

Violence against women journalists in Lebanon

1. Please indicate whether there are cases of gender based violence and harassment against women journalists in your country. If so, please specify how these cases are documented, and describe the State response, or lack thereof, to such cases, including examples of good practice.

In Lebanon, cases of sexual harassment and violence against women journalists vary from sexual stereotyping and accusations to threats of rape and killing.

This is becoming a frequent weapon to ripost when some parties/ persons do not agree with the journalist's opinion instead of replying in the same "politically polite" manner. Many female journalists were attacked in their personal and sexual life in a demeaning degrading manner in order to "domesticate" them, silence them and inhibit them from expressing their points of view freely, and therefore generalize their case to other journalists who dare to speak up freely. This is not only an intimidation and threat to the safety of women journalists and to their well-being, but it also leads to their exclusion from participation in the press and undermines the diversity of opinion and the freedom of expression. It is also another way to perpetuate gender inequality and patriarchy as politics is considered a "men's field" as was mentioned repeatedly on social media especially when replying on Twitter's account of the journalist or reporter "under attack."

As of October 17, 2019, we have witnessed an increase in the number of cases of GBV and harassment against women journalists especially after the riots as more female reporters were covering the manifestations and getting in contact with massive crowds, more journalists hosted and engaged in the talk shows and in expressing their point of views on social media.

During the coverage of the manifestations, some female reporters were sexually and verbally harassed and were subject to violent acts such as punching and sexual abuse. During live coverage, a manifesting singer tried to kiss a reporter to silence her, another one hugged and kissed another one, a third journalist was pinched in her back, to list few accidents. The situation culminated to beating women journalists and stealing the phone of one and confiscating the phone of another. The mobile personal phone of a prominent manifesting journalist was stolen, some personal photos leaked, and she was threatened to spread personal content. Some journalists reported on their social media accounts that they have received threats of rape and killing.

Doxing occurred, the personal details of a list of male and female journalists who are active in the riots was shared and published online. It resulted in offensive comments and unwanted calls from strangers, leading to severe sickness, high stress and hospitalization of a family member of one of the journalists.

Cyberstalking has become a common practice, seldom from parody accounts that spread false accusations, defamation, slander and libel and a hashtag to increase the intensity of the attack in order to make it trending with thousands of tweets.

After all pressures on social media have failed to silence an activist journalist, she faced pressure from superiors in a media outlet that lead to her resignation.

Most of those acts were not documented officially in the absence of a gender or VAW media monitor or deposit of a legal complaint.

The State response was limited to denouncing these acts by the Minister of Information in a courtesy statement without any measures to prohibit and punish those acts, especially in the absence of a law that punishes sexual harassment in the place of work and in public places in

Lebanon. However, it is worth noting that legal action and prosecution in this case is triggered only upon the institution of the civil action by a private person for damage and as provided by some articles of different inter-related laws.

There were no actions taken by neither the order of Lebanese press nor by the syndicate of editors to face those aggressions. This led to the creation of the Alternative Syndicate of Press by the activists to replace both the order of press and the syndicate of editors and to denounce violence against both female and male journalists.

2. Please indicate whether your country has early-warning and rapid-response systems in place, such as hotlines, online platforms or 24-hour emergency contact points to ensure that journalists and other media actors have immediate access to protective measures when they are under threat.

In Lebanon, there is no hotline or platform dedicated only to media actors; however, there is an emergency public hotline that can be used to ensure protection of any endangered individual.

The Internal Security forces has dedicated a hotline (1745) with trained personnel to answer calls and intervene in cases of Violence Against Women but no single female journalist got in contact with this line.

3. Please specify whether there are any programs in place aimed at addressing factors that increase the likelihood of violence and harassment in the world of work for women journalists, including discrimination, the abuse of power relations, and gender, cultural and social norms that support violence and harassment.

The law proposal on "Penalizing Sexual Harassment in the Places of Work and in Public Places" was approved by the government on March 8, 2017 but has not been promulgated yet by the Parliament to be put in action. This law identifies factors that might lead to increased likelihood of violence and harassment in the place of work for women, including discrimination, the abuse of power relations, and gender, cultural and social norms that support violence and harassment, and it sets a legal framework to combat it.

The National Strategy to Prevent and Combat GBV drafted by the previous Ministry of State for Women's Affairs, addressed the issue of harassment and violence in the place of work without specific reference to work categories and protective measures by category.

However, under this strategy, one of the working objectives is to draft a "code of ethics" in order to abolish stereotypes from media content and their perpetuation, raise awareness about violence and other issues related to empowering women and abolishing all types of cultural and social discriminatory norms.

Another objective was to train the media sector on the ethics and guidelines of covering and reporting on cases of GBV specifically and women's issues generally, a task already on-going by two NGOs.

This strategy is under revision by the National Commission for Lebanese Women and hasn't been implemented yet.

4. Please specify whether online and ICT-facilitated violence against women is recognized as a crime, particularly cases of killings, threats of rape and harassment of women journalists.

The previously mentioned law on penalizing sexual harassment recognized on-line and ICT-facilitated VAW as crime. Without criminalization, victims cannot protect their human rights to privacy and dignity.

5. Please indicate whether transparent complaint mechanisms for cases of offline and online and ICT-facilitated violence against women journalists have been adopted, and if so, whether policies and procedures for reporting and requesting the removal of harmful content are available and easily accessible.

In the absence of a specialized law and of policies and procedures for reporting, victims are compelled to sue perpetrators through a patchwork of related crimes. The legal instruments most frequently used in this regard are cybercrime laws, criminal laws, hate speech laws and laws on data protection and privacy. The Lebanese Penal code and articles of defamation and indecency (article 383) punish publishing harmful content, trial might lead to the removal of content if judged harmful. However, this is a long expensive legal procedure, and the victims attempting to erase content may be exposed to the risk of having their case made even more public.

6. Please indicate what challenges are faced by women journalists when reporting on cases of gender based violence, and specify whether there are any good practices in this regard.

One challenge among many is the exhaustive legal system and the stigma to report on such issues and limit the victim from pursuing justice and protection.

The vast majority of GBV and sexual harassment crimes go unpunished, which in turn contributes to the recurrence of these crimes.

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