

## A STUDY ON CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN JOURNALISTS OF PRINT MEDIA IN INDIA

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**Abstract**

The study examines challenges faced by women journalists of India who have been or are currently associated with English print media in India. 15 women journalists from different cities of India and majorly from Mumbai working for various beats were interviewed to understand the nature of the challenges faced by the journalists along with the impact and the conditions under which they face these issues. This research discloses the struggles encountered by women journalists through the method of in-depth interviews. This study finds, women journalists face three-way challenges in the career of journalism which is on-field, in workspace and online. Some of the major challenges involve gender discrimination, lack of basic amenities, online trolling and the pressure to manage family and career. The findings reveal the impacts of these challenges on the lives of the women journalists and the support system they rely on to fight these battles.

**Keywords:** women journalists, challenges, online, organisation, on field, feminist theory, India

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**Introduction:**

Media is known as the fourth pillar of democracy and journalism is one of the most important aspects of media which shapes the way in which the audience thinks and views the world. Today, with the advent of technology and the ever changing cultural, economic and political arenas, Journalism as an industry plays an instrumental role in informing the public about the current happenings but at the same time becomes a target where manipulation and fakeness persists in the name of power on a massive level. Working in an industry which demands responsibility, dedication and strength to tackle challenges and serve the people in the country with the news along with balancing the act of righteousness is a struggle for many journalists. With women making their mark equally in every field, journalism is not an exception but it comes with its own set of concerns for women who choose to make their

career in the journalism arena.

With the innumerable problems women face on a day-to-day basis, a career in journalism does not promise a safe and secure life but doubles the battle for women as they try to manage their personal and professional lives equally. This research aims to understand the challenges faced by these women journalists and how they hold themselves amidst these difficult times.

**Review of Literature:**

The challenges faced by women journalists nowadays are a part of many aspects like the rise in technology or lack of support system for journalists. However, it goes back to the pre-independence period when the press was not free from the shackles of the government. As mentioned in the article published by the 'Indian Express' titled as 'A pre-independence history of press freedom in India' (Iyenger, 2017) speaks about the restrictions imposed by the British Government on the

content of Indian publications popularly known as 'Vernacular Press Act' or 'Gagging Act' during 1878 which reveals the strict vigilance and the control, the Britishers imposed on Indian publications which restricted them from bringing out news to the public.

To support the above concept and how it is prevalent even today, an article published by 'The Wire' titled 'When a government is hostile to the press' (Tully, 2020) explains about the current situation of pandemic, where the author of the article feels media is the lapdog of the government which prevents them from giving the balanced news to the public and it pressurises the media to the extent where the journalists are not allowed to report on the cases which involve talking about police authorities or the government. Today, the media is focused on delivering the news which is mostly biased and chooses not to speak about the government till date. This article is a revelation to understand if the media is given the freedom to express unbiased news.

Many times, there are direct attacks on journalists, there are death threats, sexual assaults, gender biasness and many other problems women face in their day-to-day life whilst in this profession. However, not every case is reported or an action is taken. This type of situation prevails not just in cities but also in remote locations and with journalists covering stories in regional languages as well. An article published by 'The Wire' gives the statistics on the number of issues faced by women journalists along with the report and experiences published by 'Committee to Protect Journalists' (Ananya, 2016). The CPJ report reveals, since 1992, 27 Indian journalists have been murdered directly due to their work and none of the murdered cases have seen a conviction.

### Objectives

- To understand if women journalists face challenges.
- To study the conditions under which women journalists face these challenges.
- To examine what constitutes their support system to

handle the challenges they encounter on various levels.

- To study the impact these challenges have on women journalists and their work.

### Methodology:

In this study, the researcher has used the qualitative approach to conduct an in-depth study on the challenges faced by women journalists in the print media in India, under the exploratory research design as the researcher wants to explore the topic and seeks answers to what, how and why of the subject. The researcher has conducted structured interviews with open-ended questions as a primary research method and online sources and newspaper articles as the secondary sources. Snowball sampling method has been used to reach out to the respondents who could contribute to the research. The researcher has interviewed 15 women journalists from various states of India who are currently working in print media. Some of the respondents have been interviewed by keeping their identities anonymous on their request. The method involved for data analysis is thematic as it includes studying the experiences, opinions and views of interviewed women journalists with an inductive approach which involves allowing the data to determine its themes.

### Limitations:

The primary concern encountered by the researcher was the time-constraints and getting in touch with the journalists. Despite getting the contacts of journalists from various sources, journalists were unavailable to give their insights as they were extremely busy. The researcher intended to interview more than 20 journalists from different parts of the country but due to the pandemic, many journalists could not get in touch due to ill health resulting in the reduction in the number of respondents. Due to time-limit some interviews have been conducted by clubbing the questions.

**Findings:**

Qualitative Research methodology has been used by the researcher to understand the experience of the journalists. This methodology enabled the researcher to understand the challenges faced by women journalists in detail through in depth interview method. For better understanding of the data collected, it is imperative that the information is segregated into two major categories:

- Thematic Segregation
- Recurring Thematic Segregation

**Thematic Segregation:** Based on the thematic nature of the data collected, the challenges are divided into three parts.

**On-Field:** Women journalists encounter multiple challenges on-field while they are reporting stories. From lack of basic facilities to sexual harassment and many more issues are a fragment of women's lives while working on-field. The impact of these struggles are grave and can be long-lasting affecting their productivity and their personal life in general.

