhood to women.

Further analysis of the Malaysian online newspaper articles indicates that they predominantly focus on violence against women, reporting it to be three times higher than violence against men. They present numerical data on specific cases but lack discussions about these rates or prevalence. Sexual abuse, economic abuse, and social abuse receive sporadic mention without in-depth explanations.



Factors contributing to domestic violence, highlighted in 77% of the articles, include role confusion and situational psychosocial issues like drug addiction, family stress, and financial difficulties (Razali et al., 2018).

When it comes to reporting on VAWG, an element that all stakeholders agree on is the dearth of accurate data. UN Women noted this stating that only 45.1% of indicators required to monitor the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a gender perspective were available<sup>13</sup>. While NGOs<sup>14</sup> have also identified a lack of data as a key barrier to evidence-based policymaking<sup>15</sup>.

### **Violence and harassment of female journalists**

Female journalists in Malaysia have faced violence and harassment, both online and offline. While research<sup>16</sup> on this specific issue in Malaysia is limited, global trends suggest that female journalists often experience gender-based harassment and threats while performing their duties<sup>17</sup>.

Research indicates that online gender-based intimidation is prevalent, with attacks targeting women journalists covering issues like teenage pregnancies, forced marriages, sexual harassment, and rape culture. Online stalking, unwanted spam messages with sexualised content, and harassment through misogynistic and hateful content are common challenges faced by women journalists, not only in Malaysia but globally.

Interestingly, offline harassment, including verbal and physical violence, is reported to come primarily from male colleagues, adding another layer to the challenges faced by women journalists in Malaysia and beyond (Khan, 2021)

A study conducted in 2023 by the Journalism Department of the University of London, titled 'The Impact of Sexual Harassment on Job Satisfaction in Newsrooms,' offers valuable insights into the operational dynamics of the media industry. The findings indicate that Malaysia occupies an intermediate position concerning job satisfaction and perceptions of newsroom gender equality in comparison to other participating Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam. With a personal job

satisfaction mean of 4.85, Malaysia falls between the higher-ranking nations of Indonesia and Vietnam. But with a newsroom gender equality mean of 4.54, Malaysia demonstrated lower levels of equality perceptions than its regional counterparts (Blumell et al., 2023, pp. 11).

The research delves into the substantial issue of sexual harassment, revealing that women in Malaysia encounter a higher incidence of both verbal and physical harassment compared to their male counterparts. Although Malaysia fares comparatively better than certain regions, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, in terms of harassment levels, the data underscores the importance of sustained vigilance and the implementation of preventive measures.

According to the 2023 research findings published by WAN-IFRA Women in News, it is imperative for media organisations to promptly acknowledge the pervasive nature of sexual harassment and take concerted measures to establish a more secure working environment. The research survey encompassed a total of 494 respondents hailing from five distinct countries; Indonesia, Myanmar, Malaysia, Philippines, and Vietnam. These participants were asked to provide responses regarding their encounters with sexual harassment within the workplace, spanning both verbal and physical forms.

Analysis of the Malaysian segment of the survey revealed that 40% of the respondents had encountered instances of sexual harassment. A further breakdown of this data indicated that 55% of the reported cases occurred in the print media sector, followed by television (41%), radio (41%), online media (29%), and other media categories (36%)<sup>18</sup>.

In addition to the statistical data, a recent documentary film titled "The Boys Club," directed by Chen Yih Wen, has garnered significant attention. This documentary is widely regarded as a poignant example of workplace harassment issues.

As one media professional stated during the screening<sup>19</sup>, "What often happens is the types of scenarios that Wen spoke about where the harassment occurs, while away on foreign assignments, while working late, it is something very common within the media industry."

Aside from the awareness, Chen is working with



the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) on the film's impact campaign. The director and the executive producers also want to lobby for a more comprehensive and survivor-centric Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill, a law that has been more than 20 years in the making in Malaysia. (The Vibes, 2022).

## Needs of media organisations

In order to analyse the challenges and opportunities related to gender sensitisation in the media, a series of interviews were conducted with five participants.

These interviewees were Ms Wathshlah Naidu, President of the Centre of Independent Journalism (CIJ); Ms Ho Yock Lin, President of the All Women's Action Society (AWAM); Ms Amanda Shweeta Louis, Information Officer at All Women's Action Society (AWAM); Ms. Syarifatul Adibah, Senior Programme Officer (Communications) at Sisters in Islam (SIS); Ms. Aleza Othman, Communications Officer (Communications) at Sisters in Islam (SIS); Ms Pearl Lee, Co-Founder of Twentytwo13, and Assistant Secretary of the National Press Club of Malaysia; and Ms Aidila Razak, Special Reports Editor at MalaysiaKini.

These interviewees represent diverse sectors, including one individual from a mainstream media outlet (MalaysiaKini), one from online media (Twentytwo13), and three from non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (CIJ, AWAM and SIS), of which CIJ operate as a media advocacy organisation. All these organisations have a newsroom staff size of less than 50 individuals.

Among these organisations, the NGOs exhibit a higher gender imbalance, with a greater representation of women. In contrast, the media organisations maintain an equal gender distribution among their staff, though the senior leadership positions are predominantly occupied by men.

The findings indicated that NGOs scrutinise media reporting through a gender-sensitive perspective. They diligently assess media reports for instances of gender-based misinformation or hate speech, whether directed at the media or originating from media sources. One respondent disclosed their ongoing monitoring efforts

focused on evaluating the actions taken by media entities and the ethical standards upheld in their reporting, with a specific emphasis on gender-related distinctions.

## Types of reporting when engaging with survivors and gender issues

During the interviews we have identified commendable engagement practices within both types of organisations, with areas where improvements can be made. The media advocacy organisation adheres to international guidelines, notably UNESCO's Gender Reporting and CEDAW, to inform their conduct. Conversely, other entities rely on informal mentorship provided by senior members, emphasising on-the-job training, as opposed to having a formal organisational document for guidance.

The NGOs noted an increasing awareness within media houses about gender-related issues. Despite a lack of consistent standards for content, the media does comply with legal standards, including criminal and sexual harassment laws that provide physical protection. Some may reference the Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Content Code (MCMC), or they may follow the standards established by the Content Forum,<sup>20</sup> which are mandatory for its members.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, a guideline for media is in development, addressing gender in various aspects, including hiring policies, gender audits, and media membership. The absence of a clear mechanism to hold media accountable on gender-related matters underscores the need for a media council.

Several respondents mentioned the existence of a pro-tem committee currently drafting the media council bill, which may be presented to the parliament in the first quarter of 2024.

The role of traditional media has undergone a transformation due to the rise of social media. Some respondents suggested that a significant challenge in addressing these issues lies in the fact that survivors themselves increasingly publish their own stories on social platforms, putting mainstream media outlets in the position of deciding whether to follow up on these narratives.<sup>22,23</sup> This dynamic also presents difficulties in obtaining a comprehensive perspective on the matter, as numerous barriers

may arise, hindering further examination.

The respondents who represent the media sector emphasised the challenges associated with reporting on breaking news compared to feature stories. The former demands a quick turnaround and may consequently involve fewer angles or sources, whereas the latter allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the subject matter. Nevertheless, all respondents concurred that reporters are now giving greater consideration to gender-related topics than in the past. They postulated that this shift may be attributed to the evolving nature of society as a whole and the heightened overall awareness regarding these issues.

### Training

Some staff within media organisations have undergone third-party training, typically facilitated by local NGOs or international organisations in the absence of formal in-house training programs. According to the respondents, the most difficult challenge in this regard is insufficient staffing levels,<sup>24</sup> which leave little room for training endeavours.

Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many NGOs actively engaged in media training. However, interactions between the two types of organisations (NGO and media) primarily revolved around soliciting expert commentary, conducting interviews, and collecting data for various stories. Furthermore, the guidelines published by some NGOs serve as instructional materials for media training.

Respondents from AWAM and SIS noted that journalists participating in such training sessions are often entry-level staff or interns and lack authority in the final publishing decisions. It is the editors and sub-editors who stand in need of such training, but there exists minimal incentive for their participation unless top-level directives mandate it.

The NGOs proposed that training in gender sensitivity should encompass subeditor-level personnel within media organisations, with one advocate even suggesting that journalists should undergo gender sensitivity training before being permitted to publish reports on the subject.

Representatives from the media likewise

supported the idea of having editors and sub-editors receive gender sensitivity training. However, they acknowledged that extensive, multi-day training sessions can disrupt the normal workflow in newsrooms, and thus, they recommended short, online training sessions lasting a few hours, with reference materials for post-training review.

### Mechanisms to ensure victim-survivors' safety and well-being

There are some mechanisms to ensure survivors' safety and well-being, within the respondents' organisation. However, these mechanisms are not fully realised in any documentation nor formalised in a standard operating procedure or guidelines. The media organisations follow the ethics of journalism [code of content by MCMC,<sup>25</sup> code of ethics by NJI],<sup>26</sup> which are passed in the form of best practices within the organisation.

A risk to survivors' safety and well-being also stems from the aforementioned self-publication on social media, where the identity of the perpetrators or survivors are revealed. This may also happen via official channels, such as police statements. Once the perpetrators are revealed, the identity of survivors can be extrapolated, especially within smaller communities.

### Stakeholder collaboration

Both media respondents emphasised a significant area for enhancing efforts related to VAWG issues, highlighting the need for increased engagement with stakeholders, particularly NGOs. Furthermore, they highlighted the importance of using language that is accessible to both reporters and the general public, positing that simplifying industry jargon would facilitate better engagement. To address this issue, they recommended that NGOs simplify the use of industry-specific terminology when publishing reports or issuing press statements.

Another respondent proposed the establishment of bi-monthly meetings between media and NGOs, which could help to foster a deeper understanding of the relevant issues within the media community. This would ensure that reporters and editors remain well-informed about the most pertinent topics.

Most NGOs engage in collaborative efforts with academia, partnering with universities for research and reporting purposes. Additionally, they collaborate with secondary schools and colleges to conduct awareness sessions. These initiatives extend to clubs and internship programs, all aimed at educating the younger generation on gender sensitivity. The focus is on cultivating the proper networks and working with the right target groups to shape and promote these ideas.

### **Measuring the impact and audience engagement**

NGOs routinely assess audience engagement through various analytical tools, primarily focusing on social media platforms. The key metrics utilised for this purpose are 'likes,' 'shares,' and 'comments.' By monitoring and analysing these metrics, NGOs gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of their outreach efforts. Additionally, data is collected from individuals who reach out to the organisation, and they often make this data available on the organisation's websites.

Although specific studies on gender disparities within the media are currently lacking, NGOs are actively engaged in discussions centered on women's rights groups and the LGBTQIA community in anticipation of the gender guidelines currently under development.

Conversely, respondents from media organisations lack a specific mechanism for measuring the impact of their reporting. However, there have been instances where reports have been picked up by other organisations<sup>27</sup>, and, in some cases, mentioned by ministries or political leaders.

### **Safety for journalists**

One respondent presented multiple instances of journalists encountering harassment throughout her career. Such incidents could arise from interactions with politicians<sup>28</sup> during interviews, working with sources, VIPs, while covering protests, or even within media scrums, where reporters might be subjected to physical contact. However, the majority of such incidents remain unreported.

Upon delving into the issue of underreporting, respondents pointed out that journalists are expected to manage hostile situations and endure unsavoury experiences. They often avoid reporting harassment, as they do not wish to be characterised as individuals who frequently raise complaints about such incidents. Consequently, they are often expected to handle these situations themselves and refrain from reporting them to their superiors.

The media organisations revealed that they have some specialised protocols in place to support the safety of journalists. When counselling services facilitated by the HR department were proposed, none of the reporters had availed themselves of this support.

An additional method of establishing support appears to be through the cultivation of a consultative relationship. As one respondent described, reporters are encouraged to discuss their issues within a peer-to-peer support system. However, all respondents concur that an organisational-level guideline or standard is required to address these concerns adequately.

The NGOs noted that they possess toolkits for addressing gender-based violence online, along with additional resources such as counselling and legal advice for those who seek their assistance. However, these resources are not tailored to any specific profession.

### **Media's portrayal of VAWG**

The respondents discerned a correlation between the leadership roles occupied by women and the portrayal and public perception of women in the media. They also acknowledged an improvement in media reporting compared to the past, yet all respondents concurred that there is still room for improvement.

The respondents from media houses stated that their reporting typically does not differentiate between genders, unless specific circumstances warrant such differentiation. Instead, it tends to focus more on the intersectionality of factors such as ethnicity, class, race, and age, which often impose more significant social divisions than gender.

NGOs observed that media coverage of gender-related issues may include problematic

statements made by individuals involved, such as sexist or victim-blaming remarks. These statements are often incorporated into the coverage in an effort to provide a comprehensive view of the situation. They also highlighted two key factors contributing to the persistent cycle of victim-blaming: societal and cultural influences and the sensationalised, click-bait headlines that tend to garner more attention and generate higher sales.

To counteract these challenges, the respondents underscored the critical importance of fostering broader social change, encouraging people to transcend outdated attitudes regarding gender. They emphasised the need to establish mechanisms for holding individuals, especially those in positions of power, accountable.

AWAM had introduced an unconventional approach to accountability. As part of their media monitoring efforts, they identify instances of sexism among public figures and present them through a satirical award known as the 'Aiyoh Wat Lah!' Awards.<sup>29,30</sup> This award is designed to draw attention to such instances and is reported in the media. (This award is currently on hiatus, but the NGO is considering its revival.)

### Relevance of Media

As highlighted by the respondents, the role of the media is experiencing a decline, as society's reliance on traditional media has waned. Notably, some online "news" organisations

lack official accreditation from the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia<sup>31</sup> and lack a code of ethics that guides their practices.

Several respondents pointed out the existence of news aggregators that populate their sites with content featuring shockingly misogynistic reporting.<sup>32,33</sup> One particular site, Oh!Bulan,<sup>34</sup> was frequently cited as an example. This Malay language site has garnered followers<sup>35</sup> who engage with its content in a manner that reinforces stereotypes and prejudices, effectively creating an echo chamber of sexism.

Research indicates that the Ministry of Communications and Multimedia follows stringent procedures to verify the authenticity of reporters before granting them press credentials.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, media organisations are closely scrutinised to assess the validity of their content and their adherence to established guidelines.

As Ms Naidu (CIJ) stated, the media face the added pressure of extreme views and voices, as well as the influence of major technology companies. Furthermore, financial considerations play a significant role, as sensationalism often drives sales. With a rise in online gender-based violence, the ethical considerations for addressing such issues diverge from those in other contexts. As the challenges have evolved, the strategies to address them must evolve in tandem.

## Recommendations

By standardising guidelines, enhancing training, and ensuring the well-being of journalists, the media can play a more responsible and effective role in raising awareness and promoting societal change in this critical area:

1

### Standardise Gender Reporting Guidelines

Media organisations should work collectively with NGOs and other stakeholders to establish clear and standardised gender reporting guidelines. These guidelines should encompass hiring policies, gender audits, and require the inclusion of gender reporting in annual reports. The guidelines should address sensationalism, click-bait headlines, and victim-blaming narratives, emphasising responsible reporting practices.

2

## Enhance Training and Collaboration

Media organisations should prioritize gender sensitisation training for their journalists. Collaboration with NGOs, women's rights groups, and academic institutions should be encouraged to provide training sessions. This training should focus on ethical reporting, understanding the legal framework, and promoting a more gender-sensitive approach. Regular engagement sessions between media organisations and NGOs should be established to ensure a continual exchange of knowledge and best practices.

3

## Ensure Safety and Mental Well-being of Journalists

Media organisations must develop protocols and support systems to address the safety and mental well-being of journalists, particularly in situations of gender-based harassment. Journalists should be encouraged to report such incidents without fear of repercussions, and support mechanisms such as counselling should be readily available. Media organisations should also raise awareness of the potential trauma and post-trauma reactions experienced by journalists, fostering a supportive and open newsroom environment.

---

## Research References

- AFP. (2021, March 30). 75% of female journalists face online abuse, says Unesco. Free Malaysia Today. <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/world/2021/04/30/75-of-female-journalists-face-online-abuse-says-unesco/>
- Balachandar, D., & Naidu, W. (2023). Media Landscape Report 2022, (pp. 1–37). Centre for Independent Journalism Malaysia. <https://cijmalaysia.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Media-Landscape-Report-03052023.pdf>
- Bechtel, J. (2023, May 03). Malaysia makes a huge leap on the annual World Press Freedom Index. Benar News. <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/malaysian/press-freedom-05032023155159.html>
- Blumell, L., Dinfin Mulupi, & Arafat, R. (2023). The Impact of Sexual Harassment on Job Satisfaction in Newsrooms. *Journalism Practice*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2023.2227613>
- Carvalho, M., Tan, T., & Vethasalam, R. (2022, July 22). Dewan Rakyat passes Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill. The Star. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/07/20/dewan-rakyat-passes-sexual-harassment-bill>
- Chung, I., Farid, A., & Agha, S. (2021). A Study on Malaysia Public Attitudes and Perceptions towards Violence Against Women (VAW). Women's Aid Organisation. [https://wao.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/PRINT-WAO\\_VAW-Public-Attitudes-and-Perceptions-Report-2021\\_19-NOV\\_FINAL.pdf](https://wao.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/PRINT-WAO_VAW-Public-Attitudes-and-Perceptions-Report-2021_19-NOV_FINAL.pdf)
- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. (2022, May 9). Retrieved October 2, 2023, from [https://www.kpwkm.gov.my/kpwkm/uploads/files/Penerbitan/instrument\\_antarabangsa/Discrimination%20against%20women%20CEDAW/CEDAW\\_C\\_MYS\\_6\\_8667\\_E.pdf](https://www.kpwkm.gov.my/kpwkm/uploads/files/Penerbitan/instrument_antarabangsa/Discrimination%20against%20women%20CEDAW/CEDAW_C_MYS_6_8667_E.pdf)
- Cook, S. (2022, March 30). Testimony on Freedom of Expression in Asia. Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/article/testimony-freedom-expression-asia>
- Dzulkiify, D. (2021, May 5). Malaysia Media Report 2020: Lack of women in senior editorial positions results in toxic newsrooms. Malay Mail. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/05/05/>



malaysia-media-report-2020-lack-of-women-in-senior-editorial-positions-resu/1971926

- Ferrarese, M. (2022, April 17). Machismo plays a starring role in the Malaysian film world. Nikkei Asia. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Life-Arts/Arts/Machismo-plays-starring-role-in-Malaysian-film-world>
- Firefly advert featuring women's posterior courts controversy. (2016, March 12). Malaysiakini. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/333748>
- Firefly roasted on Facebook over ads featuring women's bottoms. (2016, March 12). Malay Mail. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2016/03/12/firefly-roasted-on-facebook-over-ads-featuring-womens-bottoms/1078433>
- Firefly under fire for yet another "sexist" advert. (2017, February 14). Malaysiakini. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/372369>
- Firefly told to apologize for sexist ad, no buts. (2016, March 14). Malaysiakini. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/333677>
- Global Gender Gap Report 2023. (n.d.). World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023>
- Gorokhovskaia, Y., Shahbaz, A., & Slipowitz, A. (2023). Marking 50 Years in the Struggle for Democracy. Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2023/marking-50-years>
- Hamzah, M., Naidu, W., Fong, L. S., Naidu, D., & Balachandar, D. (2023, March). Social Media Monitoring of Malaysia's 15th General Elections (G. Venkiteswaran, Z. Nain, D. N. S. Shi, D. M. Ahmad, W. L. Kim, D. L. K. Tung, J. A. Surin, & I. A. Ismail, Eds.) CIJ Malaysia. <https://cijmalaysia.net>. <https://cijmalaysia.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/GEM-Report-ENG.pdf>
- Ibrahim, F., Yunus, N., Halem Shah, D. F. J. S., Ilias, M., & Ahmad Mokhtar, A. H. (2017). Portrayal of Women's Images in Television Dramas: A Malaysian Case. SHS Web of Conferences, 33, 00063. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/20173300063>
- IPSOS Strategy3 & Peterson, T. (2023) A Report on Malaysia's Progress and Commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 5.1 Indicator 5.1.1. Sisters in Islam & Musawah. Retrieved October 2, 2023, from [https://www.musawah.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SGD511\\_Updated-Report\\_21092023\\_v1.pdf](https://www.musawah.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SGD511_Updated-Report_21092023_v1.pdf)
- Is There No Media Freedom In Malaysia? (2023, May 3). Kkd.gov.my. <https://www.kkd.gov.my/en/public/news/18869-is-there-no-media-freedom-in-malaysia>
- Jayatilaka, T. (n.d.). Award-Winning Malaysian Filmmaker Yih Wen Chen's Stories Start with a Gut Feeling. Tatler Asia. Retrieved October 22, 2023, from <https://www.tatlerasia.com/power-purpose/front-female/malaysian-yih-wen-chen-storytelling-the-boys-club-busan-international-short-film-festival>
- Khan, I. (2021). Main Challenges for Women Journalists at Grassroots Level: Submission for the Consultation on Gender Justice by UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression. In [www.ohchr.org](http://www.ohchr.org) (pp. 1–6). Free Press Unlimited. [https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Free-Press-Unlimited\\_2.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/Free-Press-Unlimited_2.pdf)
- Kuan, S. (2023, March 8). Former IGP Musa courts controversy again with tweets seemingly blaming victims of domestic abuse. NST. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/03/887028/former-igp-musa-courts-controversy-again-tweets-seemingly-blaming-victims>
- Macharia, S. (Ed.) (2020). 6th Global Media Monitoring Project. In *Who Make the News* (pp. 1–153). *Who Makes the News?* [https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GMMP2020.ENG\\_FINAL\\_.pdf](https://whomakesthenews.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GMMP2020.ENG_FINAL_.pdf)
- Malaysia: End gender segregation for artistic and cultural performances. (2020, February 21).



ARTICLE 19. <https://www.article19.org/resources/malaysia-end-gender-segregation-for-artistic-and-cultural-performances/>

- Malaysia: Freedom on the Net 2023 Country Report. (n.d.). Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/malaysia/freedom-net/2023>
- Mustafa, M., & Lee, N. (2022, July 22). Malaysian lawmakers pass long-awaited bill targeting sexual harassment. Benarnews.org. <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/malaysian/sexual-harassment-07222022142613.html>
- National Union of Journalists Malaysia (n.d.). Safe Work Practices - Guideline for Media Professionals. <http://www.Nujm.org>. Retrieved September 15, 2023, from <http://www.nujm.org/content/download/SWP.pdf>
- National Union of Journalists (Peninsular Malaysia) Accredited NUJ-IFJ Press Card Application Form (Form 3). (1962). <http://www.nujm.org/content/download/form3.pdf>
- National Union of Journalists Malaysia (NUJ). (n.d.). [www.nujm.org](http://www.nujm.org). <http://www.nujm.org/about.html>
- NPC. (2023, September 6). NPC supports MCMC's call for Google and Meta "to pay for journalism." National Press Club Malaysia. <https://nationalpressclub.org.my/npc-supports-mcmcs-call-for-google-and-meta-to-pay-for-journalism/>
- ODS HOME PAGE. (n.d.). Documents-Dds-Ny.un.org. Retrieved October 23, 2023, from <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N04/309/80/PDF/N0430980.pdf?OpenElement>
- Our Members – Content Forum. (n.d.). Content Forum. Retrieved October 21, 2023, from <https://contentforum.my/our-members/>
- Palansamy, Y. (2016, March 14). After Firefly ad, PAS MP wants to ban use of women's bodies for promo material. Malay Mail. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2016/03/14/after-firefly-ad-pas-mp-wants-to-ban-use-of-womens-bodies-for-promo-material/1079455>
- Razali, S., Fasiah, S., Razak, A., Aqilah, N., Halim, A., Aqilah, F., Anwar, M., Jalil, N., Ahmad, S., Saim, N., Athirah, W., Deraman, W., Sood, M., Teknologi, U., & Buloh, S. (2018). Perception of Online Newspapers on the Coverage of Domestic Violence in Malaysia. *Journal of Media and Information Warfare*, 11(2), 19–45. <https://ir.uitm.edu.my/id/eprint/42572/1/42572.pdf>
- Shamim, N., & Hassim, N. (2021). *Journal of Media and Communication Research* Gender role portrayals in online advertising: A Malaysian case study. *SEARCH*, 13(2), 123–140. [https://expert.taylors.edu.my/file/remis/publication/100975\\_8529\\_1.pdf](https://expert.taylors.edu.my/file/remis/publication/100975_8529_1.pdf)
- Sooi, C.C. (2022, February 14). Use of SLAPP against women human rights defenders in M'sia condemned. Focus Malaysia. <https://focusmalaysia.my/use-of-slapp-against-women-human-rights-defenders-in-msia-condemned/>
- Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation: Southeast Asia cases & recommendations for governments, businesses, & civil society. (2020, March). Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. [https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/files/SLAPPs\\_in\\_SEA\\_2020\\_Final.pdf](https://media.business-humanrights.org/media/documents/files/SLAPPs_in_SEA_2020_Final.pdf)
- The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Content Code 2022. (n.d.). <https://contentforum.my/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Content-Code-2022.pdf>
- Teoh, M. (2023, March 31). Malaysia long way from achieving gender equality, says SDG 5.1.1 report. The Star. <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/family/2023/03/31/malaysia-long-way-from-achieving-gender-equality-says-sdg-511-report>
- Ting, L. Z. (2022, February 7). Being normal doesn't make it healthy: How gender stereotyping harms all of us. Ideas.org.my. <https://www.ideas.org.my/being-normal-doesnt-make-it-healthy-how-gender-stereotyping-harms-all-of-us/>

- United Nations Development Programme. (2021). Gender Inequality Index. Human Development Reports. <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII>
- Women's Aid Organisation (2015, March 30). Vote for the worst in "Aiyoh Wat Lah!" Awards. Malaysiakini. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/293700>
- Zakarya, A.Z. (2022, April 7). Tolak lakukan seks, suami pukul isteri dengan topi keledar dipenjara lima tahun. Utusan Digital. <https://www.utusan.com.my/nasional/2022/04/tolak-lakukan-seks-suami-pukul-isteri-dipenjara-lima-tahun/>

---

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Malaysia: Freedom on the Net 2023 Country Report. (n.d.). Freedom House. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/malaysia/freedom-net/2023>

<sup>2</sup> Reporters Without Borders RSF. Malaysia, 2023. [online] [Accessed on 23 October 2023] <https://rsf.org/en/country/malaysia>

<sup>3</sup> Global Gender Gap Report 2023. (n.d.). World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023>

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Table 5: Gender Inequality Index. [Online]. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/documentation-and-downloads> [accessed 20 October 2023]

<sup>5</sup> Note: a lower GII value signifies better performance concerning gender inequality

<sup>6</sup> Special message from AWAM president. (2022). AWAM 2022: Annual Report. In [www.awam.org.my](http://www.awam.org.my) (p. 4). AWAM. <https://www.awam.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/AWAM-ANNUAL-REPORT-2022.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Ipsos Strategy3 & Peterson, T. (2023) A Report on Malaysia's Progress and Commitment to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Target 5.1 Indicator 5.1.1. Sisters in Islam & Musawah. Retrieved October 2, 2023, from [https://www.musawah.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SGD511\\_Updated-Report\\_21092023\\_v1.pdf](https://www.musawah.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SGD511_Updated-Report_21092023_v1.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Firefly roasted on Facebook over ads featuring women's bottoms. (2016, March 12). Malay Mail. <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2016/03/12/firefly-roasted-on-facebook-over-ads-featuring-womens-bottoms/1078433>

<sup>9</sup> Firefly told to apologise for sexist ad, no butts. (2016, March 14). Malaysiakini. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/333677>

<sup>10</sup> MP raps Firefly over sexist advertisements (2017, March 3). The Malaysian Reserve. <https://themalaysianreserve.com/2017/04/03/mp-raps-firefly-over-sexist-advertisements/>

<sup>11</sup> Carvalho, M., Tan, T., & Vethasalam, R. (2022, July 19). Uproar in Parliament after MP calls out lawmakers "prone" to making sexist remarks [Review of Uproar in Parliament after MP calls out lawmakers "prone" to making sexist remarks]. The Star.com.my. <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/07/19/uproar-in-parliament-after-mp-calls-out-lawmakers-039prone039-to-making-sexist-remarks>

<sup>12</sup> Studies how women and men are represented in the news

<sup>13</sup> Country Fact Sheet | UN Women Data Hub. (n.d.). Data.unwomen.org. <https://data.unwomen.org/country/malaysia>

<sup>14</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): Sixth periodic report submitted by Malaysia under article 18 of the Convention due in 2022 (2022). [www.kpwkm.gov.my](http://www.kpwkm.gov.my)

(pp. 9–10). [https://www.kpwkm.gov.my/kpwkm/uploads/files/Penerbitan/instrument\\_antarabangsa/Discrimination%20against%20women%20CEDAW/CEDAW\\_C\\_MYS\\_6\\_8667\\_E.pdf](https://www.kpwkm.gov.my/kpwkm/uploads/files/Penerbitan/instrument_antarabangsa/Discrimination%20against%20women%20CEDAW/CEDAW_C_MYS_6_8667_E.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> The Status of Women's Human Rights: 24 Years of CEDAW in Malaysia (2019). (p. 258). Women's Aid Organisation. <https://wao.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/The-Status-of-Womens-Human-Rights-24-Years-of-CEDAW-in-Malaysia.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Zulkiefli, F. A. (2022, October 19). Cops grill NST editor over "Mossad abduction" report. Malaysiakini. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/news/640303>

<sup>17</sup> NST Online - NST Putrajaya bureau chief Farrah Naz Karim arrested! Get details in tomorrow's New Straits Times | Facebook. (n.d.). [www.facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/nstonline/photos/nst-putrajaya-bureau-chief-farrah-naz-karim-arrested-get-details-in-tomorrows-ne/10151189960063466/). Retrieved October 3, 2023, from <https://www.facebook.com/nstonline/photos/nst-putrajaya-bureau-chief-farrah-naz-karim-arrested-get-details-in-tomorrows-ne/10151189960063466/>

<sup>18</sup> Data Breakdown Page – Sexual Harassment in The Media. (n.d.). [Sexualharassment.womeninnews.org](https://sexualharassment.womeninnews.org). Retrieved October 22, 2023, from <https://sexualharassment.womeninnews.org/research/data-breakdown/>

<sup>19</sup> #LensaFINAS #Spotlight Liputan sesi tayangan filem dokumentari pendek "The Boys Club" karya pembikin filem wanita muda negara, Chen Yih Wen yang telah... | By FINAS Malaysia | Facebook. (n.d.). [www.facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=376826771089857). Retrieved September 18, 2023, from <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=376826771089857>

<sup>20</sup> THE MALAYSIAN COMMUNICATIONS AND MULTIMEDIA CONTENT CODE 2022. (n.d.). <https://contentforum.my/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Content-Code-2022.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Our Members – Content Forum. (n.d.). Content Forum. Retrieved October 21, 2023, from <https://contentforum.my/our-members/>

<sup>22</sup> Kuan, S. (2023, March 8). Former IGP Musa courts controversy again with tweets seemingly blaming victims of domestic abuse [Review of Former IGP Musa courts controversy again with tweets seemingly blaming victims of domestic abuse]. NST. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/03/887028/former-igp-musa-courts-controversy-again-tweets-seemingly-blaming-victims>

<sup>23</sup> Zolkepli, F. (2023, March 8). Respect my privacy, it's a private family matter, says former IGP. The Star. Retrieved September 30, 2023, from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/03/08/respect-my-privacy-it039s-a-private-family-matter-says-former-igp>

<sup>24</sup> The global trend of shrinking newsrooms poses an inherent challenge to news gathering and reporting due to the dwindling number of journalists available for these tasks.

<sup>25</sup> The Malaysian Communication and Multimedia Content Code 2022. (n.d.). <https://contentforum.my/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Content-Code-2022.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> NUJ Code of Ethics. (n.d.). National Union of Journalists Malaysia (NUJ). [www.nujm.org](http://www.nujm.org/about.html). <http://www.nujm.org/about.html>

<sup>27</sup> Lee, P. (2021, September 9). "Children born in Malaysia – not just those born abroad to Malaysian mothers – should get citizenship." Twentytwo13. <https://twentytwo13.my/news/children-born-in-malaysia-not-just-those-born-abroad-to-malaysian-mothers-should-get-citizenship/>

<sup>28</sup> Arif, Z. M. (2023, September 11). Police to look into alleged harassment of reporters by minister's bodyguard. New Strait Times. <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/09/953891/police-look-alleged-harassment-reporters-ministers-bodyguard>

<sup>29</sup> Women's Aid Organisation (2015, March 30). Vote for the worst in "Aiyoh Wat Lah!" Awards. Malaysiakini. <https://www.malaysiakini.com/letters/293700>

<sup>30</sup> Aiyoh...Wat Lah?! Awards 2012. (n.d.). [www.youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pz_gvKdtkdE). Retrieved September 31, 2023, from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pz\\_gvKdtkdE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pz_gvKdtkdE)

<sup>31</sup> The print media falls under the purview of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

<sup>32</sup> Amirul, I. (2023, May 12). Tampar & Tendang Perut Isteri, Lelaki Dipenjara 21 Hari. OHBULAN! <https://ohbulan.com/tampar-tendang-perut-isteri-lelaki-dipenjara-21-hari/>

<sup>33</sup> Zakarya, A.Z. (2022, April 7). Tolak lakukan seks, suami pukul isteri dengan topi keledar dipenjara lima tahun. Utusan Digital. <https://www.utusan.com.my/nasional/2022/04/tolak-lakukan-seks-suami-pukul-isteri-dipenjara-lima-tahun/>

<sup>34</sup> OHBULAN! - Laman Socialtainment Malaysia. (2019). OHBULAN! <https://ohbulan.com/>

<sup>35</sup> ohbulan.com Traffic and Engagement Analysis via Similarweb. Retrieved October 22, 2023, <https://www.similarweb.com/website/ohbulan.com/#traffic>

<sup>36</sup> Emedia. (n.d.). Emedia.penerangan.gov.my. Retrieved October 22, 2023, from <https://emedia.penerangan.gov.my>

# The Philippines

By Kayonaaz Kalyanwala

## Country Overview

The Philippines has established a solid foundation for gender equality and women's empowerment. Most notably, the adoption of the Magna Carta of Women in 2009 has strengthened women's human rights. The country has consistently earned high rankings on indices such as Global Gender Gap - the Philippines ranked at 16/146 surveyed countries in the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index.<sup>1</sup>

However, the situation on the ground is more complicated. The nuances were best explained by one of the interviewees for this research when she said: "I think we're now top 17 in the gender global index [sic]. But we don't feel that way here in the Philippines ... There's really a gap there in what's in like in the formal facade of things over what's happening on the ground. Because, really, the implementation of those laws falls short. There are not enough resources, not enough personnel, you know, to do the work that will make the laws effective on the ground."

A 2017 government advocacy plan says that just 3 in 10 women use legal mechanisms after facing violence against women (VAW). This stems from cultural stereotypes about women, poor information, and a lack of access to public services.<sup>2</sup>

The Philippines saw an increase in misogyny and violations of women's rights during the Rodrigo Duterte administration between 2016 and 2021.<sup>3</sup> Women's organisations were subjected to surveillance, threats, and violence. Female political leaders, indigenous and leftist groups, and journalists - some of his fiercest critics - became targets of persecution, violence, and sexual assault, and were often imprisoned. Renowned journalist and Nobel peace prize recipient Maria Ressa, known for her critical reporting, has faced severe legal consequences. Since 2018, the State has brought 23 cases against Ressa, including charges of tax evasion and cyber libel.<sup>4</sup> As of September 2023, two cases remain active.<sup>5</sup> Ressa's cases served as a stark reminder of the challenges journalists face

in the Philippines.

Media ownership is restricted to citizens and corporations from the Philippines.<sup>6</sup> The country ranked 132/180 on Reporters Without Borders' 2023 World Press Freedom Index. The country report finds that mainstream media ownership is highly concentrated, which reflects "closer ties between media owning families and political barons at regional and national levels."<sup>7</sup> While freedom of speech is enshrined in the constitution, it has been muzzled by libel and defamation cases that have been brought against the press as well as civil society. Freedom House categorises the Philippines as 'partly free' in both its 2023 Freedom on the Net (61/100) report<sup>8</sup> and its 2023 Global Freedom Index (58/100).<sup>9</sup> The scores underline what is widely regarded as a regression of democracy under Duterte.

Concerns remain even with the new President, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., whose father declared military rule in the 1980s. As stated in the country's Freedom in the World 2023 Report, "the Philippines remains one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists. Journalists experience physical attacks; threats, including death threats and bomb threats; smear campaigns claiming they conspire against the government; red-tagging; and distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks."<sup>10</sup> As of November 2023, Human Rights Watch reports that four journalists have been killed since President Marcos assumed office in June 2022.<sup>11</sup>

## Representation of women and girls in the media

The following section gives a broad overview of media and journalism in the Philippines.

### Women in the Media

Filipino women have a history of playing pivotal roles in the Philippine press. In the 1980s, women took a lead in critiquing the government, challenging media censorship, and documenting



military atrocities in remote areas during the Marcos era of martial law (Fernandez, 1987 and Forbes, 2015).<sup>12,13</sup> Forbes (2015) documents that several factors enabled this: Women journalists, especially in print, flourished because most male journalists were either in exile, already blacklisted or co-opted by the ruling government. Women interviewed by Forbes explain that Marcos' own 'traditional machismo' wouldn't allow him to publicly confront a woman, and secondly women weren't primary breadwinners and could depend on their families for an income if they lost their job. Women from this generation continue to be staunch defenders of media freedom, including by founding media monitoring organisations such as Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism and Center for Media Freedom and Responsibility<sup>14</sup> (CMFR).

The Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media (International Women's Media Foundation, 2011)<sup>15</sup> found that in middle management roles — such as senior editors and chiefs of correspondence — women and men journalists are at parity. This was slightly lower for junior (45.7%) and senior roles (44.2%) including anchors, reporters, and producers. However, there was greater disparity in women's representation in senior management (35.5%) and top-level management (34.5%). Recent analysis shows an improvement in these numbers.

A 2023 article by CMFR<sup>16</sup> says that more than half (50.99%) of the membership of the National Union of Journalists in the Philippines (NUJP) are women. According to Tripon and Garcia (2020)<sup>17</sup>, women are increasingly taking on lead roles in television, print, and online media, such as at ABS-CBN, Rappler, News5, Philippine Star, CMFR, VERA Files, MindaNews, and the Philippine Daily Inquirer. The authors suggest that this increase in the number of women in broadcast journalism means that more women's issues are represented. For instance, discussions on preventing harassment and providing safe spaces for women and girls, extending paid maternity leave, providing healthcare to mothers, and a new HIV law which is rights-based, have all led to related legislations being passed in Congress.

### **Guidelines and Laws that Safeguard Against VAW**

Several laws and legislations lay the grounds for ensuring that women have equal opportunities in society, including how they are represented, as well as ensuring there is legal recourse if these rights are violated.

- **The Magna Carta of Women, 2009:** The Act fulfils the Philippine government's commitment to the United Nations General Assembly's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), ratified by the Philippines in 1981. The law "advocates for substantive equality" (World Bank, 2021; p. 23)<sup>18</sup> by emphasising on the socio-cultural context that might put women at a disadvantage compared to men in all spheres of life. It also mandates "Non-discriminatory and non-derogatory portrayal of women in media and film to raise the consciousness of the general public in recognising the dignity of women and the role and contribution of women in family, community, and the society through the strategic use of mass media" (Philippines Commission on Women).<sup>19</sup>
- **The Labor Code of the Philippines (Presidential Decree No. 442, as amended) and the Omnibus Rules Implementing the Labor Code:** These prevent gender-based discrimination at workplaces by mandating facilities for women such as maternity leave benefits, and family planning services.
- **Safe Spaces Act 2019:** The law expands on the Anti-Sexual Harassment Act of 1995. It lays down penalties for sexual harassment, including wolf-whistling, catcalling, and making sexual jokes or remarks against women in public spaces. This is the first legislation in the Philippines to recognise and define online gender-based violence.
- **Anti Trafficking in Persons Act, 2003:** The law defines and criminalises trafficking. It prohibits the creation and distribution (including internet, broadcast and print) of propaganda that could promote trafficking. It mandates that media persons must not disclose any details of the case, especially the trafficking survivor; all media personnel are prohibited from closed door hearings.
- **Anti-Photo and Video Voyeurism Act, 2010:** Prohibits the non-consensual creation and

distribution of photos or videos of sexual acts, naked persons. It also prohibits the publication and broadcast of such content through video, internet and cell phones.

Different groups of journalists have created guidelines which promote ethical and fair reporting practices.

- **Gender-Fair Media Guidebook, 2017, Philippine Commission on Women and Media and Gender Equality Committee:**<sup>20</sup> This guidebook fulfils expectations in the Magna Carta of Women about media representation of women. The document contains checklists and practical guides for 1) Creating empowering content 2) Non derogatory portrayal 3) Balanced representation 4) avoiding stereotypes and using non-sexist language. The ultimate aim is to promote reporting which breaks stereotypes and highlights women's issues in the Philippines.
- **Getting it Right: Reporting on Disability in the Philippines, 2015, VERA Files:**<sup>21</sup> This guide provides pointers and checklists for journalists to navigate the unique set of ethical issues that come with reporting on disability. It serves as a "reminder to the media that PWDs are by themselves "experts" who can provide context and perspective to stories about disability"(p.42).
- **Ethical Guide for Filipino Journalists, 2021, National Union of Journalists of the Philippines**<sup>22</sup>: The guide covers disinformation and fact-checking, safety of journalists, handling ethical dilemmas, amongst others. In a section dedicated to reporting on women, it urges journalists to cover stories beyond VAW and expand to areas like reproductive justice, wage gaps, changing roles in society, etc. It also lays down guidelines to safeguard survivors of VAW.

### Studies on Portrayal of Women

Very few studies are available to understand how women are portrayed in the media. This study largely relies on interviews with media practitioners and NGO professionals, which are shared in the next section.

A study (Licudo, J. et. al., 2022) on the media

portrayal of women politicians during COVID-19 found that journalists commonly emphasised women's feminine attributes, with common adjectives including: comforting, empathetic, sensitive, emotional, and communicative. This re-focuses on traditional roles they are expected to play in society. Women politicians were more likely to be described in 'feminine' language while journalists tend to include direct quotes from male politicians including their stance, opinions, and comments on issues.<sup>23</sup>

Another study on gender portrayal in advertisements<sup>24</sup> found that, overall, women were more likely than men to be portrayed as consumers (65% versus 56%). However, alcoholic beverages were only endorsed by men. As consumers, men were more likely than women to be shown as experts (13% versus 6%). In terms of characters portrayed, women were more likely to be portrayed in parental roles while men were more likely to be shown in professional roles. Though the study didn't include digital ads in their sample, the report suggests that ads in this space are more inclined to include 'progressive depictions' including those from the LGBTQIA community.

### Online Gender-Based Violence

The Philippines has one of the highest rates of internet use in the world. The internet penetration rate was 73.1 percent of the country's total population as of January 2023, according to DataReportal.<sup>25</sup> Reuters' 2023 Digital News Report<sup>26</sup> found that Radio and TV brands remain the most popular media overall in the Philippines, though social media was the most popular source of news in the urban sample. TikTok is becoming increasingly popular, growing from 2% of news consumers in 2020 to 21% in 2023.