**Organisational:** Organisational disputes are not new. Women journalists struggle a lot on a regular basis in organisations and these struggles range from gender discrimination on the grounds of lack of appreciation, promotion and remuneration to getting excused from taking up leading roles or not being hired because of personal choices. Organisational struggles drain women journalists on another level as despite all the struggles to achieve a high position, women are not given equal opportunities and have to fight for their basic rights in their professional life.

**Virtual:** With the virtual world getting wider it is equally dreadful when it comes to the lives of the women journalists. Many women journalists during their work in journalism face risky incidents which involve social media majorly. It could be stalking by unknown people, rape threats or death threats. All these challenges have a massive impact on the women

journalists both emotionally and psychologically.

**Recurring Thematic Segregation:**

The facts collected from the interviews have some themes which are recurring. The recurring challenges are classified as follows:

**Gender Discrimination:** Many women journalists claim that gender discrimination takes place in their workplace where women are not given fair opportunities. They are specifically chosen to cover soft beats due to the gender stereotypes and are refrained from taking up higher positions in the organisations believing they would leave the space for their personal commitments or would not be able to handle the pressure. Hence, most of the establishments appoint men for the higher positions and these positions are backed by the power of patriarchy. Madhuri Kumar is a journalist from a national newspaper from Patna states:

“A female is equally competent as men but no female is given the responsibility to become a news editor on the desk. It is always the male who becomes the news editor. Very few females are given the opportunity. Only one or two as you can count. Rest they can go max up to principal copywriter but not beyond that and you can become an assistant editor but as far as responsibility of a bureau head or a news desk is concerned it is always the men”.

The above statement clarifies that women are barred from taking up higher positions in organisations due to gender discrimination.

**Discrimination on the grounds of Remuneration or appreciation:** Gender Discrimination persists on the grounds of appraisals and promotion. Women face tremendous pressure working in this industry as they share equal working timings with men in the industry and work equally hard but when it comes to the rewards, they are not paid equally. On the similar lines Interviewee No 3 who wished to remain anonymous is a journalist who works for a business newspaper in

Mumbai edition claims:

“I do not have much to say about the timings but yes, in terms of role, you will be delayed with promotions and important positions will not be given to you because you are a woman. For a woman, they use statements like, “You will be getting married and you will be having babies then why do you need a promotion?”. So, the authorities consider women distracted and they are not fairly treated”.

This shows women are not treated with equality and are questioned on their personal choices. It is normal for a man to ask for a salary raise as he is considered to be the breadwinner of the family and it is normalised in the society but for a woman, it is considered as a sign of distraction or a way in which a woman is seen as less committed.

**Safety and Security:** One of the most important concerns journalists are compelled to cope up, are the security issues. Most women journalists claim that there is no additional security given to them considering their job timings and the nature of work, women need more security but the field of journalism lacks this basic facility for the women.

To support this, Interviewee No 5 who wishes to remain anonymous is a journalist who works for a national newspaper in Patna narrates an incident which happened with her friend.

“I remember one incident when my friend told me that she was on field to cover a rally when PM Modi was here during Lok Sabha elections and somebody groped her. She was an intern with us. When she returned from the rally, she was crying and I consoled her. She told me I was doing my job when somebody groped me. So these are some serious struggles of women journalists and you cannot protect yourself for hide yourself”

The above statement proves that women encounter some grave security concerns in fields which lack protection and security.

**Online Trolling:** With the advent of social media, the

world has come closer. Life has become simpler and the journalism industry works greatly with the help of social media. However, it comes with its own price for journalists dealing with social media on a regular basis. Invasion of privacy, Online trolling, Cybercrime, Death threats and rape threats to name a few. On the same line, Interviewee No 5 who wished to stay anonymous is a journalist for a national newspaper in Patna states:

“When I was a beginner I had written an article helping people which was also supported with the factor of caste and how one should not promote hatred towards certain castes, that was a successful attempt as after reading my article, many people came forward to help other people but I also received hate from people on social media accusing me for being from a different caste”.

The above statement suggests that social media has brought the world together by connecting people from different parts of the globe but at the same time has given access to the people to express their opinions freely which does not necessarily happen in a healthy way but mostly results in nasty remarks and unhealthy criticism which impacts women journalists seriously.

**Family and Career:** Juggling between personal and professional life has always been tedious for everyone and especially women. It is a difficult choice to make. Women in journalism are passionate about their career and love their families as well but managing a challenging career and taking care of their families comes with its own set of challenges. On the same grounds Interviewee No 2 tells:

“What my observation says is that after a certain level, women are not able to go up in the ladder because what happens is, it becomes difficult to juggle between personal life and work and your organisation does not support there so you will see a lot of women accepting a later role so they can at least continue the jobs also because an administration does not support you beyond

a mandated law.”

The above statement proves that when women choose their family their career suffers and ultimately it becomes difficult for them to start their career or take up the same position in the same organisation again. Many organisations do not support women in terms of their career or with their families so women are forced to choose one side and compromise of the other.

**Lack of basic facilities:** Considering women menstruate and are on field covering stories for long hours at stretch, women journalists do not feel safe to work due to lack of basic facilities like toilets for women. Interviewee No 4 who wished to stay anonymous is a state correspondent in Goa working for a national publication reveals:

“When you spend too much time outdoors or travelling, you do not have access to public toilets . Clean toilets are a far cry; there are no toilets to begin with. On those days these are the additional challenges we face. As working professional women, we do not want to make much of it as we do not want to look like we are at disadvantage because of this but it is a basic need and I do not feel it is that difficult to fulfil”.

The above statement proves that women in the field of journalism have to struggle even for some basic facilities such as toilets and sanitation. With a field which requires longer working hours for women, the lack of hygiene and toilets result in some serious consequences pertaining to the health of women journalists.

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