The high use of online media comes with a price: an increase in online gender-based violence (OGBV) and organised disinformation campaigns. The Foundation for Media Alternatives (FMA) has been gathering evidence of OGBV cases since 2014. They reported a 160% increase in cases in 2022 compared to 2019<sup>27</sup>. According to the FMA, it is difficult for women to report OGBV cases because they are not taken seriously by law enforcement and are re-traumatised in the process of doing so. Secondly, survivors rarely

know the processes around content removal, such as nude photos and sex videos, evidence collection, and privacy.<sup>28</sup>

Journalists also face threats of online violence. A Rappler report (2021, p.96)<sup>29</sup> says they are “shamed in public in posts often rife with misogyny, gendered attacks, sexualisation, hate. Many commentaries online justify or wish for violence and real-world harm upon journalists concerned. In some cases, it is not just the journalists who are targeted. Supporters, family members, and friends are targeted as well”. Since one in three internet users in the country is new, they are especially vulnerable to both OGBV and disinformation campaigns, and more training is required to equip such groups to navigate the internet.<sup>30</sup>

### Violence Against Women Journalists

The six-year term of President Duterte saw a significant number of attacks on journalists as well as media houses. Between June 2016 and June 2022, the CMFR documented 265 cases of press freedom violations. Of these, 69 involved women journalists.<sup>31</sup> The persecution has reduced, but still continues under President Marcos Jr.<sup>32</sup> Forty-seven incidents of press freedom violations were documented by the National Union of Journalists from June 2022 to March 2023; 14 incidents involved women journalists.<sup>33</sup>

Several reports point out that the nature of threats range from verbal and physical assault, doxxing (the malicious publication of a person’s or organisation’s private or identifying information on the internet), murder, lawsuits, and “red-tagging”<sup>34</sup> amongst others.<sup>35,36</sup> What sets apart this phase of media intimidation, especially for women, is the constant barrage of sexual language and threats by Duterte against journalists, senators, civil servants, and many other critics, especially during his controversial ‘war on drugs’. This rhetoric trickled down to other aspects of society, especially on social media. The online hate went hand-in-hand with steady disinformation campaigns run by pro-government camps that involved social media influencers, fake accounts, or anonymously-managed pages. These served to discredit journalists and others who questioned government policies through a

process widely known as ‘astroturfing’.<sup>37</sup>

Two of the hardest-hit organisations have been ABS-CBN and Rappler. In 2020, ABS-CBN, the Philippines’ leading free to air radio and television network, was forced off air after the Philippine House of Representatives refused to approve the franchise bill that would have allowed it to operate for another 25 years.<sup>38</sup> The frequencies which belonged to ABS have been sold to allies of President Marcos Jr. and Duterte – Apollo Quiboloy, and Manuel Villar, former Senate president and the country’s richest man. Eleven cases were filed against Rappler’s Maria Ressa, as well as other officers and reporters, with charges including cyber libel, non-payment of taxes, and violation of the ‘anti-dummy’ law (used when laws for nationalisation of certain rights, franchises or privileges are flouted).<sup>39</sup> They were also issued with a shutdown order. Ressa and Rappler were acquitted of four tax evasion cases in January 2023 and another one in September 2023<sup>40</sup>. Alternative media outlets frequently face cyber-attacks which destroy their websites.<sup>41</sup>

### Needs of media organisations

Five interviews were conducted for this research to understand perspectives around reporting practices and portrayals of VAW as well as other issues around journalist safety. Three respondents had media experience: a media manager at a large Filipino media organisation; an international producer at a large international newsroom, with experience in the Philippines; and a media development professional. Two respondents are from organisations working on the intersection of media and feminist practices: a medium sized NGO (NGO representative) and Feminist Media Lab (FML).<sup>42</sup>

### Portrayal practices/stereotypes of women and girls

This section covers how interviewees perceive the framing of women and VAW, as well as their own practices, to ensure that stories are covered ethically, without retraumatising survivors. It also covers challenges to reporting, the issue of safety and how organisations collaborate to ensure gender fair coverage.

### ***Framing and Language***

Despite an increasing number of women in top positions at Filipino news outlets, all respondents said the portrayal of women tends to be stereotypical. Reporting on VAW can often be “sensationalist”, as one respondent said, or a “dichotomy between the powerless woman and the monsters”, as stated by another. While reporting on VAW, journalists might focus on what the survivor was wearing, their physical appearance, or whether or not they were drinking. The FML’s founder suggested that there is a public perception of what a ‘good victim’ is – a woman who is proper and in line with social mores – and anyone outside this category will be blamed for violence. Her organisation found that even brochures from the police on preventing VAW put the burden of stopping the crime on women.

Respondents attributed this to outlets aiming for virality, laziness, and prioritising the male perspective. There are underlying social causes for this portrayal of victim/survivors. For instance, in the case of domestic violence women are expected to make a compromise rather than break up the family and leave their husband. The FML founder said that the dominant public idea of gender-based violence in the Philippines remains limited to physical and sexual violence and doesn’t consider psychological or economic violence, even though the law recognises them as such. In these circumstances, highlighting the underlying causes of gender-based violence by creating engaging material which tackles the control and judgement over women’s sexuality is crucial.

The former President freely talked about inflicting sexual violence on women, and this was seen to increase negative language about and towards women. In turn, other officials in the government were emboldened to make sexist remarks or openly question women’s expertise on issues of social relevance. The media manager sums this up: “...although of course sexism has always been there, in the last six years it was very, very hard to correct the messaging in social media, in the news ... because you had the last most powerful person telling you that it’s okay”.

Simultaneously, some respondents felt that women were often outspoken critics of the government, and therefore it was important to

feature them as lead voices or experts. Women also occupy top positions in governance, the nonprofit sector, academia, and business, among others. Both media producers consciously seek out women when more men have publicly spoken about an issue. In contrast, the media development professional felt that reporting on VAW doesn’t always reflect the voices of women high up in the corporate world. She attributed this to the ties between political power and media ownership, and that very few women own media companies.

In the broader Asian context, the international media producer felt there was a difference in how a network or channel might produce the story based on their audience’s interest. However, she felt that positive stories were missing from the narrative, especially those showing “...how women are helping themselves, or how women and men work together to make women’s situations better”.

### ***Challenges to reporting***

Respondents said that the safety of journalists as well as their sources are the biggest challenges to reporting on VAW. As the media manager pointed out, women, including senators, aren’t spared humiliating verbal or physical harassment from male officials when they speak about social issues. Sources can often be hostile because they are scared for their own safety, especially in areas of conflict or extreme political violence. The international media producer said that she couldn’t complete a story about child marriages in the Philippines because the NGO didn’t see her as a collaborator, and the source was also under attack from the imams for preventing child marriage. The media development professional also said that along with encouraging survivors to talk about violence they face, there need to be systems in place to support victims/survivors and ensure they are not blamed.

### ***Informed Consent and Ethics***

There were mixed responses about practices of ensuring that interviewees were not retraumatised while reporting VAW. The NGO respondent found that reporters sometimes followed a deliberate line of questioning that blamed the victim-survivor. She gave the example of a gang rape survivor who was told by an anchor on national television that the attack



was her fault because she was drinking with the men. There were no attempts to hide her identity. Meanwhile, the international media producer said that in most cases, following good practices was a personal initiative rather than a policy; a "hit and miss" approach. The media manager said that the safety of the subject, especially women, is much more important than getting a 'scoop'.

However, informed consent is taken seriously by organisations as confirmed by the media manager, international media producer, and media development professional. As practitioners, they felt it was the journalist's responsibility to make the source feel comfortable throughout, to keep them involved in story development, to ask them how they want to be portrayed, including how much they want to reveal, and to ensure that no element betrays their anonymity. The international media producer pointed out that producers don't often share their practices with each other. In her case, she learnt practices of being an empathetic and ethical storyteller from her mentors. She asks, "what they want out of the story, and how they think they could be a voice of empowerment". Giving an overall perspective from Asia, the media development professional said that often, once the formal ethics process is done with, the storytelling/reportage itself doesn't necessarily hold true to these values.

### ***Satisfaction with media reportage***

In terms of satisfaction with how their organisation or the industry in general covered women and girls, most respondents feel that there is room for improvement. The FML founder expressed a deep dissatisfaction with the stereotyping and slut-shaming that the media indulges in and was also critical of the push back against strong women leaders in the country. Meanwhile, the media manager believed that her organisation was ahead of the industry in how it reported on women and children. "We're probably not perfect like everybody else but I can say that (name withheld) is one of the best, the one per cent in terms of covering women and children."

The NGO representative said there are examples of both good and bad practices based on an individual news organisation's values. The international media producer felt there is room for increasing the number of positive stories about women role models who a new generation

of women can look up to. Stories need to portray women in all their complexities rather than binaries. "It's hard to be a woman, because there's so many standards we have to fall into...maybe that's the kind of content we need, like a woman is a person period".

### ***Engaging audiences***

Between media professionals and NGO professionals the latter shared more instances of engaging with audiences to raise awareness and understanding of VAW and its impact on communities. Usually, FML works with survivors of violence, many of whom have been failed by first responders who negated their experiences or reconciled them with perpetrators. Therefore, FML feels it is imperative to create a safe space for the people who are engaging with the informational material they share online. They also want to enable people to imagine what "an ideal future safe from violence might look like". One strategy they use is to always include links to online gender-based violence helplines or psychosocial support. The medium sized NGO has been involved in multiple audience focused interventions including the #RespetoNaman (Respect Me)<sup>43</sup> campaign and an upcoming chatbot which provides legal and psycho-social support to people who report harassment, rape or any kind of abusive treatment. The chatbot will be available to all genders. This organisation also has protection centres for GBV survivors. In this way both organisations work towards creating an enabling environment for survivors of GBV.

### ***Reporting practices***

This section examines the nature of collaborations between newsrooms and NGOs specifically, as well as the wider collaborative practices that could improve reporting on VAW. The section also looks at the kinds of training available to journalists covering VAW stories.

#### ***Collaborations***

Collaborations between NGOs and newsrooms fell in two categories for the respondents: training for journalists, and to gain access to stories on the ground. Two respondents shared that NGOs were crucial in facilitating contact and gaining trust with remote communities or possibly those who speak a different dialect to



the producers.

The NGO representative said that her organisation often consults for certain media outlets to make their reporting more gender responsive. She said that there was a need for conferences or consultative meetings to bring different groups working on gender-based violence together. She believes her organisation has the capacity to host these, but funding organisations do not see a merit in financial support for such work.

### ***Training for journalists***

Respondents said that the National Union of Journalists in the Philippines (NUJP) holds regular workshops and conferences on gender sensitivity in how to cover women's and children's issues. However, training does not necessarily result in gender-sensitive reporting. The NGO representative's organisation is often asked to conduct newsroom trainings but "it's usually after a backlash of certain incidents [that] have happened. And [newsrooms ask] how can we be more gender responsive? How can we use gender fair language?" Her organisation also works with advertising groups to reduce sexist material.

The media manager said that her organisation ensures comprehensive safety training for their staff through partners from international organisations and the NUJP; safety manuals are also regularly updated. The focus is on improving skills, especially digital skills. Feminist Media Lab has their own guidelines on communicating against gender-based violence which they currently use to train advocacy organisations and government officials who are responsible for implementing laws on how they can communicate gender-based violence without stereotyping, victimising, and perpetuating the male gaze in their communication materials. They expressed an interest in working with media organisations as well.

### ***Impact and Monitoring***

None of the respondents' organisations collect and analyse data on media reporting of VAW to understand the prevalence and patterns of coverage. Both media practitioners' organisations do not currently gather data of the impact their stories have on audiences either. The media manager said that her organisation keeps in touch with women's rights organisations or the

communities where the stories come from to keep track of the developments and to write follow up reports. In the process of research, it was found that CMFR has a programme called 'Media Ethics and Responsibility' which reviews news reports from Philippine broadsheets, and also provides commentary on the state of journalism, including on how stories are reported. The Foundation for Media Alternatives tracks cases of online gender-based violence as reported in the media.

Both respondents from the NGOs said that their work is based on evidence from the ground, and about the impact of their interventions. For instance, FML conducted an "emotional mapping" of the needs of the victims/survivors to create their social media campaign's strategy. They also collect data on the impact their work has, which includes Facebook metrics (because that is a primary platform for their work) and analysis of the different categories of comments and messages that victims/survivors send them.

### ***Violence and Harassment of Female Journalists***

All respondents confirmed that there has been an increase in attacks against women journalists in the last six years both during and since the Duterte administration. In these circumstances, both media practitioners said attention to journalists' safety is important. The media manager said that all journalists in her organisation were given safety briefings when they went to the field to report on volatile issues. They also use strict safety protocols, including a security officer, planning transportation and communication channels ahead of scheduled travel.

The international media producer pointed out that women journalists face sexual harassment within their organisation from their peers or managers. A CMFR article<sup>44</sup> says that cases of workplace harassment are likely to be severely underreported because women fear being seen as weak. Padovani and Bozzon (2020) note that despite comprehensive laws which prohibit sex discrimination, such as the Magna Carta of Women in 2009, "media organisations in the Philippines may have deemed general gender-equality policies unnecessary and did not adopt them. On the other hand, they fully embraced

paternity leave and return-to-job policies (P. 121)<sup>45</sup>

All respondents prioritise addressing the toll that working on VAW has on employees' and volunteers' mental health. "I wish there was [support for journalists]. I feel like the way I feel right now is because of accumulated trauma. I feel like I am tired or burnt out because of all these years of hearing sad stories and documenting them," said the international media producer. The media manager also

spoke of providing support to cope with the trauma that journalists face from the additional anxiety caused by the harassment during the Duterte period. Respondents said that at an organisational level it was important to have check-ins and briefings, and to encourage employees and volunteers to flag issues and take timely action. The medium-sized NGO has provided support to journalists at large media houses who have been in Duterte's firing line.

---

## Recommendations

Efforts must be made to address misogyny, protect journalists' rights, and create an environment that enables independent and objective media organisations to thrive.

**1**

### Standardise training

Media organisations need to regularise and institutionalise a range of training for journalists. This includes digital skills such as fact-checking and data protection, security training, as well as training on ethical reporting of gender issues. Additional efforts should be made to safeguard the physical, mental and digital wellbeing of journalists.

**2**

### Work collaboratively

There is a clear scope for collaborations between women's rights organisations and media organisations that can strengthen gender-based reporting and VAW interventions. While these already exist, they need to be widened in scope, bringing together people working on an intersectional set of rights including those of marginalised people, indigenous people, people with disabilities, the LGBTQI+ community. Crucial to this is funding organisations with the capacity to facilitate such collaborations and conversations.

**3**

### Conduct research on media reportage of VAW

The data gaps of monitoring VAW stories in depth as well as the portrayal of women and the LGBTQI+ community need to be filled. Particularly the research could look into the impact of the last six years on women's rights, bodily autonomy, and perceptions of safety.

---

## Research References

- Chua, Y.T. (2023), Philippines, Digital News Report. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.
- CMFR Staff, (2023). Strong record of empowerment: The feminist movement in PH media. Centre

for Media Freedom Responsibility, 23 March

- Committee to Project Journalists, 2023. Hold The Line Coalition welcomes acquittal of Maria Ressa and Rappler, calls for dropping of remaining cases. [Online]. Available at: <https://cpj.org/2023/09/hold-the-line-coalition-welcomes-acquittal-of-maria-ressa-and-rappler-calls-for-all-remaining-cases-to-be-dropped/>
- Fernandez, D.G. (1987). Women in Media in the Philippines. *Media Asia*, 14(4), pp. 183-193
- Freedom House (2023) Freedom on the Net: Philippines.
- Freedom House (2023) Freedom in the World: Philippines
- Forbes, A. (2015). Courageous women in media: Marcos and censorship in the Philippines. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 21 (1), pp. 195-210
- Foundation for Media Alternatives (2021). Filipino Women's Digital Agenda: A Policy Overview.
- Foundation for Media Alternatives, Association for Progressive Communications, Access Now and Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau (2022). Human Rights And The Philippine Digital Environment Joint Submission To The Universal Periodic Review Of The Philippines. Foundation for Media Alternatives.
- Global Voices, 2023. What is red-tagging and why it is dangerous in the Philippines?. [Online]. Available at: <https://globalvoices.org/2023/04/27/what-is-red-tagging-and-why-it-is-dangerous-in-the-philippines/> [Accessed 24 November 2023]
- Human Rights Watch, 2023. Philippine Journalist Shot Dead Live on Air. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/07/philippine-journalist-shot-dead-live-air> [Accessed 24 November 2023]
- Inter-Agency Council on Violence Against Women and Their Children (2018). National Advocacy and Communication Plan, Manila.
- International Journalists' Network, 2023. 4 down, 3 to go: Cataloging Maria Ressa's legal battles in early 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://ijnnet.org/en/story/4-down-3-go-cataloging-maria-ressa%E2%80%99s-legal-battles-early-2023> [Accessed 24 November 2023]
- International Women's Media Foundation (2011). Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media. Washington D.C.
- Investing in Women (2020). Gender Representation in Philippine Advertising. Diliman.
- Kemp, S. (2023) "Digital 2023: The Philippines," DataReportal. [Online]. Available at: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-philippines>
- Licudo, J. et. al., (2022) Women Taking the Lead: An Analysis of the Mainstream Media Coverage of Filipino Women Leaders during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Padovani, C. and Bozzon, R. (2020). Media gender-equality regimes: Exploring media organisations' policy adoption across nations" in Monika Djerf-Pierre & Maria Edström (eds.) Comparing gender and media equality across the globe.
- Philippines Commission on Women (2009). Republic Act 9710: The Magna Carta of Women. Available: <https://pcw.gov.ph/magna-carta-of-women/>
- Philippine Commission on Women and Media and Gender Equality Committee (2017). Gender-Fair Media Guidebook, 2nd Ed. Philippine Commission on Women, Manila
- Publishing Perspectives, 2023. Nobel Peace Laureate and Author Maria Ressa Acquitted. Online. Available at: <https://publishingperspectives.com/2023/09/the-philippines-nobel-laureate-maria-ressa-acquitted/> [Accessed 24 November 2023]
- Rappler, (2021). Patient Zero A study on the Philippine Information Ecosystem, Internews

- Rappler, 2022. TIMELINE: How Duterte normalized sexism in the Philippine presidency. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/timeline-how-duterte-normalized-sexism-misogyny-philippine-presidency/> [Accessed 24 November 2023]
- Reporters Without Borders, 2023. World Press Freedom Index, Philippines. [Online]. Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/country/philippines>
- Sharer, R. (1994) Women's Page Editors as Agents of Political Change in the Philippines, *Media Asia*, 21:1, 21-29, DOI: 10.1080/01296612.1994.11726429
- The Coalition for Women in Journalism, n.d. Maria Ressa's Conviction and The State of Press Freedom in The Philippines. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.womeninjournalism.org/reports-all/report-maria-ressas-conviction-and-the-state-of-press-freedom-in-the-philippines?rq=philippines>
- Tripon, O., and Garcia, L. (2020). Women and the Media (p. 252-289) in Ofrenco, R.P., and Illo, J.F., (eds) *Philippine NGO Beijing + 25 Report*. UP Centre for Women's and Gender Studies, Diliman, Quezon City.
- VERA Files (2015) *Getting it Right: Reporting on Disability in the Philippines*. Ed. Yvonne T. Chua. The Asia Foundation. Pasig City.
- World Bank (2021) *Gender-Based Violence Policy And Institutional Mapping Report*. Washington DC.
- World Economic Forum (2023) *Global Gender Gap Index Report*. Geneva.
- Yep, D.J. (2021) *Ethical Guide for Filipino Journalists*, 2nd ed. National Union of Journalists of the Philippines
- Yi, B.L. and Crispin, SW. (2023). Marcos Jr's Philippines, milder tone belies harsh media reality in *Committee to Protect Journalists* 16 May.

---

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> World Economic Forum (2023) *Global Gender Gap Index Report*. Geneva.

<sup>2</sup> Inter-Agency Council on Violence Against Women and Their Children (2018), *National Advocacy and Communication Plan*, Manila.

<sup>3</sup> Rappler, 2022. TIMELINE: How Duterte normalized sexism in the Philippine presidency. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/timeline-how-duterte-normalized-sexism-misogyny-philippine-presidency/> [Accessed 24 November 2023]

<sup>4</sup> International Journalists' Network, 2023. 4 down, 3 to go: Cataloging Maria Ressa's legal battles in early 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://ijnnet.org/en/story/4-down-3-go-cataloging-maria-ressa%E2%80%99s-legal-battles-early-2023> [Accessed 24 November 2023]

<sup>5</sup> Publishing Perspectives, 2023. Nobel Peace Laureate and Author Maria Ressa Acquitted. Online. Available at: <https://publishingperspectives.com/2023/09/the-philippines-nobel-laureate-maria-ressa-acquitted/> [Accessed 24 November 2023]

<sup>6</sup> International Womens' Media Foundation (2011). *Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media*. Washington D.C.

<sup>7</sup> Reporters Without Borders, 2023. World Press Freedom Index, Philippines. [Online]. Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/country/philippines>

<sup>8</sup> Freedom House, 2023. *Freedom on the Net: Philippines*.

<sup>9</sup> Freedom House (2023) Freedom in the World: Philippines

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch, 2023. Philippine Journalist Shot Dead Live on Air. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/11/07/philippine-journalist-shot-dead-live-air> [Accessed 24 November 2023]

<sup>12</sup> Fernandez, D.G. (1987). Women in Media in the Philippines. *Media Asia*, 14(4), pp. 183-193

<sup>13</sup> Forbes, A. (2015). Courageous women in media: Marcos and censorship in the Philippines. *Pacific Journalism Review*, 21 (1). pp. 195-210

<sup>14</sup> See also: Sharer, R. (1994) Women's Page Editors as Agents of Political Change in the Philippines, *Media Asia*, 21:1, 21-29, DOI: 10.1080/01296612.1994.11726429

<sup>15</sup> International Women's Media Foundation (2011). Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media. Washington D.C.

<sup>16</sup> CMFR Staff, (2023). Strong record of empowerment: The feminist movement in PH media. Centre for Media Freedom Responsibility, 23 March

<sup>17</sup> Tripon, O., and Garcia, L. (2020). Women and the Media (p. 252-289) in Ofrenco, R.P., and Illo, J.F., (eds) Philippine NGO Beijing + 25 Report. UP Centre for Women's and Gender Studies, Diliman, Quezon City.

<sup>18</sup> World Bank (2021) Gender-Based Violence Policy And Institutional Mapping Report. Washington DC.

<sup>19</sup> Philippines Commission on Women (2009). Republic Act 9710: The Magna Carta of Women. Available: <https://pcw.gov.ph/magna-carta-of-women/>

<sup>20</sup> Philippine Commission on Women and Media and Gender Equality Committee (2017). Gender-Fair Media Guidebook, 2nd Ed. Philippine Commission on Women, Manila

<sup>21</sup> VERA Files (2015) Getting it Right: Reporting on Disability in the Philippines. Ed. Yvonne T. Chua. The Asia Foundation. Pasig City.

<sup>22</sup> Yep, D.J. (2021) Ethical Guide for Filipino Journalists, 2nd ed. National Union of Journalists of the Philippines

<sup>23</sup> Licudo, J. et. al., (2022) Women Taking the Lead: An Analysis of the Mainstream Media Coverage of Filipino Women Leaders during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

<sup>24</sup> Investing in Women (2020). Gender Representation in Philippine Advertising. Diliman.

<sup>25</sup> Kemp, S. (2023) "Digital 2023: The Philippines," DataReportal, <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2023-philippines>

<sup>26</sup> Chua, Y.T. (2023), Philippines, Digital News Report. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

<sup>27</sup> Foundation for Media Alternatives (2021). Filipino Women's Digital Agenda: A Policy Overview.

<sup>28</sup> Foundation for Media Alternatives, Association for Progressive Communications, Access Now and Women's Legal and Human Rights Bureau (2022). Human Rights And The Philippine Digital Environment Joint Submission To The Universal Periodic Review Of The Philippines. Foundation for Media Alternatives.

<sup>29</sup> Rappler, (2021). Patient Zero A study on the Philippine Information Ecosystem, Internews

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> CMFR Staff, (2023). Strong record of empowerment: The feminist movement in PH media. Centre for Media Freedom Responsibility, 23 March

<sup>32</sup> Yi, B.L. and Crispin, SW. (2023). Marcos Jr.'s Philippines, milder tone belies harsh media reality in Committee to Protect Journalists 16 May.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



<sup>34</sup> Global Voices, 2023. What is red-tagging and why it is dangerous in the Philippines?. [Online]. Available at: <https://globalvoices.org/2023/04/27/what-is-red-tagging-and-why-it-is-dangerous-in-the-philippines/> [Accessed 24 November 2023]

<sup>35</sup> Freedom House (2023) Freedom on the Net: Philippines.

<sup>36</sup> Tripon, O., and Garcia, L. (2020). Women and the Media (p. 252-289) in Ofrenco, R.P., and Illo, J.F., (eds) Philippine NGO Beijing + 25 Report. UP Centre for Women's and Gender Studies, Diliman, Quezon City.

<sup>37</sup> Rappler, (2021). Patient Zero A study on the Philippine Information Ecosystem, Internews.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> The Coalition for Women in Journalism, n.d. Maria Ressa's Conviction and The State of Press Freedom in The Philippines. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.womeninjournalism.org/reports-all/report-maria-ressas-conviction-and-the-state-of-press-freedom-in-the-philippines?rq=philippines>

<sup>40</sup> Committee to Project Journalists, 2023. Hold The Line Coalition welcomes acquittal of Maria Ressa and Rappler, calls for dropping of remaining cases. [Online]. Available at: <https://cpj.org/2023/09/hold-the-line-coalition-welcomes-acquittal-of-maria-ressa-and-rappler-calls-for-all-remaining-cases-to-be-dropped/>

<sup>41</sup> Tripon, O., and Garcia, L., 2020. Women and the Media (p. 252-289) in Ofrenco, R.P., and Illo, J.F., (eds) Philippine NGO Beijing + 25 Report. UP Centre for Women's and Gender Studies, Diliman, Quezon City.

<sup>42</sup> Consented to share name.

<sup>43</sup> The MeToo movement of the Philippines.

<sup>44</sup> CMFR Staff, (2023). Strong record of empowerment: The feminist movement in PH media. Centre for Media Freedom Responsibility, 23 March

<sup>45</sup> Padovani, C. and Bozzon, R. (2020). Media gender-equality regimes: Exploring media organisations' policy adoption across nations" in Monika Djerf-Pierre & Maria Edström (eds.) Comparing gender and media equality across the globe

# Singapore

By Lee Yoke Mun and Kimberly Wong of AWARE

## Country Overview

Based on Freedom House's 2023 'Freedom in the World' report, Singapore was classified as "partly free", scoring 47 out of 100 countries assessed for political rights and civil liberties.<sup>1</sup> In particular, the country scored one out of four points on the presence of free and independent media. All domestic mass media are not independent of the government, through ownership, funding, regulation, or otherwise.<sup>2</sup> Editorials and news coverage are generally supportive of state policies and have been criticised for self-censorship, though critical content may occasionally be published in newspapers. Media outlets, particularly independent media, as well as bloggers and public figures, have faced substantial civil and criminal penalties for speech considered by the government to be seditious, defamatory, or injurious to racial or religious sensitivities. The Freedom House report also noted that civil society organisations, especially those engaged in human rights and governance-related work, meet restrictions in their work; activists face the risk of police questioning, criminal charges, and civil lawsuits, among other restrictions and risks.

On gender equality, Singapore ranked 49/146 countries (second within ASEAN)<sup>3</sup> and scored 0.739 in the World Economic Forum's 2023 Global Gender Gap Report.<sup>4</sup> Although the country performs well in educational attainment and health and survival, women's representation amongst legislators, senior officials, and managers remains low at 38% (Singapore's ranking: 48th). Women's political empowerment is also limited, with women making up only 29% of parliamentarians (ranking: 56th) and 13% of ministers (ranking: 106th).

On the other hand, the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index (GII) places Singapore's 2021 GI value at 0.040 — far below the world average of 0.465, indicating low levels of inequality between women and men.<sup>5</sup> Relatively similar proportions of women and men in Singapore aged 25 years and above receive secondary education (80.5%

and 85.9% respectively). However, the gender disparity in the labour force participation rates (LFPR) was considerable: Only 59.4% of women aged 15 years and above participated in the labour force compared to 76.8% of men. The Ministry of Manpower (MOM), however, reported that the LFPRs for women and men in 2021 were 64.2% and 77.2% respectively.<sup>6</sup>

In 2020, the Minister for Home Affairs and Law, Shanmugam, announced that the government would conduct a review of women's issues to explore how Singapore could more deeply imprint the value of gender equality into its "collective consciousness".<sup>7</sup> It was the first time that the government had recognised gender equality as a fundamental value and a goal. Throughout 2021, the government held 160 Conversations on Singapore Women's Development with nearly 6,000 participants.<sup>8</sup> Based on the feedback gathered through these conversations, the White Paper on Singapore Women's Development was launched in March 2022, laying out 25 action plans across five areas: equal opportunities in the workplace, recognition and support for caregivers, protection against violence and harm, other support measures for women, and mindset shifts.<sup>9</sup>

While the White Paper mentioned initiatives to enhance protections against violence and online harms for women, several civil society organisations noted that it contained no mention of various marginalised groups of women, including migrant domestic workers; migrant spouses; religious and ethnic minorities; lesbian, bisexual and transgender women; sex workers; and women with disabilities.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the media's role in furthering gender equality was not addressed.

## Representation of women and girls in the media

### Portrayal of women and girls in media

There is limited research on the representation of women and girls in Singaporean media. Existing

studies — many of which were conducted in the early 2000s — examine the portrayal of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and the representation of working women and women Paralympians in the news and on social media.

### ***Depiction of VAWG***

According to research, news reports on VAWG often sidelined victim-survivors' voices while shaming, blaming, or holding them responsible for the violence they experienced. For instance, scholars found that news reports from the 1990s on domestic violence often blamed women for provoking or causing the violence. Reports also included police advisories suggesting that women stay vigilant and adopt "safety strategies" to "avoid (re-)victimisation".<sup>11</sup> This can have a profound impact on women's day-to-day freedoms: A 1997 study found that women respondents were more likely to pay close attention to news reports of sexual violence and reported higher levels of fear when outside of their homes alone at night, compared to men.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, women engaged in risk management or avoidance tactics, such as avoiding dark areas and dressing modestly, to minimise their exposure to the same crimes.

Such narratives extend to online spaces today. In response to VAWG news, social media users blame survivors for their experiences of sexual violence by criticising their appearance or behaviour.<sup>13</sup> Comments reveal widespread confusion around consent and the trivialisation of non-physical forms of violence like voyeurism, verbal harassment, and unwanted staring.<sup>14</sup> Two examples of Facebook comments follow:<sup>15</sup>

**"Not this is not the way to behave but at least he's not out raping women. Small victories."**

**"Well, they no longer worry as much about getting murdered, raped, or kidnapped so the spare paranoia goes to 'I'm worried someone might jackoff to pictures of my panties.' Just put it into perspective."**

Research has shown that media tends to de-gender, de-politicise, and individualise VAWG.<sup>16</sup> Technology-facilitated sexual violence is commonly attributed to perpetrators' poor mental health, psychological diagnoses, and/or ease of access to pornography and technology such as spy cameras.

The prevailing discourse not only minimises perpetrators' responsibility, but it also fails to recognise VAWG as a larger structural problem and, resultantly, does not contribute to shifting the public's understanding of VAWG.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Representation of women***

Even women who challenge gender roles by entering positions of power in Singapore continue to be bound by gendered expectations. A 2021 study found that despite growing recognition of female entrepreneurs' talents, the media linked working women's success to their ability to balance work and family life, while de-emphasising their professional skills.<sup>18</sup> In particular, articles on "mumpreneurs" often framed entrepreneurship as a desirable way to fulfil personal ambition while enjoying the emotional satisfaction of motherhood.<sup>19</sup> Notably, some reports positioned female entrepreneurs as supportive spouses, as opposed to primary business owners.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, scholars found that not only did newspapers portray successful female managers as "aggressive" and "powerful" and female entrepreneurs as "steel magnolias" or "iron ladies", but women were also expected to balance displays of "masculine" traits such as determination with "feminine" traits such as interpersonal communication skills.<sup>21</sup>

Women Paralympians are also subjected to gendered and/or ableist portrayals: A study analysing 70 local news articles on the Paralympics revealed that although women Paralympians accounted for 67% of images featured in the media, less than 35% of them were featured engaging in their respective sports, compared to 63% of male Paralympians.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Reporting on violence against women and girls***

Singapore media is regulated through legislation and codes of practice. The state's monopoly over Singapore's media landscape is enshrined in legislation. The Newspaper and Printing Presses Act grants ministers extensive powers over printing presses, including the power to decide who can (and cannot) be a newspaper company shareholder and whether to issue a company the permit required to print or publish in Singapore.

Beyond this, the Broadcasting Act extends state control over various media forms. This

Act invests the Infocom Media Development Authority (IMDA), a national statutory board, with the authority to devise Codes of Practice (“codes”), including the following codes which are applicable to traditional media and some forms of new media:

1. Content Code for Nationwide Managed Transmission Linear Television Services;
2. Content Code for Radio Services;
3. Internet Code of Practice;
4. Code of Practice for Online Safety; and
5. Guidelines for Code of Practice for Online Safety

Notably, a similar Code for newspapers and printing presses is not publicly available on the IMDA website, despite publishers being told to abide by it.<sup>23</sup> It appears to be exclusively available for existing publishers or those applying to set up a new printing press. Journalists are expected to uphold the Code of Professional Conduct in their work, but the Code does not offer explicit guidance on depiction of women and girls:<sup>24</sup>

With a paucity of information and research on

media form and provides guidelines which typically cover the categories of national and public interest, social norms and values, racial and religious harmony, and violence and other harmful behaviour (e.g. smoking, alcoholism).

“Women” and “girls” are not explicitly referenced within these IMDA codes and no specific guideline pertaining to the reporting of VAWG exists. This absence suggests that VAWG may not be receiving sufficient attention within media regulation and more explicit guidelines and policies might be needed to address this in Singapore’s media landscape.

***Guidelines relating to VAWG: Reporting on violence against women and girls***

With news reporting on criminal cases, the public prosecutor may — and typically does — apply for gag orders to protect survivors’ and witnesses’ identities, especially in cases involving sexual offences, minors, and sexual exploitation of trafficked victims<sup>27</sup>.

While the IMDA codes do not specifically mention “women” and “girls”, they do consequently provide some protection to survivors and appear to exercise some trauma-

<b>Singapore Journalists’ Code of Professional Conduct</b>
1. Every member shall maintain good quality of workmanship and high standard of conduct.
2. No member shall do anything that will bring discredit on himself/herself, his/her union, his/her newspaper or other news media or his/her profession.
3. Every member shall defend the principles of freedom in the honest collection and dissemination of news and the right of fair comment and criticism.
4. Every member shall realise his/her personal responsibility for everything he/she prepares for his/her newspaper or other news media.
5. Every member shall report and interpret the news with scrupulous honesty.
6. Every member shall use only honest methods to obtain news, pictures and documents.
7. No member shall accept any form of bribe whether for publication or suppression nor permit personal interest to influence his/her sense of justice.
8. Every member shall respect all necessary confidence regarding sources of information and private documents.
9. Every member shall keep in mind the dangers in the laws of libel, contempt of court and copyright.
10. Every member shall observe at all times the fraternity of their profession and shall never take unfair advantage of a fellow member.

related practices within the media industry, we must rely on official guidelines — such as IMDA Codes — to understand the ways in which institutions shape Singapore’s media landscape.

Generally, IMDA’s Codes maintain fair market conduct across the industry and “[safeguarding] the interests of consumers of media services and of the public”.<sup>25</sup> They seek to ensure that no broadcasting content or programme is “against the public interest or order, or national harmony, or [offends] against decency”.<sup>26</sup> Each Code elaborates upon what this means for the relevant

informed practices. For example, the Content Code for Radio Services requires service providers to exercise discretion and ensure that their programmes do not “[carry] explicit and prolonged sexual violence or erotic description of sexual assault or coercion”<sup>28</sup>. Meanwhile, the Content Code for Nationwide Managed Transmission Linear Television Services advises:

<p>8.19 News and other factual programmes, such as current affairs and informational programmes, that contain violent or graphic real-life visuals should carry consumer advice to alert viewers.</p>
<p>8.21 Presentation of news on FTA TV must observe the following additional guidelines:</p> <p>(a) News reports and bulletins should always be presented with due accuracy and impartiality, and without the interjection of personal views by presenters.</p> <p>(b) News reports and bulletins should be clearly distinguished from other programmes.</p> <p>(c) Morbid, sensational, or alarming details not essential to factual reporting should be excluded.</p> <p>(d) Particular care must be taken when reporting on sexual crimes. Reports must not carry information which could lead to the identification of such victims.</p> <p>(e) News reports must be sensitive to the use of materials or information relating to a person's personal or private affairs. The broadcast of such materials or information is acceptable only if there is an identifiable public interest for doing so.</p> <p>(f) Visuals that may seriously distress or offend should only be displayed when there is an identifiable public interest for doing so. Such visuals should be suitably edited and carry consumer advice to alert viewers. Sensitivity must be exercised in broadcasting visuals of or interviews with bereaved relatives or survivors and witnesses of traumatic incidents.</p> <p>(g) Sexual or other sensational material should not be exploited as news items without justification.</p>

*From the Content Code for Nationwide Managed Transmission Linear Television Services<sup>29</sup>*

There is no further guidance on adhering to these codes, such as clear standards of care that media organisations should meet before, during, and after reporting on sexual crimes.<sup>30</sup> Service providers that violate the relevant codes may be subjected to sanctions by IMDA.

In terms of new media, internet services and content providers are required to deny access to what IMDA deems to be prohibited material, such as material promoting sexual violence, if directed by IMDA to do so. More recently, the Online Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act was introduced to regulate content on social media platforms.<sup>31</sup> The accompanying Code and Guidelines stipulate social media services' obligation to regulate and minimise users' exposure to harmful content by issuing community guidelines and proactively removing them.<sup>32</sup> These documents identify six categories of harmful content, including sexual content such as those relating to or encouraging sexual offences under the law. AWARE – a Singaporean advocacy organisation working to end violence against women – has however highlighted concerns about disclosures of sexual violence potentially coming under the umbrella of "sexual content" and the consequent silencing of survivors in public online spaces.<sup>33</sup>

#### **Guidelines on gendered representations**

Concerning gendered representations, the television and radio codes provide the following

anti-discrimination clause:<sup>34</sup>

#### **2.9 Programmes should not:**

- (a) make references to any class or group of persons as being innately or inherently inferior; and**
- (b) encourage or in any way lead to discrimination against any section of the community on account of race, religion, gender, age, occupational status or disability.**

Specifically relating to women and girls, service providers are given the direction to "bear in mind the importance of the family as the basic unit of society" and respect "the institution of marriage".<sup>35</sup> This works in conjunction with clauses that warn against the promotion, justification, or encouragement of non-heterosexual or non-cisgender lifestyles.<sup>36</sup>

#### **2.8 Programmes containing content on lifestyles such as homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexualism, transsexualism, transvestism, paedophilia and incest should be treated with utmost caution. Their treatment should not in any way promote, justify or encourage such lifestyles. Explicit dialogue or information concerning the above topics should not be broadcast.**

IMDA's desire for media to abide by both the prevailing social norms and values on gender and family and an ethos of non-discrimination reflects the assumption that those prevailing values are not inherently discriminatory. However, these guidelines reify Singapore's gendered social norms and ultimately preserve conservative social values, justified by reference to moral concerns such as their potential negative impact on social order and public well-being. Such directions shape biased representations of women and girls, as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) individuals in local media.

#### **Violence and harassment of women journalists**

The research gap extends to data on violence and harassment faced by women journalists: There is no publicly available data capturing this as of 2023. However, recent surveys illustrate the scale of workplace sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination in Singapore.



In Singapore's first-ever nationally representative survey on workplace sexual harassment conducted in 2021, it was found that 40% of women experienced sexual harassment in the past five years, often by their peers or senior colleagues in the workplace.<sup>37</sup> Only three out of 10 survivors reported the incident to official personnel, most commonly to a senior person. Those who did not report cited reasons including wanting to forget about it, not thinking the case was severe enough, or believing that they did not have enough evidence.

Additionally, a 2022 survey by the Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) and Milieu Insight showed that around one in two workers experienced discrimination in the past five years, with gender (23%) being one of the top three grounds on which they faced discrimination.<sup>38</sup> More women (58%) than men (53%) experienced at least one type of discrimination.

While the data does not reveal industry-specific trends, it hints to the likelihood that women journalists face discrimination and sexual harassment at least at similar rates, especially given their high visibility within the public sphere.

Anecdotally, the forms of violence that women journalists experience include being subjected to non-consensual filming (example below) and harassing online comments.<sup>39</sup>



An X (formerly Twitter) thread by Kimberly Lim, an SCMP journalist<sup>40</sup>

## Needs of media organisations

To better understand the needs of organisations when gender-sensitive reporting, interviews were conducted with four respondents: two from media outlets (one mainstream and one independent), and two from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). To protect the identities of all interviewees, their names and those of their organisations have been omitted. Both NGOs and the independent media outlet have fewer than 50 employees, primarily women. The mainstream media outlet has more than 250 employees in its female-dominated newsroom.

These two types of organisations mostly interact with each other when media outlets approach NGOs for comments or interviews on relevant topics. Delving into their reporting processes, we found that media outlets generally adopt good practices when engaging with survivors and have measures in place to support women journalists reporting on gender issues. However, gaps remain.

## Training

Neither media representative has attended formal training on gender sensitivity. Instead, they rely on senior colleagues to impart best practices and know-how to less experienced staff, with much of their knowledge being gained on the job rather than mandated by their organisation.

Similarly, the NGOs interviewed do not consistently conduct training for media professionals. Rather, when working with journalists on media pieces, these NGOs would nudge them to adopt preferred terminologies and trauma-informed reporting practices to ensure interviewees' emotional safety and avoid perpetuating victim-blaming sentiments. For instance, whenever interviews with survivors are requested, the NGOs may work with journalists to rephrase questions such that they would not be insensitive towards the interviewee. The sporadic nature of these efforts, however, likely limits their effectiveness: Three out of four respondents observed that victim-blaming language and harmful gender stereotypes continue to be published.

Specifically, one respondent shared that recent articles on sexual violence and VAWG attribute some blame to survivors by including

comments on their attire, implying they “asked for it”. Headlines or ledes may also suggest that survivors had “upset” the perpetrator leading up to the violent incident.

doing so, not only is it implied that perpetrators are less accountable for their actions, but VAWG is framed as individual incidents and a medicalised problem rather than a systemic

## **Jilted S'porean man, 21, assaults & rapes youth, 17, who is mum of his child, 5, after seeing her with another man**

**SINGAPORE: Unsatisfied with how his girlfriend responded to his requests for sex, a 35-year-old man turned instead to her 13-year-old daughter.**

*Examples of article headlines and ledes from media outlets<sup>41,42</sup>*

Additionally, local news reports may emphasise the perpetrator’s “potential” or “future”, downplaying the severity of their actions.

issue arising from patriarchal structures and norms that perpetuate such violence. In comparison, when responding to such news reports, the NGOs would make a conscious effort

## **'Potential to excel in life': NUS undergrad who molested woman gets probation for 'minor intrusion' offences**

*Example of an article headline from a local mainstream media outlet<sup>43</sup>*

The respondent from the mainstream media outlet explained that such language might emerge from journalists’ sense of obligation to report the facts of the matter. For instance, it might be “questionable” if reporters leave out the defence attorney’s line of argument due to their use of victim-blaming language. A 2016 survey with local journalists and editors shows that many share -this perception around their professional duty: Among other journalistic roles, “reporting on things as they are” was seen as their key duty by nearly half of the journalists.<sup>44</sup> Although journalistic integrity should be maintained, the persistence of gender-insensitive headlines and ledes indicates that the media may not be exercising adequate gender- and trauma-informed care towards survivors.

Relatedly, perpetrators’ responsibility for their actions might also be further diffused when articles mention their mental health conditions. In

to contextualise these incidents within wider structural issues that contribute to VAWG.

The NGOs and independent media representatives found media representations of women and girls to be unsatisfactory. One respondent pointed out how one mainstream media outlet placed women’s issues, such as VAWG and caregiving, under the “lifestyle” section of their website with a sizeable number of these articles focusing on women’s health. Not only does this delegitimise and underplay the myriad issues faced by women, but it also contrasts with the mainstream media representative’s perception of a fairly equal representation of men and women.

The difference in gender sensitivity extends to media coverage of marginalised communities of women: The NGO respondents observed that mainstream media outlets continue to use

certain terminology which reinforces stigma against marginalised groups (for example, using “maid” to refer to migrant domestic workers (MDW), implying a lower status). However, the mainstream media respondent felt that their organisation is generally mindful of the ever-changing terminology in various areas.

Interestingly, gender seems to factor less prominently in news reports where there are intersecting identity markers such as one’s race, class, or migrant status. A respondent observed that male migrant workers and female MDWs tend to be “othered” in similar ways within public discourse due to their shared class and migrant status, while their gender receives much less visibility. As a result, the unique challenges that each of these groups face due to the intersection of their gender, class and migrant status, such as those of live-in female MDWs, are often not discussed. No scholarly literature on this exists at the time of writing.

Overall, based on the World Health Organisation’s Gender Responsive Assessment Scale,<sup>45</sup> the interviews suggest that the mainstream media’s reporting on VAWG and, more broadly, gender equality is somewhat gender-blind and lacks sensitivity, particularly towards the systemic nature of such issues.

### **Mechanisms to ensure victim-survivors’ safety and well-being**

It is clear that all the respondents’ organisations have practices in place to protect survivors’ safety and well-being during media engagements. Yet these practices are not fully formalised with structured policies or standard operating procedures.

The interviewed media outlets shared that they may reach out to NGOs or social workers, who act as an intermediary between the media outlets and survivors when seeking stories or quotes for a story. Prior to any media engagements, the NGOs work closely with survivors to assess their safety, well-being, and readiness to be interviewed. This includes ensuring that any official investigations and court cases involving the survivor have concluded to avoid any consequences.

The practices adopted by these organisations

throughout the reporting process can be further understood using some of the guiding principles of trauma-informed care:<sup>46</sup>

#### *a. Transparency*

When first contacting NGOs and survivors, the media outlets keep all parties fully informed about the article’s context, where it will be published, and what the interview process entails. One of the NGO representatives has a written guide for potential interviewees, briefing them on what they can expect and how the organisation will support them (for instance, protecting their anonymity, and liaising and negotiating with the media on their behalf).

#### *b. Empowerment, voice and choice*

With media engagement, anonymity is a survivor’s main concern. All four respondents noted they work closely with survivors to determine the level of detail they are comfortable sharing in articles.

Considering the sensitive nature of the topic, media outlets may sometimes share their drafts or selected quotes with the NGOs and survivors for verification of accuracy. There might be room for discussion if the survivor is uncomfortable with the quotes. However, if a consensus cannot be reached, one media respondent stated they would consider removing the survivor’s account from the article entirely.

One challenge in relation to this is the tight deadlines associated with increasingly shortening news cycles: Verifying quotes and reading transcripts to avoid misrepresentation of survivors’ experiences is an ideal survivor-centric and trauma-informed practice, but the publishing system makes this difficult.

Both media respondents also spoke about balancing journalistic interests with the need for survivor-centric and trauma-informed reporting. From the media’s perspective, a detailed story often makes for a more compelling read. However, covering survivors’ experiences without due care can harm those exact individuals should they become identifiable and be put at risk of retaliation.

#### *c. Collaboration and mutuality*

To ensure survivors’ well-being, the NGOs informally check in with them throughout the media engagement process. Journalists may rely

on social workers to refer survivors to relevant resources should they experience distress during the interview process.

### **Stakeholder collaboration**

Initiatives promoting collaboration between the media, civil society, government, and other stakeholders have emerged over the years. In July 2023, the Singapore Independent Media Fair – attended by one NGO respondent – featured various independent media outlets and dialogues with civil society members.<sup>47</sup> Another media representative shared that they sometimes approach NGOs, such as AWARE, not only for profiles but also for data-gathering through focus group discussions and interviews.

Prior to that, there were several partnership efforts, including the formation of the Media Watch Community in 2001, which sought to monitor the fairness of media coverage of local issues.<sup>48</sup> Despite its initial success, it eventually closed down due to insufficient funding and fears about supporting an organisation that would critique state media.

One NGO respondent shared plans of organising a media fellowship but felt that journalists may be reluctant to engage lest they come to be viewed as activists when they have to remain objective and non-partisan in their profession. Given the turbulent history of activism in Singapore, such concerns may hinder further collaboration between the various stakeholders.

### **Protection against violence and harassment of women journalists**

Based on the interviews, journalists appear to mainly rely on informal support from their peers or superiors. At the same time, larger media organisations are more likely to have formal reporting channels and action may be taken depending on the severity of the violence that they face. If deemed necessary or if the journalist is heavily impacted by the violence, the organisation may also encourage them to file a police report or refer them to further emotional support externally.

Other measures used to protect women journalists include publishing VAWG articles

without a byline and equipping them with the right language or skills for engaging with survivors. In some cases, a story might not be published at all.

Meanwhile, the NGOs shared that they did not offer support specifically for women journalists.

Though not specific to women journalists, external resources such as helplines and counselling services are available to them. For instance, survivors can call the National Anti-Violence and Sexual Harassment Helpline for emotional support. AWARE also runs a helpline at their Sexual Assault Care Centre,<sup>49</sup> as well as the Workplace Harassment and Discrimination Advisory, which provides practical and emotional support to anyone who encounters workplace issues.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, they may approach the Protection from Harassment Court to apply for a Protection Order under the Protection from Harassment Act.<sup>51</sup>

### **Further research on reporting on violence against women and girls and gender equality**

The NGO representatives and the independent media representative shared that they track the frequency of news items around VAWG and gender equality, although less attention is paid to the tone and context of media reporting. Often, the monitoring of such reporting occurs in reaction to, for instance, requests for commentary or when certain issues gain traction in the public discourse.

Additional research on this subject remains relatively sparse. Only one respondent pointed out that they conducted a study on gender in Singaporean advertising.

## Recommendations

Efforts must be made to address misogyny, protect journalists' rights, and create an environment that enables independent and objective media organisations to thrive.

1

### **Introduce media guidelines to inform reporting practices for cases of sexual violence**

We echo AWARE's previous recommendation<sup>52</sup> to implement a set of media guidelines to inform journalists and media outlets of gender-sensitive reporting practices. The guidelines should cover various aspects of reporting, such as pointers on appropriate language to use when reporting on relevant issues and suggestions on conducting interviews with sexual violence survivors using a gender- and trauma-informed approach, amongst others.

These media guidelines should be released and upheld by IMDA to ensure that media outlets will be held accountable for their coverage of sexual violence. They should also be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure their relevance and effectiveness.

2

### **Media organisations should mandate gender- and trauma-informed training for all journalists, editors, and any other relevant media professionals**

Ideally, such training should be carried out during the onboarding process and held periodically to ensure media workers are equipped with the skills to engage with survivors and exercise gender sensitivity in their work. Such training can be developed and conducted in collaboration with NGOs to tap into their expertise and foster collaboration.

3

### **Require media outlets to develop comprehensive and clear guidelines and policies on media engagement with members of the public**

It is encouraging that media outlets have some measures in place to ensure survivors' safety and well-being, and that these measures are being passed down to newer employees. Formalising them in guidelines and policies will allow standardisation throughout each organisation and provide clarity on processes and grievance handling. The standards and policies should include all stages of media engagement with the public, from initial contact with the relevant individuals until publication.

Data should also be regularly collected to review the organisation's practices and identify gaps for improvement. Based on the information gathered, organisations should update their policies and procedures as legislation and other regulations evolve, taking into consideration emerging recommended best practices.

4

### **Expand the upcoming Workplace Fairness Legislation's (WFL) scope of coverage to include harassment.**



Currently, employers are encouraged to adhere to the Tripartite Advisory on Managing Workplace Harassment and take steps to “ensure a safe and conducive workplace”, such as by implementing grievance reporting channels and processes.<sup>53</sup> However, this Advisory is not legally enforceable.

Most recently, the Singaporean government in August 2023 accepted the Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness’s recommendations for the upcoming WFL aimed at tackling workplace discrimination. One such recommendation is to protect the confidentiality of parties who report discrimination or harassment cases, and prohibit retaliation against them.<sup>54</sup> Yet, more broadly, employers are not legally required to prevent workplace harassment.

To strengthen protection against workplace harassment, the WFL should explicitly prohibit such behaviour and mandate employers to implement anti-harassment measures in the workplace.

---

## Research References

- Attorney-General’s Chambers Singapore, n.d.. Application of Gag Orders. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.agc.gov.sg/legal-processes/application-of-gag-orders> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- AWARE and Ipsos, 2021. Workplace Sexual Harassment In Singapore. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-Sexual-Harassment\\_AWARE-Singapore\\_Report-14-Jan-2021.pdf](https://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-Sexual-Harassment_AWARE-Singapore_Report-14-Jan-2021.pdf) [accessed 18 September 2023]
- AWARE, 2021. A study of online misogyny in Singapore, Singapore: AWARE.
- AWARE, 2021. An Omnibus on Gender Equality. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/AWARE-Report-July-2021-An-Omnibus-on-Gender-Equality.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- AWARE, 2022. 1 in 2 experienced workplace discrimination in Singapore over the past five years, with race, age and gender discrimination most common. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2022/09/1-in-2-experienced-workplace-discrimination-aware-milieu-survey/> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- AWARE, 2022. A Recap: Thank You, Next? Town Hall on the White Paper. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2022/04/a-recap-thank-you-next-town-hall-white-paper> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- AWARE, 2022. AWARE’s Submission to the Public Consultation on Enhancing Online Safety For Users in Singapore. Available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2022/08/submission-public-consultation-enhancing-online-safety-users-singapore/> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- AWARE, 2022. AWARE welcomes the White Paper on Singapore Women’s Development, identifies “missed opportunities” that deserve more attention. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2022/03/white-paper-on-singapore-womens-development-missed-opportunities> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- AWARE, n.d.. Workplace Harassment And Discrimination Advisory. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/womens-care-centre/workplace-harassment-and-discrimination-advisory/> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Brooke, M., 2018. The Singaporean Paralympics and Its Media Portrayal: Real Sport? Men-Only?. *Communication & Sport*, 7 (4), pp. 446–465. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479518784278>

- De Petri, C. G., 2000. News of battering in Singapore: Reporting domestic violence in the Straits Times. [Online]. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10356/2122> [accessed 30 May 2023]
- Duffy A. and Wee K., 2016. Journalists in Singapore. [Online]. Available at: [https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/32016/1/Andrew\\_Duffy\\_Wee\\_Kim\\_Journalists\\_in\\_Singapore.pdf](https://epub.ub.uni-muenchen.de/32016/1/Andrew_Duffy_Wee_Kim_Journalists_in_Singapore.pdf) [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Freedom House, n.d.. Freedom in the World 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/singapore/freedom-world/2023>[accessed 18 September 2023]
- Gough, B. and Novikova, I, 2020. Mental health, men and culture: how do sociocultural constructions of masculinities relate to men's mental health help-seeking behaviour in the WHO European Region?: Table 1. WHO Gender Responsive Assessment Scale: criteria for assessing programmes and policies. Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report, No. 70. [Online] Available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559709/table/ch2.t1/> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Han, L., Lee, C., and Lee, G. J., 2021. Caught between State and Motherhood: The Public Image of Female Entrepreneurs in Singapore. *Asian Women*, 37 (2), pp. 35–60. <https://doi.org/10.14431/aw.2021.6.37.2.35>
- Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2019. Content Code For Nationwide Managed Transmission Linear Television Services. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/managed-linear-tv-services-content-code-updated-29-april-2019.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2020. Content Code For Radio Services. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulation-licensing-and-consultations/codes-of-practice-and-guidelines/acts-codes/content-code-for-radio-services22072020.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2023. Broadcasting Act 1994: Code Of Practice For Online Safety. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/code-of-practice-for-online-safety.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2023. The Broadcasting Act 1994: Guidelines On Categories Of Harmful Content. [Online]. Available on: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/guidelines-for-code-of-practice-for-online-safety.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2023. Newspaper Permit. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/regulations-and-licensing-listing/newspaper-permit> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Lam, L., 2019. Man locked girlfriend's 13-year-old daughter with special needs in room, sexually assaulted her. Channel NewsAsia, 8 Nov. Available at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/man-locked-girlfriend-daughter-special-needs-sexual-assault-848646> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Lee, J., 2005. Perception of Women Managers in Singapore: A Media Analysis. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 11 (2), pp. 233–250. DOI: 10.1080/1360238042000291162
- Lim, K. (@kimberlylimmy), 2023. (1/6) I had confronted a total of 4 men for recording me without consent when I was covering an event yesterday. To add, over the course of several interviews, some said that I should be happy if they found me attractive, in response to questions. [Online]. Available at: <https://twitter.com/kimberlylimmy/status/1694277484186149374> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020. "Conversations on Women Development" – Speech by Mr K

- Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/speeches/conversations-on-women-development-speech-by-mr-k-shanmugam-minister-for-home-affairs-and-minister-for-law/> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Ministry of Manpower, 2022. (16) Resident Labour Force Aged Fifteen Years and Over by Marital Status, Age and Sex, June 2021. [Online]. Available on <https://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Labour-Force-Tables2021.aspx> [accessed 18 September 2023]
  - Rashith, R., 2016. The Internet Sexually Harasses Local Writer Kirsten Han Online For Being Vocal. Must Share News, 11 February. Available at: <https://mustsharenews.com/internet-harass-kirsten-han/> [accessed 18 September 2023]
  - REACH, n.d.. Singapore Women's Development White Paper. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.reach.gov.sg/Participate/conversations-on-singapore-womens-development> [accessed 18 September 2023]
  - Sexual Assault Care Centre, n.d.. Get in touch with us. [Online]. Available at: <https://sacc.aware.org.sg/get-help/talk-to-us/> [accessed 18 September 2023]
  - Singam, C, 2022. Where I Was: A Memoir About Forgetting and Remembering. Singapore: Ethos Books.
  - Singapore Legal Advice, 2022. Applying for a Protection Order for Harassment in Singapore. [Online]. Available at: <https://singaporelegaladvice.com/law-articles/protection-from-harassment-applying-for-a-protection-order/> [accessed 18 September 2023]
  - Singapore National Union of Journalists, n.d.. Singapore Journalists' Code of Professional Conduct. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/j6075/edit/ethiccodes/SINGAP\\_1.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/j6075/edit/ethiccodes/SINGAP_1.html) [accessed 18 September 2023]
  - Singapore Statutes Online, 2020. Info-Communications Media Development Authority Act 2016: Section 61. [Online]. Available at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/IMDAA2016?WholeDoc=1> [accessed 18 September 2023]
  - Singapore Unbound, 2023. Singapore Independent Media Fair. [Online]. Available at: <https://singaporeunbound.org/media-fair> [accessed 18 September 2023]
  - Soon, K. N., 2023. Opportunities and challenges for retaining trust in Singapore's state-funded media. [Online]. Available at <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/opportunities-and-challenges-retaining-trust-singapores-state-funded-media> [accessed 17 October 2023]
  - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. [Online]. Available at: <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]
  - Sun, D., 2019. 'Potential to excel in life': NUS undergrad who molested woman gets probation for 'minor intrusion' offences. The Straits Times, 26 September. Available at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/university-student-who-molested-woman-gets-probation-for-minor-intrusion> [accessed 18 September 2023]
  - Tan, F., 2023. Jilted S'porean man, 21, assaults & rapes youth, 17, who is mum of his child, 5, after seeing her with another man. Mothership, 25 July. Available at: <https://mothership.sg/2023/07/man-assault-rape-partner/> [accessed 18 September 2023]
  - Tan, S., 2023. 'Just put it in perspective': the perception of sexual voyeurism and violence in Singapore evaluated through Facebook comments. Journal of Gender Studies, 32 (1), pp. 59-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1979483>
  - Tham, I., 2022. New rules to make social media firms accountable for online harms. The Straits Times, 9 November. Available on: <https://www.straitstimes.com/tech/tech-news/bill-passed-in-parliament-to-make-social-media-firms-account-for-online-harms> [accessed 18 September 2023]

- Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness, 2023. Building Fairer & More Harmonious Workplaces: Tripartite Committee On Workplace Fairness Final Report. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/-/media/mom/documents/press-releases/2023/tripartite-committee-on-workplace-fairness-final-report.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices, n.d.. Manage and Prevent Workplace Harassment (Employers). [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ta.sg/tafep/employment-practices/workplace-harassment/manage-and-prevent-workplace-harassment> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- United Nations Development Programme, n.d.. Table 5: Gender Inequality Index. [Online]. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/documentation-and-downloads> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Vitis, L., 2021. Media representations of camera sexual voyeurism in Singapore—a medicalised, externalised and community problem. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21 (7), pp. 1158-1175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1810095>
- World Economic Forum, 2022. Global Gender Gap Report 2022. [Online]. Available at: [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2022.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf) [accessed 18 September 2023]
- Yeoh, B. S. A. and Yeow, P. L. 1997. Where women fear to tread: Images of danger and the effects of fear of crime in Singapore. *GeoJournal*, 43 (3), pp. 273-280.

---

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Freedom House, n.d.. Freedom in the World 2023. [Online]. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/singapore/freedom-world/2023> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- <sup>2</sup> Soon, K. N., 2023. Opportunities and challenges for retaining trust in Singapore's state-funded media. [Online]. Available at <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/opportunities-and-challenges-retaining-trust-singapores-state-funded-media> [accessed 17 October 2023]
- <sup>3</sup> ASEAN: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam
- <sup>4</sup> World Economic Forum, 2022. Global Gender Gap Report 2022, Geneva: World Economic Forum.
- <sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Programme, n.d.. Table 5: Gender Inequality Index. [Online]. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/documentation-and-downloads> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- <sup>6</sup> Ministry of Manpower, 2022. (16) Resident Labour Force Aged Fifteen Years and Over by Marital Status, Age and Sex, June 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Labour-Force-Tables2021.aspx> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- <sup>7</sup> Ministry of Home Affairs, 2020. "Conversations on Women Development" – Speech by Mr K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mha.gov.sg/mediaroom/speeches/conversations-on-women-development-speech-by-mr-k-shanmugam-minister-for-home-affairs-and-minister-for-law/> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- <sup>8</sup> REACH, n.d.. Singapore Women's Development White Paper. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.reach.gov.sg/Participate/conversations-on-singapore-womens-development> [accessed 18 September 2023]
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> AWARE, 2022. AWARE welcomes the White Paper on Singapore Women's Development, identifies "missed opportunities" that deserve more attention. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.aware.org>.

sg/2022/03/white-paper-on-singapore-womens-development-missed-opportunities [accessed 18 September 2023]; AWARE, 2022. A Recap: Thank You, Next? Town Hall on the White Paper. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2022/04/a-recap-thank-you-next-town-hall-white-paper> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>11</sup> Vitis, L., 2021. Media representations of camera sexual voyeurism in Singapore: a medicalised, externalised and community problem. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21 (7), pp. 1158-1175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2020.1810095>

<sup>12</sup> Yeoh, B. S. A. and Yeow, P. L. 1997. Where women fear to tread: Images of danger and the effects of fear of crime in Singapore. *GeoJournal*, 43 (3), pp. 273-280.

<sup>13</sup> AWARE, 2021. A study of online misogyny in Singapore, Singapore: AWARE.

<sup>14</sup> Tan, S., 2023. 'Just put it in perspective': the perception of sexual voyeurism and violence in Singapore evaluated through Facebook comments. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 32 (1), pp. 59-73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1979483>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Vitis (2021)

<sup>17</sup> Vitis (2021); De Petri, C. G., 2000. News of battering in Singapore: Reporting domestic violence in the Straits Times. [Online]. Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10356/2122> [accessed 30 May 2023]

<sup>18</sup> Han, L., Lee, C., and Lee, G. J., 2021. Caught between State and Motherhood: The Public Image of Female Entrepreneurs in Singapore. *Asian Women*, 37 (2), pp. 35-60. <https://doi.org/10.14431/aw.2021.6.37.2.35>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Lee, J., 2005. Perception of Women Managers in Singapore: A Media Analysis. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 11 (2), pp. 233-250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360238042000291162>

<sup>22</sup> Brooke, M., 2018. The Singaporean Paralympics and Its Media Portrayal: Real Sport? Men-Only?. *Communication & Sport*, 7 (4), pp. 446-465. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479518784278>

<sup>23</sup> Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2023. Newspaper Permit. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/regulations-and-licensing-listing/newspaper-permit> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>24</sup> Singapore National Union of Journalists, n.d.. Singapore Journalists' Code of Professional Conduct. [Online]. Available at: [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/j6075/edit/ethiccodes/SINGAP\\_1.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/journalism/j6075/edit/ethiccodes/SINGAP_1.html) [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>25</sup> Singapore Statutes Online, 2020. Info-Communications Media Development Authority Act 2016: Section 61. [Online]. Available at: <https://sso.agc.gov.sg/Act/IMDAA2016?WholeDoc=1> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>26</sup> Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2019. Content Code For Nationwide Managed Transmission Linear Television Services. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/managed-linear-tv-services-content-code-updated-29-april-2019.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>27</sup> Attorney-General's Chambers Singapore, n.d.. Application of Gag Orders. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.agc.gov.sg/legal-processes/application-of-gag-orders> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>28</sup> Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2020. Content Code For Radio Services. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulation-licensing-and-consultations/codes-of-practice-and-guidelines/acts-codes/content-code-for-radio-services22072020.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]



<sup>29</sup> Infocomm Media Development Authority (2019)

<sup>30</sup> As stated in 8.21(d) in the Content Code for Nationwide Managed Transmission Linear Television Services (Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2019).

<sup>31</sup> Tham, I., 2022. New rules to make social media firms accountable for online harms. The Straits Times, 9 November. Available on: <https://www.straitstimes.com/tech/tech-news/bill-passed-in-parliament-to-make-social-media-firms-account-for-online-harms> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>32</sup> Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2023. Broadcasting Act 1994: Code Of Practice For Online Safety. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/code-of-practice-for-online-safety.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]; Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2023. The Broadcasting Act 1994: Guidelines On Categories Of Harmful Content. [Online]. Available on: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulations-and-licensing/regulations/codes-of-practice/codes-of-practice-media/guidelines-for-code-of-practice-for-online-safety.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>33</sup> AWARE, 2022. AWARE's Submission to the Public Consultation on Enhancing Online Safety For Users in Singapore. Available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2022/08/submission-public-consultation-enhancing-online-safety-users-singapore/> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>34</sup> Infocomm Media Development Authority, 2020. Content Code for Radio Services. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/regulation-licensing-and-consultations/codes-of-practice-and-guidelines/acts-codes/content-code-for-radio-services22072020.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> AWARE and Ipsos, 2021. Workplace Sexual Harassment In Singapore. [Online]. Available at: [https://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-Sexual-Harassment\\_AWARE-Singapore\\_Report-14-Jan-2021.pdf](https://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/Workplace-Sexual-Harassment_AWARE-Singapore_Report-14-Jan-2021.pdf) [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>38</sup> AWARE, 2022. 1 in 2 experienced workplace discrimination in Singapore over the past five years, with race, age and gender discrimination most common. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/2022/09/1-in-2-experienced-workplace-discrimination-aware-milieu-survey/> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>39</sup> Rashith, R., 2016. The Internet Sexually Harasses Local Writer Kirsten Han Online For Being Vocal. Must Share News, 11 February. Available at: <https://mustsharenews.com/internet-harass-kirsten-han/> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>40</sup> Lim, K. (@kimberlylimmy), 2023. (1/6) I had confronted a total of 4 men for recording me without consent when I was covering an event yesterday. To add, over the course of several interviews, some said that I should be happy if they found me attractive, in response to questions. [Online]. Available at: <https://twitter.com/kimberlylimmy/status/1694277484186149374> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>41</sup> Tan, F., 2023. Jilted S'porean man, 21, assaults & rapes youth, 17, who is mum of his child, 5, after seeing her with another man. Mothership, 25 July. Available at: <https://mothership.sg/2023/07/man-assault-rape-partner/> [accessed 18 September 2023];

<sup>42</sup> Lam, L., 2019. Man locked girlfriend's 13-year-old daughter with special needs in room, sexually assaulted her. Channel NewsAsia, 8 Nov. Available at: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/man-locked-girlfriend-daughter-special-needs-sexual-assault-848646> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>43</sup> Sun, D., 2019. 'Potential to excel in life': NUS undergrad who molested woman gets probation for 'minor intrusion' offences. The Straits Times, 26 September. Available at: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/courts-crime/university-student-who-molested-woman-gets-probation-for-minor-intrusion> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>44</sup> Duffy A. and Wee K., 2016. Journalists in Singapore. [Online]. Available at: [https://epub.uni-muenchen.de/32016/1/Andrew\\_Duffy\\_Wee\\_Kim\\_Journalists\\_in\\_Singapore.pdf](https://epub.uni-muenchen.de/32016/1/Andrew_Duffy_Wee_Kim_Journalists_in_Singapore.pdf) [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>45</sup> Gough, B. and Novikova, I, 2020. Mental health, men and culture: how do sociocultural constructions of masculinities relate to men's mental health help-seeking behaviour in the WHO European Region?: Table 1. WHO Gender Responsive Assessment Scale: criteria for assessing programmes and policies. Health Evidence Network Synthesis Report, No. 70. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK559709/table/ch2.t1/> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>46</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014. SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach. [Online]. Available at: <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>47</sup> Singapore Unbound, 2023. Singapore Independent Media Fair. [Online]. Available at: <https://singaporeunbound.org/media-fair> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>48</sup> Singam, C, 2022. Where I Was: A Memoir About Forgetting and Remembering. Singapore: Ethos Books.

<sup>49</sup> Sexual Assault Care Centre, n.d.. Get in touch with us. [Online]. Available at: <https://sacc.aware.org.sg/get-help/talk-to-us/> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>50</sup> AWARE, n.d.. Workplace Harassment And Discrimination Advisory. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/womens-care-centre/workplace-harassment-and-discrimination-advisory/> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>51</sup> Singapore Legal Advice, 2022. Applying for a Protection Order for Harassment in Singapore. [Online]. Available at: <https://singaporelegaladvice.com/law-articles/protection-from-harassment-applying-for-a-protection-order/> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>52</sup> AWARE, 2021. An Omnibus on Gender Equality. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.aware.org.sg/wp-content/uploads/AWARE-Report-July-2021-An-Omnibus-on-Gender-Equality.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>53</sup> Tripartite Alliance for Fair & Progressive Employment Practices, n.d.. Manage and Prevent Workplace Harassment (Employers), n.d. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.tal.sg/tafep/employment-practices/workplace-harassment/manage-and-prevent-workplace-harassment> [accessed 18 September 2023]

<sup>54</sup> Tripartite Committee on Workplace Fairness, 2023. Building Fairer & More Harmonious Workplaces: Tripartite Committee On Workplace Fairness Final Report. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mom.gov.sg/-/media/mom/documents/press-releases/2023/tripartite-committee-on-workplace-fairness-final-report.pdf> [accessed 18 September 2023]

# Thailand

By Dr Kosum Omphornuwat

## Country Overview

The progress of gender equality in Thailand has had significant advances in recent decades, notably in education and business leadership, where the country exhibits a high level of gender equality compared to other Southeast Asian nations. Nevertheless, enduring disparities exist in women's representation in political spheres and physical integrity. One of the primary obstacles in addressing these disparities lies in social attitudes towards the roles of men and women in both public and domestic spheres.

Thailand is ranked "Not Free" in the Freedom House 'Freedom in the World 2023' report.<sup>1</sup> According to this annual report Thailand transitioned to a "military-dominated, semi-elected government" in 2019, after five years of military rule. Under such political circumstances, Thailand's freedom status is rated with a score of 30/100, which included a "political rights" score of 6/40 and a "civil liberties" score of 24/60. Regarding media freedom and independence, Thailand is given a score of 1/4 due to legal restrictions that limit free speech and independent media.

Thailand's ranking on the Gender Equality Index and other global gender equality rankings highlights areas that require improvement. Thailand is ranked 74th out of 146 countries (7th within the East Asia and the Pacific Region) and scores 0.711 in the World Economic Forum's 'Global Gender Gap Index 2023'.<sup>2</sup> Even though Thailand scores well in Education Attainment (ranking 61st, score 0.995), Health and Survival (ranking 42nd, score 0.977) and Economic Participation and Opportunity (ranking 24th, score 0.772), the country's gender parity score on Political Empowerment is exceedingly low (ranking 120th, score 0.101). Only 16.60% of parliamentarians (ranking 115th) and 5.26% of ministerial positions (ranking 135th) are women.

In the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) 'Gender Inequality Index (GII)' 2021<sup>3</sup>, Thailand is rated 0.333, indicating slightly high level of inequality between women and

men. This score is comparable to the average GII score of 0.337 for the East Asia and the Pacific region but is below the global average of 0.465. The GII measures gender-based inequalities in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment, and the labour market. Although in Thailand women and men aged 25 and above rank closely in secondary education (47.6% and 51.7% respectively), the gender gap for labour force participation is significant. The rate for women aged 15 and above is 59.4%, while the corresponding rate for males is 76.8%. Furthermore, the representation of women in parliament is limited to a mere 13.9% of the total seats.

The OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)<sup>4,5</sup> measures discrimination against women in social institutions, by considering laws, social norms and practices that restrict women's and girls' rights and access to empowerment opportunities and resources. In 2023, Thailand's SIGI score is at 26.6, denoting a lower degree of discrimination in comparison to the global average score of 29.1 (0 indicating no discrimination and 100 indicating absolute discrimination). However, it is important to note that in terms of restricted physical integrity, Thailand exhibits a significant prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV). According to data collected by SIGI it has been shown that 24% of women have reported experiencing intimate partner violence (IPV) at some point in their lives, while a smaller proportion of 7% have reported experiencing IPV within the preceding 12 months.<sup>6,7</sup>

## Representation of women and girls in the media

The media landscape in Thailand is seen as highly polarised - from the mainstream media regulated by the government to smaller media outlets who endeavour to produce and publish alternative viewpoints but often face harassment from authorities for doing so. As well as the

traditional news channels television, radio and newspapers, the country also consumes news from more unregulated sources like social media, especially through Facebook and sharing them online through messaging applications.

### Portrayal of women and girls in media

The representation of women in the media in Thailand is diverse and complex. Thailand has always adhered to traditional perspectives on gender roles; women are frequently portrayed in the media in the roles of carers, nurturers, and homemakers and are sometimes objectified in the media, particularly in advertisements where they are commodified. This objectification can perpetuate unattainable beauty standards and further reinforce conventional gender roles. However, in recent years, it has been observed that the Thai media has placed emphasis on women's empowerment. Increasingly, Thai women are portrayed as successful professionals, entrepreneurs, and leaders in films, television shows, and literature. Social media platforms have been instrumental in promoting gender equality and lending a voice to those promoting women's issues. Overall, the depiction of women in Thai media is evolving, with efforts to challenge and alter stereotypical portrayals of women, to promote gender equality, and to raise awareness about issues such as domestic violence and sexual harassment.

### Depiction of VAWG

There is little research available on the role the media coverage plays in the prevalence of violence against women and children (VAWG) in Thailand. However, several studies focusing on gender and media have raised concerns about gender stereotypes and depiction of VAWG in societies where violence against women persists as a serious social reality. An Analysis of National Survey (Neelapaichit N. 2017)<sup>8</sup> found that Thai domestic violence occurred in approximately 1 out of 3 families and that 1 in 6 Thai women have faced intimate partner violence (Chuemchit et al, 2018).<sup>9</sup>

National guidelines have been published regarding gender equality within the press. In 2018 The National Press Council of Thailand

(NPCT) released a code of ethics and practical guidelines for regarding respect of women's dignity and gender equality in news reports.<sup>10</sup> The National Broadcasting and Telecommunications Commission (NBTC) in 2022 also issued a set of Television Broadcasting Guidelines for news broadcasters focusing more on Human Rights and Dignity of Women.<sup>11</sup>

Since then, Thailand has been seemingly proactive in this field. On International Women's Day, 8th March 2023, the Women and Men Progressive Movement Foundation (WMP)<sup>12</sup> partnered with the Children, Youth and Family Foundation, and the Women's Well-being and Gender Justice Programme, with the support of the Thai Health Promotion Foundation. Together, they organised a forum, aiming at analysing the insights gained from the implementation of the "16 Years of the Domestic Violence Protection Act 2007." The objective of this forum was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem of violence against children, women, and individuals within the family, and to propose effective solutions to address the issue of domestic violence.

To facilitate the forum, the WMP Foundation produced 'Report on the Situation of Domestic Violence 2021'<sup>13</sup> to examine the prevalence of violence against children, women, and family members. By gathering news articles from 11 print newspapers and online news outlets, a total of 372 news reports pertaining to domestic abuse were identified for the period spanning from January to December 2021. Nearly half of the news stories reported a connection between alcohol and drug usage as the motivation behind acts of violence.

According to the WMP Foundation (2023) the current state of domestic abuse was a cause for concern. Based on an analysis of domestic violence news from 2012 to 2021, it was evident that there had been no discernible decline in the prevalence of this issue. Particularly noteworthy was the occurrence of familial homicides. Based on the 'Report on the Situation of Domestic Violence 2021',<sup>14</sup> the prevalence of news pertaining to killings accounted for the highest proportion, amounting to 52.4% of all instances of violent news. Subsequently, news about physical violence constituted 22% of the total. The incidence of suicides accounted for around

14% of the coverage. In instances of homicide within spousal and romantic partnerships, the male partner tended to be more prevalent in perpetrating acts of violence against the female partners. Regarding the motivation in the event of homicide, the primary factor identified was envy and distrust of the woman's fidelity.

The WMP Foundation (2023) found that there was an ongoing occurrence of spousal violence and homicide, with males being consistently identified as the perpetrators. The prevalence of violence was steadily increasing, as evidenced by statistical data, despite the presence of awareness campaigns and legislative initiatives aiming at tackling the problem of domestic abuse.

In addition to reports on domestic violence, the WMP Foundation published a 'Report on the Prevalence of Sexual Violence 2019'.<sup>15</sup> In this report data was compiled on the prevalence of sexual assault as reported in nine printed newspapers during 2019. A total of 333 news stories pertaining to acts of sexual violence were identified. The findings revealed that the majority of news stories were coverage on rape (43.9%), following by news on forced prostitution (11.7%), attempted rape (10.2%), sexual obscenity (9.6%), sexual violence involving men against men (6.6%), obscene clips (5.7 percent), gang rape (5.1%), abduction of minors (1.2%), and others (such as stealing underwear and exposing genitals) (6%). Out of the 333 news items analysed, a notable number of individuals who experienced sexual assault were found to be within the age ranges of 11-15 years (47.3%) and 16-20 years (35.7%). The age range of the women and girls who were sexually abused spanned from four to ninety-four.

### **Reporting on violence against women and girls**

While the WMP Foundation offered overview reports about the prevalence of domestic violence and sexual violence as depicted in newspaper but the Women's Health Advocacy Foundation (WHAF)<sup>16</sup> analysed the way in which the media delivered news pertaining to sexual topics.

Based on WHAF's analysis of, it was observed that most recorded incidents included cases of rape, which were frequently featured on the front page (Panuthecha, 2006).<sup>17</sup> According to

WHAF, historically, there existed a prevalent practice of disseminating visual representations of women who had experienced sexual assault. However, the media have since demonstrated a heightened awareness of the ethical implications associated with news reporting, leading to a more careful approach in presenting visual depictions of those who were subjected to sexual assault. The composition and linguistic elements, as well as the viewpoints employed in news production, were also subject to examination. For example, poor or inconsiderate use of language around the subject of rape can lead to a widespread misunderstanding in society, subjecting the victim to further harm.

The WHAF's analysis also indicates that the existing portrayal of rape predominantly stems from a crime perspective. The sourcing of information in news reporting usually relies on police investigations. The coverage of rape incidents from a criminal standpoint often prioritises the depiction of women's physical attributes and attire. The emphasis is placed on describing the crime scene, condition of the corpse, evidence, and comprehensive account of the act of rape. Offenders are referred to by nicknames that connote cruelty, inhumanity, or mental perversion. Consequently, the reporting of rape news has contributed to the perpetuation of rape culture, which attributes the rape problem to women and how they dress and behave. There is a widespread misconception that perpetrators of sexual assault are typically strangers or those exhibiting blatantly deviant behaviours, and that rape is primarily motivated by an overwhelming sexual urge and prompted by stimuli such as pornography and alcohol. In fact, rape is a matter of power relations – the exercise of power by those in positions of higher social or hierarchical status over those in positions of lower social or hierarchical status.

### **Violence and harassment of women journalists**

According to the UNESCO report, 'Inside the News: Challenges and Aspirations of Women Journalists in Asia and the Pacific' (2015)<sup>18</sup>, there are more women media professionals than ever in many countries across Asia-Pacific, but they still represent only three out of 10 newsroom staff, often earn less than their male counterparts and are subject to sexual harassment, while



struggling to reach decision-making positions.

While Thailand's government routinely enforces censorship, Sidasathian (2015)<sup>19</sup> argues that women journalists are particularly vulnerable to the abuse of laws restricting freedom of expression. Sexual harassment and violence targeting female journalists have attracted considerable attention in Thailand over the last twenty years, ever since a 2003 incident involving a high-ranking government officer who behaved improperly towards a female reporter (Prachathai, 2018).<sup>20</sup>

In 2006, the National Human Rights Commission convened a forum titled "(Female) Journalists and Sexual Harassment". The forum revealed that the forms of harassment female journalists were subjected to were physical, psychological, and structural. It disclosed that female journalists engaged in risk-taking to obtain news reports and that sexual harassment continued to occur on an ongoing basis. Notably, female journalists were not provided with safety-related training and junior journalists could only obtain preventative advice from more experienced female journalists.

In the workplace itself the forum found that in return for news leads, female journalists were expected to be tough yet friendly and to acquiesce to physical contact. It went on to report that a female journalist holding an equivalent position to her male counterpart received a lower salary and male journalists were promoted more readily.

The cases of female journalist harassment studied were found to have been reduced to a trivial matter. For instance, the excused male would admit that he was impaired by alcohol and lost control, and that the woman agreed to accompany him. Most cases concluded with a settlement. Female journalists who were mistreated were told to remain mute and in one case the male supervisor tried to prevent his staff from making headlines, justifying his concern for the organisation's standing (Prachathai, 2006).<sup>21</sup>

In 2016, a senior female journalist spoke to Thai Civil Rights and Investigative Journalism (TCIJ)<sup>22</sup> on the issue of sexual harassment in the news industry. She stated that female journalists were routinely sexually harassed by both colleagues and news sources. Female

journalists who appeared to be good looking and have personalities were often the targets of sexual harassment. A highlighting factor was the prevailing attitude among males that women existed solely to be admired for their beauty and charm, rather than their intellectual worth and competence as journalists (TCIJ, 2016).

Reports surfaced in 2017 regarding allegations that a media executive had sexually harassed an employee. This resulted in his resignation from the organisation and garnered significant societal disapproval. The Thai Journalist Association (TJA) set up a committee to investigate this case, but the findings have remained undisclosed (Prachathai, 2017).<sup>23</sup> In a separate incident in December 2017, a female news anchor affiliated with a renowned television network submitted a copy of online chat messages as evidence to the Technology Crime Suppression Division. A man posing as a senior executive sent her online messages proposing 222,000 baht monthly in return for her services as his mistress. He also forwarded nude photographs of other women whom he claimed were his mistresses, as well as images of his genitalia. The news anchor notified law enforcement to initiate proceedings against the man (Manager Online, 2017).<sup>24</sup>

## Needs of media organisations

A series of case studies and interviews were conducted with participants and organisations to examine the challenges and opportunities associated with gender sensitisation in the media. The sectors encompassed broadcasting, the press council, the press association, a gender-focused NGO, Justice Programmes, Equality Movements, and academia.

Established in 1997, the National Press Council of Thailand<sup>25</sup> stands as the country's first media professional self-regulatory institution. At the outset, the council consisted solely of newspapers. However, since 2020, the National Press Council has extended its coverage to include those affiliated with newspapers, radio stations, television networks, and internet media entities. The National Press Council has a range of mechanisms aimed at overseeing and regulating the ethical standards and professional conduct of mass media organisations that are affiliated with the council. Presently, a significant

regulatory framework comprises the National Press Council's Regulations on the Ethics of the Media Profession (2021).<sup>26</sup>

Additionally, the National Press Council has released a set of guidelines for the media. Guidelines of the National Press Council related to the presentation of news on the issue of violence against women and children include Guidelines for the Presentation of News, News Content, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving Individuals Affected by Sexual Abuse (2021)<sup>27</sup>, Guidelines for the Presentation of News and News Photography Pertaining to Matters of Ethnicity, Religion and Gender (2021)<sup>28</sup>, Guidelines for the Presentation of News, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving LGBT Individuals (2021)<sup>29</sup>, Guidelines for the Presentation of News, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving Women (2021)<sup>30</sup>, Guidelines for the Presentation of News, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving Children and Youth (2021).<sup>31</sup> The National Press Council not only issues the guidelines, but also arranges seminars and training sessions aimed at fostering media professionalism and ethics.

The Thai Journalists Association (TJA)<sup>32</sup> is recognised as one of the longstanding professional media organisations. Founded in 2000, the TJA's primary objective is to foster cohesion among professional media organisations, enabling them to effectively fulfil their responsibilities in sustaining the professional standards and ethical principles of the Thai media industry. In 2006, the TJA released a publication titled Guidelines for Reporting Sexual Coverage<sup>33</sup>, marking a significant milestone as the inaugural manual for media professionals in Thailand. The handbook was compiled by the Working Group for the Development of Standards for Reporting on Women's Issues, with members from the Women's Health Advocacy Foundation (WHAF), academic experts, and representatives from the media industry. This handbook undertook an analysis of the contents and consequences of sexual news reporting, encompassing topics such as sexual assaults and domestic violence. Additionally, it included illustrative instances and recommendations for presenting constructive news.

The Isra Institute<sup>34</sup>: Thai Press Development

Foundation, formerly known as the Press Development Institute of Thailand (PDIT), was founded in 2004 by a group of experts, scholars, and journalistic practitioners who recognised the need to establish a professional training institute for journalists, with a focus on the principles and ethical considerations within the field. The scope of activities of the Isra Institute encompasses the formulation and implementation of professional training initiatives in accordance with the guidelines set by the National Press Council, the Thai Journalist Association, and other affiliated associations. The Isra Institute also manages mass media research projects in collaboration with educational institutions and publishes manuals, training guides, and synopses of significant seminar-research findings. A Study to Develop and Promote Standards and Ethics of Media Producers (2022)<sup>35</sup> is a recent collaborative effort between the Isra Institute and the Thailand Media Fund.<sup>36</sup> The deliverable of this study was Guidelines for the Presentation of News on Children and Youth with Implications for Families and Society<sup>37</sup> to be used as a comprehensive manual for media operations and training.

The interviewees were: Angkana Inthasa, Head of Gender Equality Promotion, Women and Men Progressive Movement Foundation (WMP); Chanettee Tinnam, Lecturer, Faculty of Communication Arts, Chulalongkorn University; Jadet Chaowilai, Director, Women and Men Progressive Movement Foundation (WMP); and Jittima Phanutecha, Manager, Women's Well-being, and Gender Justice Programme.

Dr. Chanettee Tinnam, a lecturer at Chulalongkorn University's Faculty of Communication Arts who conducted numerous trainings in media organisations where sexual harassment occurred, concluded, based on her observations, that most media organisations lacked knowledge and understanding of the issues. Harassment incidents persisted, and the number of female journalists who experienced harassment would inevitably increase. Tinnam suggested that to prevent sexual harassment in a sustainable manner, organisations must adopt a gender equality perspective and integrate it into their corporate culture.

Tinnam noted, with reference to her 2015 study Gender Equality in Thai TV Broadcasting

Organisations<sup>38</sup>, that sexual harassment in media organisations had long been an issue. The media industry had become ingrained in a patriarchal society. Women were exposed to a hazardous working environment because of this obstacle. A number of female journalists opted to resign from their positions after the harassment.

The Women and Men Progressive Foundation (WMP) is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that has been actively operating for over a decade. The primary objective of the foundation is to “integrate efforts towards resolving and preventing gender-based violence, sexual violence and domestic abuse.” The foundation’s main operations are to provide support and assistance to women affected by violence and to establish community-based initiatives aimed at fostering safe environments for women and children within the family and community. The foundation engages in public communications to reduce gender bias and campaign to end gender-based violence. The foundation also conducts the systematic analysis and compilation of materials with the purpose of generating a comprehensive report on the state of domestic violence and sexual violence to support further campaigning and policy work.

According to the perspective of the WMP regarding the media’s portrayal of violence against women and children, there appears to be a discernible inclination towards progress, characterised by an increased emphasis on safeguarding individuals affected by violence and preserving their anonymity. However, it remains evident that the media continues to exhibit a lack of comprehension regarding prevailing misconceptions surrounding acts of violence. In certain instances, news reporting exhibits a deficiency in sensitivity. The news report places emphasis on providing comprehensive accounts and details of the abuse which is likened to repeated abuse by the media. Certain descriptions provided in news articles contain such explicit information that it becomes possible to infer the identity of the individual subjected to abuse.

Regarding the facilitation of constructive news reporting by the mass media, the foundation does not directly engage in organising courses and providing training for journalists and media organisations. The foundation serves as news

sources, information providers, and guest speakers in media trainings. Additionally, the foundation functions as a consultant in the formulation of policies to promote safety for women journalists in media organisations.

For instance, in some media interviews, reporters asked questions that implied victim shaming, such as “Is the woman dressed in a lewd manner?” The WMP representatives object to reporters’ questions and instead provide them with facts and information to debunk the “rape myth”. It has been observed that victim-blaming inquiries from the media have decreased recently. The foundation also collaborates with other organisations in the networks to coordinate public forums aimed at educating the public and fostering an understanding of the media’s coverage of abuse. Women should not be stigmatised or blamed in the news.

The WMP foundation previously managed harassment cases involving female journalists. It was discovered that most media organisations lack mechanisms to prevent and address sexual harassment in the workplace. Nonetheless, some organisations have attempted to establish such a safety mechanism and have consulted with the foundation. The foundation has assisted as part of a working committee and a consultant in the development of policies and mechanisms to prevent and resolve harassment in media organisations.

Under the support of the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, the Women’s Well-being and Gender Justice Programme had been operating to advance women’s well-being within the framework of gender justice for over a decade. In the past five years, the programme had dedicated its efforts to addressing the problems of gender-based violence, a critical concern that significantly impacted the overall welfare of women. The programme operated on two levels: to establish working models that effectively addressed the issue of gender-based violence and to mobilise public communications, particularly social campaigns. The programme collaborated with network partners to raise public awareness regarding sexual harassment in the workplace and in public spaces. The Safe City for Women initiative, for example, had an online application that pinpointed areas of high risk. By 2023, the program would launch an

online platform that served as a community and a safe space for those impacted by the traumatic effects of violence.

According to Jittima Phanutecha, Manager of the Women's Well-being and Gender Justice Programme, the media often downplayed the gravity of the issue when covering gender-based violence. News anchors occasionally spun opinions into news reports. Some even sprinkled the news with humour. Moreover, news coverage tended to ascribe responsibility to the victims asking questions such as "Why did you go there?", "What did you say?", "Why did he attack you?" The perpetrators' actions were allegedly driven by jealousy or women's desire to leave the relationship. This implied that men were obligated to punish women to maintain their masculinity and dignity.

Additionally, the Programme Manager stated that during her collaboration with the Journalists Association, she discovered that the reporters who reported on this matter of violence were specialising in criminal news rather than social news. As a result, crime news was predominantly reported through the examination of case

documents and the provision of detailed description of the abuse.

When reporters conducted interviews with local news sources, certain signs of impending violence began to surface. "I often heard them fighting." "She used to run away from home." However, the reporters lacked the sensitivity necessary to recognise these warning signals. News should provide additional insight regarding prevention and problem resolution. Those in a comparable circumstance would acquire the knowledge necessary to locate help.

As per the Programme Manager's assessment, women activists, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and civil society did not emerge as prominent news sources. They would only be interviewed by reporters to provide commentary in response to significant news events or urgent public concerns. Consequently, the networks of NGOs dedicated to addressing women's issues and gender-based violence took proactive measures by organising public forums where individuals could express their opinions, offer constructive criticism, and propose practical solutions.

## Recommendations

These recommendations are vital for ethical journalism and emphasise safety, promote gender equality, and encourage the fostering of a media environment aligned with human rights principles.

1

### Incorporate training programmes

Incorporate training programmes for reporters and journalists, with the aim of emphasising the safety of those impacted by violence and promoting sensitivity in language usage. This is crucial since the consequences of media stories may significantly impair the well-being of those impacted by violence, and reporting may inadvertently perpetuate harmful narratives or excuse the actions of those involved.

2

### Promote gender equality

Promote gender equality throughout the media organisations, particularly in newsrooms, by:

- guaranteeing a proportionate representation of women and men in media leadership positions and correspondent positions,
- developing comprehensive policies and codes of conduct on equal opportunities, sexual harassment in the workplace, and work-life balance,

- ensuring the implementation of comprehensive safety training programmes for women journalists and establishing robust policies aimed at safeguarding their well-being.
- introducing practical measures to promote the progress of women and improve the representation of women in the media through the establishment of trainee posts exclusively for women, the provision of leadership and management training programmes targeted at women, and the implementation of equality awareness training for all staff members.

## 3

**Facilitate networks**

Implement the facilitation of media consumer networks in monitoring the media and functioning as a conduit for constructive criticism of their news reporting, with due care for human rights and human dignity.

---

## Research References

- Chuemchit M, Chernkwanma S, Somrongthong R, Spitzer DL. Thai women's experiences of and responses to domestic violence. *Int J Women's Health*. 2018; 10:557–65.
- Diawkee, Thianthip, 2016. Morality and Ethics of Media for Presenting News in Digital Era. *Journal of Communication and Management NIDA*, 2(2), pp. 125-143. [Thai language]
- Internet Foundation for the Development of Thailand and Radio and Media Association for Children and Youth, 2020. *Guidelines for the Media in Presenting News Related to Children in the Case of Online Threats*. Bangkok: Internet Foundation for the Development of Thailand. [Thai language]
- Isra Institute Thai Press Development Foundation, 2019. *Media Responsibilities for Reporting Child Sexual Violence*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.isra.or.th/news-and-trainee/item/767-reporter.html>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language].
- Isara Institute Thai Press Development Foundation, 2023. *Guidelines for Presenting Information about Children that Affect Families and Society*. Bangkok: Thai Media Fund.
- Ito, Misako, 2018. Improving women experts' visibility in media. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.scidev.net/asia-pacific/opinions/improving-women-experts-visibility-in-media/>. [accessed 19 October 2023].
- National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. *Guidelines for the Presentation of News and News Photography Pertaining to Matters of Ethnicity, Religion and Gender B.E. 2564*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/regulation/6773>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language].
- National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. *Guidelines for the Presentation of News, News Content, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving Individuals Affected by Sexual Abuse B.E. 2564*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/regulation/6773>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language].
- National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. *Guidelines for the Presentation of News, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving LGBT Individuals B.E. 2564*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/regulation/6508>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language].
- National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. *Guidelines for the Presentation of News, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving Children and Youth B.E. 2564*. [Online]. Available at:



- <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/regulation/6492>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language].
- National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. Guidelines for the Presentation of News, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving Women B.E. 2564. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/regulation/6501>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language].
  - National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. Regulations on the Ethics of the Media Profession B.E. 2564. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/rule/6126>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language].
  - Neelapaichit N. Analysis of National Survey 2017: Thai domestic violence against women and family members. In: Chotivitayataragorn S, Kongsakon R, editors. Knowledge of violence against women and family members. Nontaburi: Mata Karnphim; 2018. p. 119–26.
  - Panuthecha, Jittima, et al. 2006. Guidelines for Reporting Sex Coverage. Bangkok: Women's Health Advocacy Foundation. [Thai language]
  - Prachatai, 2006. (Female) Journalists and Sexual Harassment. [Online]. Available at: <https://prachatai.com/journal/2006/09/9648>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]
  - Prachatai, 2017. TJA Forming Committee to Investigate Media Mogul Case. [Online]. Available at: <https://prachatai.com/journal/2017/09/73317>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]
  - Prachatai, 2018. Survey Finds 48% of Female Journalists Face Sexual Harassment. [Online]. Available at: <https://prachatai.com/journal/2018/01/74882>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]
  - Rakthinkamnerd, Raviwan, 2016. Listen to Female Reporters – Stereotyped as Entertainment Reporter, Risk of Harassment, Frozen in Job Opportunities. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.tcijthai.com/news/2016/02/scoop/6057>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]
  - Roengsak, Parinda & Kraiwasin, Yukoltorn, 2012. News Reporting on Children and Right Violation on Newspaper. Executive Journal, 32(4), pp. 38-43. [Thai language]
  - Sidasathian Chutima, 2015. Cited in Women's History Month: Journalists who inspire us 2023. Available at: <https://www.mediadefence.org/news/women-journalists-who-inspire-us/>. [accessed October 2023].
  - Thai Civil Rights and Investigative Journalism, 2016. Listen to Female Reporters - Being Labelled an Entertainment Reporter, Risk of Harassment, Lack of Career Prospects [Online]. Available at: <https://www.tcijthai.com/news/2016/14/scoop/6057>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]
  - Thairath Online, 2023. Domestic Violence, Media, and News Coverage. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.thairath.co.th/scoop/interview/2634691>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]
  - The Coverage, 2023. Women's and Children's Networks urge the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security to End Violence against Women and Children. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.thecoverage.info/news/content/4284>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]
  - Tinnam, Chanettee, 2015. Gender Equality in Thai TV Broadcasting Organizations. Research Presented to Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS) & UNESCO.
  - UNESCO Bangkok, 2015. Inside the News: Challenges and Aspirations of Women Journalists in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok: UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233420>. [accessed 10 October 2023].
  - UNESCO, 2017. Cracking the Code: Girls' and Women's Education in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Paris: UNESCO. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000253479>. [accessed 10 October 2023].

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Freedom House 2023. Freedom in the World, 2023 [Online]. Available at: [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW\\_World\\_2023\\_DigitalPDF.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/FIW_World_2023_DigitalPDF.pdf). [accessed October 2023]
- <sup>2</sup> World Economic Forum, 2022. Global Gender Gap Report 2022: Insight Report. [Online]. Available at: [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2022.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf). [accessed 30 July 2023]
- <sup>3</sup> United Nations Development Programme, n.d.. Global Inequality Index. [Online] Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index#/indicies/GII> [accessed 30 October 2023]
- <sup>4</sup> OECD, 2019. Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019 Global Report: Transforming Challenges into Opportunities. [Online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/bc56d212-en>. [accessed 30 July 2023]
- <sup>5</sup> OECD, 2020. Thailand: Gender Budgeting Action Plan. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/gov/budgeting/gender-budgeting-action-plan-thailand.pdf>. [accessed 10 October 2023]
- <sup>6</sup> OECD, 2021. SIGI 2021 Regional Report for Southeast Asia. [Online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/236f41d0-en>. [accessed 30 July 2023]
- <sup>7</sup> OECD, 2023. Social Institutions and Gender Index 2023 Thailand Dashboard. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/stories/gender/social-norms-and-gender-discrimination/sigi/dashboard?country=THA>. [accessed 30 July 2023]
- <sup>8</sup> Neelapaichit N. Analysis of National Survey 2017: Thai domestic violence against women and family members. In: Chotivitayataragorn S, Kongsakon R, editors. Knowledge of violence against women and family members. Nontaburi: Mata Karnphim; 2018. p. 119–26.
- <sup>9</sup> Chuemchit M, Chernkwanma S, Somrongthong R, Spitzer DL. Thai women's experiences of and responses to domestic violence. *Int J Women's Health*. 2018; 10:557–65.
- <sup>10</sup> UNESCO Bangkok, 2021. The Big Conversation: Handbook to Address Violence against Women in and through the Media. [Online]. Available at: [https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/big-conversation-handbook-address-violence-against-women-and-through-media#\\_ftn3](https://bangkok.unesco.org/content/big-conversation-handbook-address-violence-against-women-and-through-media#_ftn3) [accessed 30 October 2023]
- <sup>11</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>12</sup> Women and Men Progressive Movement Foundation. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.wmp.or.th/> [accessed October 2023]
- <sup>13</sup> Women and Men Progressive Movement Foundation, 2021. Report on the Prevalence of Sexual Violence 2021. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.wmp.or.th> [accessed 10 October 2023]
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> Women and Men Progressive Movement Foundation, 2019. Report on the Prevalence of Sexual Violence 2019. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.wmp.or.th> [accessed 10 October 2023]
- <sup>16</sup> Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Foundation of Thailand, 2023. [Online]. Available at: <http://www.womenhealth.or.th/home-news-events.html> [accessed October 2023]
- <sup>17</sup> Prachatai, 2006. (Female) Journalists and Sexual Harassment. [Online]. Available at: <https://prachatai.com/journal/2006/09/9648>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]
- <sup>18</sup> UNESCO Bangkok, 2015. Inside the News: Challenges and Aspirations of Women Journalists in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok: UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. [Online]. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233420>. [accessed 10 October 2023].
- <sup>19</sup> Sidasathian Chutima, 2015. Cited in Women's History Month: Journalists who inspire us 2023. Available at: <https://www.mediadefence.org/news/women-journalists-who-inspire-us/>. [accessed 19

October 2023]

<sup>20</sup> Prachatai, 2018. Survey Finds 48% of Female Journalists Face Sexual Harassment. [Online]. Available at: <https://prachatai.com/journal/2018/01/74882>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>21</sup> Prachatai, 2006. (Female) Journalists and Sexual Harassment. [Online]. Available at: <https://prachatai.com/journal/2006/09/9648>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>22</sup> Thai Civil Rights and Investigative Journalism, 2016. Listen to Female Reporters - Being Labelled an Entertainment Reporter, Risk of Harassment, Lack of Career Prospects [Online]. Available at: <https://www.tcijthai.com/news/2016/14/scoop/6057>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>23</sup> Prachatai, 2017. TJA Forming Committee to Investigate Media Mogul Case. [Online]. Available at: <https://prachatai.com/journal/2017/09/73317>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>24</sup> Manager Online, 2023. <https://mgronline.com/> [accessed August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>25</sup> National Press Council of Thailand, 2023. <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/> [accessed August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>26</sup> National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. Regulations on the Ethics of the Media Profession B.E. 2564. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/rule/6126>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>27</sup> National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. Guidelines for the Presentation of News, News Content, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving Individuals Affected by Sexual Abuse B.E. 2564. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/regulation/6773>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>28</sup> National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. Guidelines for the Presentation of News and News Photography Pertaining to Matters of Ethnicity, Religion and Gender B.E. 2564. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/regulation/6773>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>29</sup> National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. Guidelines for the Presentation of News, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving LGBT Individuals B.E. 2564. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/regulation/6508>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>30</sup> National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. Guidelines for the Presentation of News, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving Women B.E. 2564. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/regulation/6501>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>31</sup> National Press Council of Thailand, 2021. Guidelines for the Presentation of News, Opinion Expression, and News Photography Involving Children and Youth B.E. 2564. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.presscouncil.or.th/regulation/6492>. [accessed 18 August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>32</sup> Thai Journalists Association, 2023. <https://tja.or.th> [accessed August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>33</sup> The Thai Journalists Association, 2006. Guidelines for Reporting Sexual Coverage [Online]. Available at: [https://www.whaf.or.th/files/2019/%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%88%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%A2-%E0%B9%81%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%97%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%81%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%A3%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%82%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%A7%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%B7%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%87%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%9E%E0%B8%A8\\_eb.pdf](https://www.whaf.or.th/files/2019/%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%B4%E0%B8%88%E0%B8%B1%E0%B8%A2-%E0%B9%81%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%A7%E0%B8%97%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%87%E0%B8%81%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%A3%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%AA%E0%B8%99%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%82%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%B2%E0%B8%A7%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%A3%E0%B8%B7%E0%B9%88%E0%B8%AD%E0%B8%87%E0%B9%80%E0%B8%9E%E0%B8%A8_eb.pdf) [accessed 22 November 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>34</sup> ISRA Institute – The Press Development Foundation, 2023. <https://www.isra.or.th> [accessed August 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>35</sup> The Isra Institute, 2022. A Study to Develop and Promote Standards and Ethics of Media Producers – The Isra Institute and The Thailand Media Fund. Available at: <https://www.isra.or.th/download/category/5-paper.html> [accessed November 2023] [Thai language]

<sup>36</sup> The Thai Media Fund, 2023. [https://www.thaimediafund.or.th/en/en\\_home/](https://www.thaimediafund.or.th/en/en_home/) [accessed August 2023]

[Thai language]

<sup>37</sup> The Isra Institute, 2022. Guidelines for the Presentation of News on Children and Youth with Implications for Families and Society – The Isra Institute and The Thailand Media Fund. Available at: <https://www.isra.or.th/download/category/5-paper.html?download=15:isra> [accessed October 2023]  
[Thai language]

<sup>38</sup> Tinnam, Chanettee, 2015. Gender Equality in Thai TV Broadcasting Organizations. Research Presented to Thai Public Broadcasting Service (Thai PBS) & UNESCO.

# Surveying the needs of Southeast Asian media organisations

By Public Media Alliance

## Introduction

This section of the situation report was informed by an online survey of journalists based in five Southeast Asian countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand.

The online survey of journalists accepted responses from July to October 2023 and was hosted on the platform, Google Forms. The survey was hosted and analysed by the Public Media Alliance.

There were 44 questions in total, and a total of 40 responses were received. Responses were collated by PMA and analysed as a collective across all countries. While the online survey received a response from each country, there was an uneven number of respondents from each. Indonesia was the most represented country while Thailand was least represented. As a result, some countries were better represented than others.

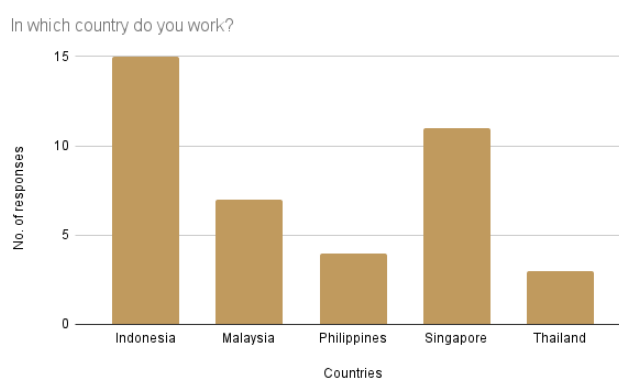
It must be noted that while the respondents offered useful insights on the gaps that may exist within the Southeast Asian media landscape when it comes to reporting on violence against women and girls and women-related issues, the sample size cannot be said to be representative of the majority of Southeast Asian journalists. Instead, the responses provide a snapshot of the current situation facing journalists in the region. Their insights serve as a solid foundation for further analysis of the issues in the region and provide direction and guidance for future research.

For a blank version of the survey, please refer to the appendix. Meanwhile, the 40 survey responses have been collated and can be downloaded [here](#).

## Demographics

Among the 40 respondents, 31 individuals (77.5%) identified as female, constituting the majority of the sample. In contrast, five respondents (12.5%) identified as male. The survey also captured three respondents (7.5%) who identified as non-binary, and one participant (2.5%) who chose the option "Prefer not to say".

Regarding the question "In which country do you work?" the survey garnered a total of 40 responses. Among the respondents, 15 individuals indicated that they work in Indonesia, while 7 stated Malaysia as their workplace. The Philippines and Singapore were cited by 4 and 11 participants, respectively, as their primary work locations. Additionally, 3 respondents identified Thailand as their country of employment.



Among the 40 respondents, half reported having 0-5 years of experience, indicating a significant presence of relatively newer journalists in the sample. Another quarter of the participants fell into the 6-10 years category, while a smaller fraction, constituting 5%, reported 11-15 years of journalistic background. Additionally, more than 20% of respondents had 15 or more years of

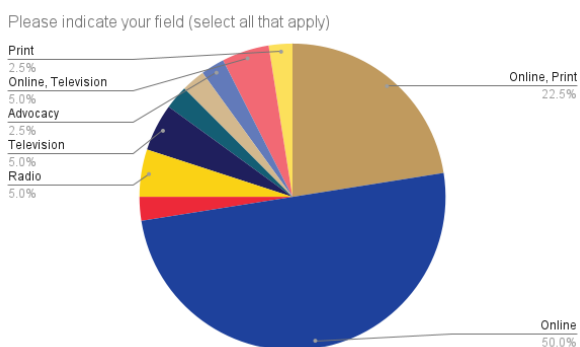


experience – 10% of respondents indicated 15-20 years of experience while another 10% indicated more than 20 years of experience, portraying a notable presence of seasoned journalists within the surveyed group.

Meanwhile, when asked to indicate their journalistic field(s), the results displayed a diverse array of responses. The most prevalent field was "Online," selected by 20 respondents, showcasing the prominent presence of digital journalism within the surveyed group. Nine respondents indicated a combination of "Online" and "Print," reflecting a hybrid engagement with both digital and traditional print media.

There were also unique configurations, with one respondent each identifying "Print" only, "Online" and "Television" together, and "Advocacy" as their primary journalistic fields. Another respondent specified engagement in both "Print" and "Television". Notably, one participant reported involvement in "Online," "Print," and "Television," highlighting a multifaceted journalistic portfolio.

Further diversifying the responses, two respondents each identified "Television" and "Radio" as their primary fields, while one participant specified engagement in "Online," "Print," and "Radio".



Respondents showcased a broad range of interests and expertise, when asked about the topics they usually cover. Some predominant themes emerged, including a significant emphasis on gender-related issues, with multiple respondents highlighting coverage of women, marginalised groups, and gender inequality.

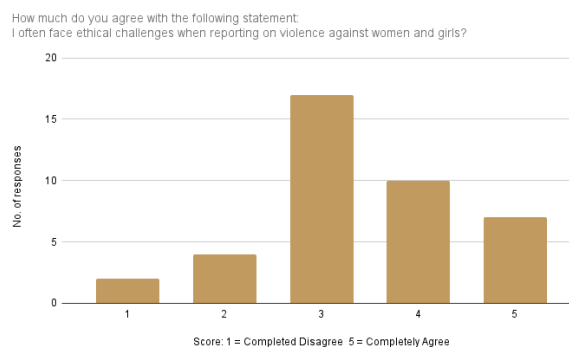
Political and social issues featured prominently, with a focus on politics, law, human rights, and social justice. Additionally, environmental concerns and sustainability garnered attention,

as other topics such as education, health, and entertainment. Specialised areas like labour rights, urban issues, disinformation, and data privacy also found representation, showcasing the depth and breadth of expertise among the surveyed journalists.

### Capacity of journalists

The survey delved into the ethical challenges faced by journalists when reporting on violence against women and girls. When asked to rate their agreement with the statement, "I often face ethical challenges when reporting on violence against women and girls," the results exhibited a varied distribution.

For two respondents, the agreement level was rated at 1, indicating a complete disagreement with the statement. Four respondents expressed a slightly higher level of disagreement, assigning a rating of 2. Most participants, constituting of 17 respondents, chose a rating of 3, suggesting a neutral stance or a moderate acknowledgment of ethical challenges in this specific reporting context.



Ten respondents indicated a level of agreement with a rating of 4, signifying a recognition of ethical challenges. Furthermore, 7 respondents strongly agreed with the statement, assigning a rating of 5, highlighting a significant subset of the group that perceives frequent ethical challenges when reporting on violence against women and girls.

When considering the capacity of journalists to report on violence against women and girls (VAWG), the survey also questioned both the prevalence of training and the source of such

training initiatives.

Among the respondents, 32.5% (13 individuals) reported having received training or sensitisation on reporting VAWG. Of those who received training, 5 respondents (38.5% of those trained) indicated that the training was conducted by their respective organisations. This finding underscores the proactive role some media organisations play in equipping their journalists with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the ethical complexities of reporting on VAWG.

Conversely, four respondents (30.8% of those trained) sought the training independently. Another four respondents (30.8% of those trained) reported that while their organisation did not directly conduct the training, it encouraged them to undertake training.

The majority of respondents, 67.5% (27 individuals), indicated that they had not received specific training or sensitisation on reporting VAWG.

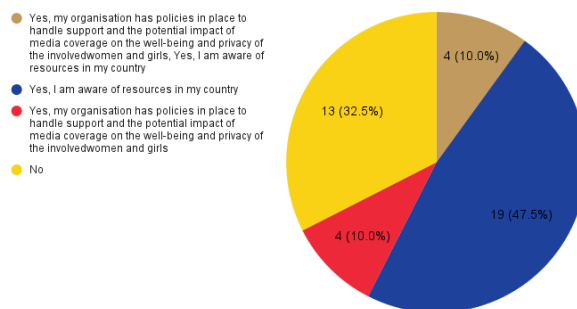
The survey inquired into journalists' perspectives on their preparedness to address ethical challenges in reporting on violence against women and girls (VAWG) and their knowledge of available support and resources for survivors or victims.

When asked, "How much do you agree with the following statement: I feel well-equipped to tackle ethical challenges when reporting on violence against women and girls?" the results varied. While 2 respondents (5%) expressed complete disagreement (rating 1), 6 respondents (15%) leaned toward disagreement with a rating of 2. The majority, comprising 20 respondents (50%), indicated a neutral stance or moderate agreement with a rating of 3. Seven respondents (17.5%) expressed agreement with a rating of 4, signifying confidence in their ability to address ethical challenges. Five respondents (12.5%) strongly agreed with the statement, providing a rating of 5, suggesting a high level of confidence in their preparedness to tackle ethical challenges in reporting on VAWG.

The above juxtaposes against the responses to the question, "Do you know where to access appropriate support and referrals for survivors or victims who may require assistance after their media exposure?" The respondents were

asked to select all situations that applied. Four respondents (10%) affirmed both organisational policies and awareness of country-specific resources. Nineteen respondents (47.5%) indicated awareness of resources in their country, while 4 respondents (10%) were aware of just organisational policies. However, 13 respondents (32.5%) reported a lack of knowledge in this regard.

Do you know where to access appropriate support and referrals for survivors or victims who may require assistance after their media exposure? Please select all that apply.



Finally, the survey delved into journalists' self-assessment of their satisfaction with their ability to effectively report on violence against women and girls (VAWG).

In response to the question, "How much do you agree with the following statement: I am satisfied with my ability to effectively report on violence against women and girls?" the distribution of responses revealed a range of sentiments. One respondent (2.5%) expressed complete disagreement (rating 1), while 9 respondents (22.5%) leaned toward dissatisfaction with a rating of 2. The majority, comprising 14 respondents (35%), indicated a neutral stance or moderate satisfaction with a rating of 3. Ten respondents (25%) expressed satisfaction with a rating of 4, signifying confidence in their reporting abilities. Six respondents (15%) strongly agreed with the statement, providing a rating of 5, indicating a high level of satisfaction with their ability to report on VAWG.

The reasons provided by journalists who felt satisfied with their ability to effectively report on VAWG included confidence in their knowledge, accurate fact-checking, support from their team or employer, long-term exposure to the topic, and access to the correct resources.

Conversely, journalists who expressed dissatisfaction with their ability to report on

VAWG cited reasons such as lack of support from employers, insufficient confidence in addressing gender issues, limited training, minimal feedback on stories, uncertainty about the seriousness of their stories, limited awareness of the subject, and challenges in maintaining victims' anonymity and approaching them appropriately.

Respondents who fell between complete satisfaction and dissatisfaction explained their stance by highlighting limited exposure to gender issues in stories or a lack of opportunities to write about the subject.

## Newsroom practices and guidelines

The survey explored newsroom practices and guidelines in relation to reporting on violence against women and girls (VAWG), revealing varying degrees of organisational frameworks from the respondents.

Of the surveyed journalists, 18 respondents (45%) affirmed the existence of specific guidelines or protocols within their organisations for reporting on VAWG. Conversely, 13 respondents (32.5%) indicated the absence of such guidelines, and 9 respondents (22.5%) expressed uncertainty about their existence.

For those who confirmed the presence of guidelines, the key points covered in their organisations' reporting practices on VAWG included a victim-focused approach, reporting with empathic journalism, a focus on solutions and victim recovery, applying a gender and child perspective, ensuring the anonymous identity of victims, prioritising victim needs, and avoiding a sensationalised portrayal of the issue. Notably, several respondents highlighted the importance of respecting victims' anonymity, providing professional support, and adhering to legal accuracy. Practices such as listening respectfully, being on the victim's side, and detailing the chronology of events were also emphasised. Additionally, considerations for cultural sensitivity, choice of interpreter, and protection of the identity of minors were underscored as integral components of their reporting practices.

These responses underscore the diversity of approaches within newsrooms, with an emphasis on ethical reporting, victim-centric coverage, and legal accuracy.

The survey further explored the feasibility of implementing reporting practices on VAWG among those respondents whose organisations lacked specific guidelines or protocols in this domain.

Though 13 explicitly said there were no specific guidelines present in their organisations, there were 21 responses to the question assessing the feasibility of implementing reporting practices on VAWG: One respondent (4.76%) expressed that it is not feasible at all (rating 1), while 2 respondents (9.52%) indicated a low feasibility with a rating of 2. The majority, comprising 7 respondents (33.33%), considered it moderately feasible with a rating of 3. Eight respondents (38.1%) leaned towards high feasibility, giving a rating of 4. Three respondents (14.29%) expressed complete feasibility, assigning a rating of 5.

Meanwhile, the respondents demonstrated varying forms of ethical approaches when interviewing women and/or girls who have experienced violence. Among the respondents, various strategies emerged, with specific attention to ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of survivors. Notably, 25 participants emphasised the use of techniques like filming from behind, employing voice actors, or altering names to safeguard identities. A comparable number, 25 respondents, highlighted the importance of removing identifying information to maintain confidentiality while conducting interviews in private and secure locations was a practice endorsed by 23 respondents. Additionally, 14 participants offered contact details to interviewees, facilitating communication for any questions or concerns that might arise after the interview.

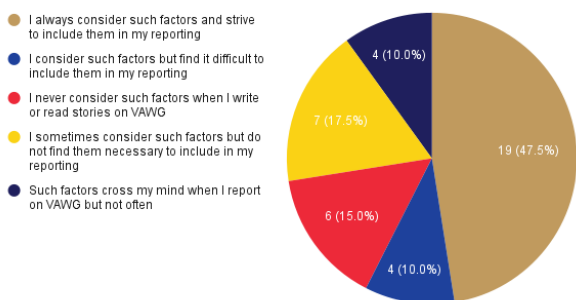
Furthermore, there was a high level of commitment to not sharing victim information without explicit permission, with 25 respondents recognising the significance of seeking consent before disseminating any potentially sensitive materials. The same number of participants stressed the need to employ sensitive terms during news uploads to prevent re-victimisation.

Other relevant practices emerged, including a commitment to sensitivity and an avoidance of sensationalism; making legal and ethical considerations, particularly in cases involving minors; and listening respectfully to interviewees. One respondent mentioned adapting the

pace of the interview to the victim's discretion, allowing control over sensitive details, and fact-checking with victims before publication, which underscored a tailored approach to individual needs.

When considering factors like race, ethnicity, socio-economic backgrounds, and physical ability in reporting on VAWG, 19 respondents expressed a commitment to always incorporating these factors into their reporting. Four respondents acknowledged considering such factors but found it challenging to include them. Six respondents admitted to never considering these factors in their reporting on VAWG. Seven respondents noted that they sometimes consider these factors but do not find them necessary to include regularly. Finally, four respondents mentioned that such factors cross their minds when reporting on VAWG but not often.

When it comes to factors such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic backgrounds, and physical ability, which statement best describes you?



Regarding the framing and contextualisation of incidents of VAWG in media coverage, various approaches were evident. A total of 25 respondents emphasised strategies such as highlighting underlying causes like gender inequality, using accurate terminology, employing inclusive and empowering language, incorporating statistics and case studies, prioritising voices of experts, focusing on the impact on victims, avoiding victim-blaming language and harmful stereotypes, and following cases from beginning to end, including legal penalties. On the other hand, six respondents did not frame or add context to incidents of VAWG in their media coverage, while seven respondents highlighted some, but not all, of the aforementioned strategies.

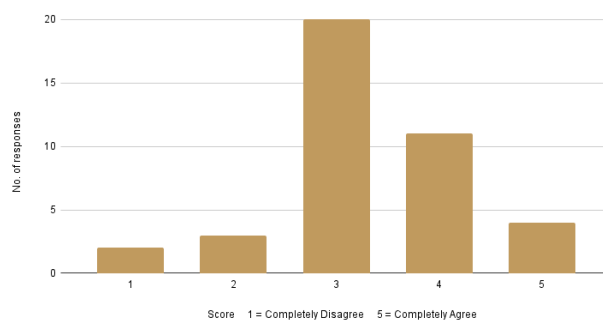
Meanwhile, solutions journalism was a consideration of many of the respondents.

Respondents were asked whether they highlight effective interventions, programmes, or solutions to prevent and address VAWG in their reports and, out of the 40 respondents, 26 answered affirmatively, while 14 responded negatively.

Among the resources interventions, programmes, and solutions highlighted by the 26 who answered in the affirmative included seeking updates from authorities on helplines and services for victims; collaboration with community organisations; providing contacts for institutions with helplines, legal aid services, and counselling services; and incorporating information from NGOs and relevant government and non-governmental institutions. Respondents also said they featured voices from relevant programmes and organisations and included guidelines, recommendations, and information from gender-focused NGOs.

For the 14 respondents who answered negatively, they cited reasons such as a lack of knowledge and the perception of non-existent effective interventions. Challenges with programme managers' apprehension about association with unfamiliar organisations were noted.

How much do you agree with the following statement: I am satisfied with my organisation's coverage of violence against women and girls in news and current affairs?



Finally, the survey included a question gauging respondents' satisfaction with their organisation's coverage of VAWG in news and current affairs. The responses were distributed across a spectrum: 2 respondents completely disagreed, 3 partially disagreed, 20 were neutral, 11 partially agreed, and 4 completely agreed.

Several reasons were provided for the respondents' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their organisation's coverage of VAWG. Some expressed concerns that women's issues were not sufficiently aligned with general topics and lacked affirmative action. Criticisms were raised

about covering VAWG only when incidents became viral, potentially contributing to sensationalism. Conversely, positive experiences were shared, such as successfully bringing justice to marginalised individuals in specific cases.

Instances of transition to new workplaces were highlighted, with improved experiences when working for organisations who were appreciative of efforts to address gender equality issues. However, challenges were noted, including a past focus on clickbait titles rather than contextual reporting. The use of sexism-related keywords for search engine optimisation (SEO) purposes was cited as a practice within some organisations.

Challenges within media organisations were also noted, including instances of sexist attitudes among colleagues and bosses. Despite these challenges, some respondents expressed satisfaction with their ability to report effectively due to their experience, networks, and knowledge of experts and women's protection organisations.

Positive feedback was given for organisations that continuously reported on VAWG, particularly cases involving women and children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Instances of commitment to inclusivity and ethical reporting were mentioned. Sufficient guidelines within organisations for reporting on violence, especially VAWG, were appreciated by some respondents.

Meanwhile, acknowledgment of the need for improvement and the importance of covering underrepresented issues were recurring themes. Suggestions for enhancements included adding more context to reports, supporting victims, and being more careful with language and framing of stories. Some respondents emphasised that news organisations could do more, especially for minority societies, to raise awareness and encourage women to speak out.

Respondents further identified various challenges faced by them and their organisations in enhancing coverage of women and girls. These challenges encompassed multiple dimensions, from internal organisational aspects to external factors like public opinion and legislation. The top three challenges, as perceived by the respondents, were diverse and included issues related to company policies, editorial decision-making, state censorship, and societal attitudes.

Training gaps on gender parity and a lack of funding for alternative media that center women as resources were mentioned as significant challenges while – in terms of internal dynamics – company policies, insufficient awareness in the newsroom, and a scarcity of women or gender minority representatives among journalists were identified.

External challenges included potential violence from the public, concerns about legislation, and state censorship affecting the freedom to report on sensitive issues. The fear of backlash and doxxing (the malicious publication of private information), especially in cases involving public institutions, was another prevalent concern. Several respondents emphasised the impact of public opinion, social media reactions, and the potential for victim-blaming on survivors' mental well-being. The planning process for covering issues, ensuring source safety, and editor decision-making were considered crucial in overcoming challenges.

The role of editors in decision-making was a recurring theme, along with concerns about the editorial culture prioritising sensationalism over victim protection. Issues related to the readiness of survivors to report, inconsistent application of social media policies, and the gender composition of newsroom leadership were also mentioned.

Balancing the gravity of women's issues with reader interest and the ability to understand the depth of such problems emerged as a nuanced challenge. The relentless pursuit of clicks and views, tight deadlines, and the importance of mental health were recognised as additional obstacles in comprehensive reporting.

The inclusion of women and non-binary journalists, and the prioritisation of women's issues in editorial decision-making, were suggested solutions. Overall, the challenges outlined by the respondents underscored a multifaceted nature of improving media coverage of women and girls, requiring a concerted effort across organisational, societal, and individual levels.

## **Safety of women journalists**

The survey set out to gain insight on violence experienced by women journalists, either by



women who've experienced violence themselves or people who know a woman journalist who has experienced violence.

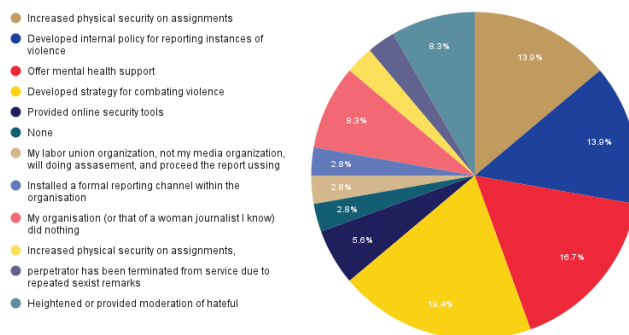
When asked, "I (or a woman I know) have experienced violence in-person or online in the course of journalistic work", a majority (27 out of 40 respondents), acknowledged experiencing violence or knowing someone who has experienced violence either in-person or online during their journalistic pursuits. Conversely, 13 respondents reported not having experienced such violence or knowing someone who has experienced such violence.

To delve into the nature and forms of the violence faced by women journalists, respondents were prompted to select from a list of options. The varied forms of violence reported encompassed abusive or hateful language, threats of sexual violence, doxxing, threats of physical violence, offline attacks connected to online violence, threats to reputation, detected surveillance, verbal violence, catcalling, and cyberbullying.

Among the steps taken to mitigate violence included keeping records of harassment, limiting the sharing of personal information online, using law enforcement as a resource, and taking steps to safeguard mental well-being.

Meanwhile, in response to the question gauging the confidence in news organisations taking reports of violence against women journalists seriously, the findings indicate a range of

How did your organisation (or that of a woman journalist you know) offer support after an incident of violence and worked to minimise future incidents?



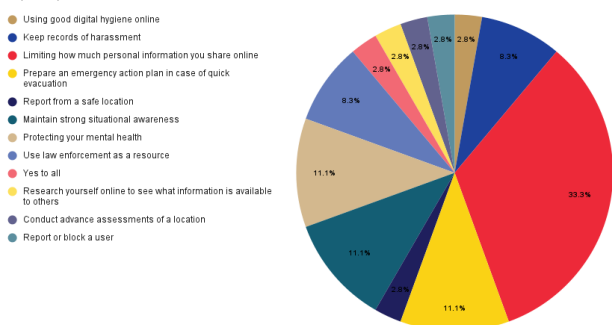
of violence against women journalists seriously. Additionally, 13 respondents chose a rating of 3, signifying a neutral stance on the matter, while 11 respondents each chose ratings of 4 and 3, reflecting a moderate level of agreement.

In instances where a formal or informal report was made to a media organisation after violence was experienced by a female journalist in her journalistic work, the respondents identified several ways in which support was offered, or not offered:

Furthermore, when support was offered by media organisations, the respondents indicated that there were variations in the level of support. Nine respondents indicated that threats of physical or sexual violence, whether occurring offline or online, were treated with the highest level of seriousness by their organisations. In contrast, six respondents reported that their organisations treated all forms of violence uniformly, suggesting a consistent approach regardless of the nature or medium of the violence.

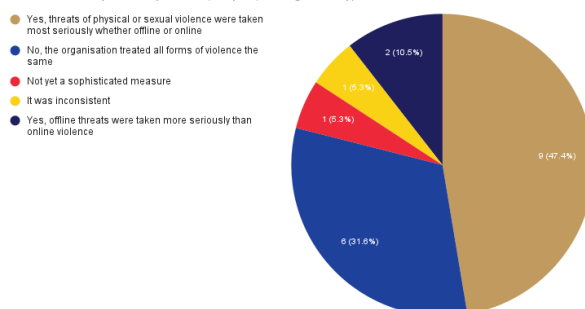
Two respondents expressed that offline threats received more serious attention than online violence, highlighting a distinction in the perceived severity of different forms of threats. Additionally, one respondent mentioned that the level of support was inconsistent, and another respondent noted that their organisation had not yet established a sophisticated measure to differentiate between types of violence.

Have you, or a woman journalist you know, ever taken independent measures to protect from violence (both online and in-person)?



sentiments among the respondents. None of the participants expressed complete disagreement (rated as 1), while two respondents leaned towards disagreement (rated as 2). On the other end of the spectrum, a substantial number of respondents, 14 in total, fully agreed (rated as 5) that their news organisations would treat reports

Where support was offered by a media organisation, did the level of support from your organisation (or that of a woman journalist you know) vary depending on the type of violence?



---

## Recommendations

Based on the extensive insights gathered from the survey responses, the following are key recommendations. These recommendations demonstrate how media organisations can more effectively report on women and girls and gender minorities, and address issues such as violence against women journalists.

**1**

### **Increase newsroom investment in training**

The findings demonstrate the need for increased organisational investment in providing targeted training opportunities to journalists, ensuring a more informed and ethically grounded approach when reporting on sensitive topics such as violence against women and girls. Addressing this gap could contribute to fostering a more supportive and skilled journalism environment.

**2**

### **Develop comprehensive guidelines and policies for reporting on VAWG**

The findings emphasise the importance of providing comprehensive support structures within media organisations and fostering awareness of available resources to enable journalists to navigate the ethical challenges associated with reporting on VAWG responsibly. In instances where guidelines or policies already exist, these should be regularly reviewed and strengthened. Developed guidelines and policies should consider the diversity of approaches within newsrooms, with an emphasis on ethical reporting, victim-centric coverage, and protection for victims and survivors. Guidelines should include directions on language usage, framing stories, and addressing potential challenges such as online threats and doxxing.

**3**

### **Develop robust mechanisms to combat violence against women journalists**

The findings demonstrate the impact of violence, with offline attacks, verbal harassment, and threats of physical violence affecting the safety and well-being of women journalists. The diversity of the reported incidents underscores the urgent need for robust measures to address and combat violence against women in journalism, ensuring a safer and more inclusive environment for all practitioners in the field. The findings show a recognition of distinctions in the seriousness of offline versus online threats and underline the importance of tailored and comprehensive support mechanisms within media organisations to address the diverse challenges faced by women journalists in the course of their work. The findings also emphasise the need for organisations to continually refine and adapt their support frameworks based on the evolving landscape of threats encountered by women journalists. Media organisations are also encouraged to advocate for and support legal protections for journalists, especially women, who may face threats and violence in the course of their work.

**4**

### **Facilitate collaboration**

The findings highlight the need for the facilitation of collaboration between media

organisations and relevant NGOs, crisis helplines, and women's organisations to create a network for sharing information and resources. Media organisations are also encouraged to collaborate within the journalism community to address common challenges and share best practices. Notably, collaboration should encourage solutions journalism by highlighting effective interventions, programmes, and support services in reports on VAWG.

5

### **Prioritise gender parity within newsrooms**

Media organisations should promote diversity and inclusion in newsrooms by not only actively seeking representation of women and gender minorities, but by also challenging sexist attitudes and behaviours within the newsroom. Media organisations should also ensure that diverse voices are heard in the newsroom decision-making processes to enhance the breadth and sensitivity of coverage.

**Find out more about the Public Media Alliance, Konde.co, AWARE Singapore and UNESCO IPDC:**

[www.publicmediaalliance.org](http://www.publicmediaalliance.org)

[www.konde.co](http://www.konde.co)

[www.aware.org.sg](http://www.aware.org.sg)

[www.unesco.org/en/international-programme-development-communication](http://www.unesco.org/en/international-programme-development-communication)

---

Published by the Public Media Alliance

© Public Media Alliance 2023

