

SAFETY CONCERNS AND AWARENESS OF SAFETY MEASURES AMONG FEMALE JOURNALISTS REPORTING ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Female journalists often face a dual challenge when reporting on elections, grappling with routine attacks both as women and as professionals. This study aims to explore the safety concerns of female journalists covering elections in Lagos state, Nigeria, and investigate their attitudes towards these concerns, their awareness, and utilization of available safety measures. Using an explanatory sequential method, we conducted a questionnaire survey with 40 female journalists and followed up with in-depth interviews of two senior female journalists. Findings revealed that Sexual harassment emerged as a common offline threat (87.5%), while libelous comments (75%) and stalking (75%) posed significant online concerns. Despite these alarming safety statistics, female journalists agreed that safety is a concern ($\bar{x} = 3.72$); while expressing that safety concerns would not significantly affect their election coverage (mean = 2.70). Furthermore, there is a disparity between high awareness (mean = 4.00) and low adoption (mean = 3.12) of available safety measures among female journalists. In addition, the interviews underscored the absence of substantial support from media organizations during election coverage, exacerbating the vulnerabilities faced by female journalists. This lack of institutional backing warrants immediate attention to foster a safer reporting environment.

Keywords: Female Journalists in Nigeria, Election Reporting, Safety Concerns, Safety Measures, Awareness.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, female journalists, much like their male counterparts, have been at the forefront of delivering relevant reports on various societal issues, including elections. The history of women's involvement in journalism dates back to 1849 when Margaret Fuller reported on the invasion of Rome by French forces led by Louis-Napoleon (Munoz, 2014). Since then, the field of journalism has continually benefited from the unique perspectives brought forth by women, exemplified by pioneering foreign female correspondents such as Mary Roberts Rinehart, Sigrid Schultz, and Martha Gelhorn (Munoz, 2014).

However, despite their valuable contributions, female journalists still face various forms of discrimination while carrying out their duties. Historically, journalism was male-dominated, evident from common phrases like "gentlemen of the press." This gender imbalance is reflected in newsrooms and events, where male practitioners significantly outnumber their female counterparts. This equally contributes to the gender disparity noticed even in leadership as "a survey of the leadership status of female reporters in the country in 2017 revealed a ratio of 2:1 representation in board and management levels in favor of men (*This Day*, 2018)". Jubril and Abubakar (2018) noted that the prevailing patriarchal structure of the Nigerian society affects the female gender's desire to go into male-dominated roles within the society. They further noted that the journalism profession is not spared of this problem in spite of the fact that the media should enlighten the public on how some of these cultural problems hamper development. Alaka conducted a survey in 2017 at 85 media outlets in Nigeria and confirmed that the ratio of male to female journalists was nine to one (Alaka in Egwu, 2018).

Gradually, this trend is being challenged with the growing number of women who have found their passion in journalism. Ogundare (2018) rightly noted that although journalism used to be seen as the exclusive preserve of men who were able to excel in it as a result of the peculiarity of the African nature, the cycle is breaking even as more females make huge impact with the help of technologies such as the internet. Even at that, the ratio of men to women in this profession is significantly low raising concerns globally and locally just as the risk of arrest or attack of women has risen (VOA, 2021).

The issue of insecurity and gender discriminations have been and continue to be areas of concern for most female journalists especially in many countries where some are confined to feature writing and soft stories for various reasons including cultural norms denying women equal status when it comes to setting the news agenda. North (2014) noted that this issue has been long identified as a problem of vertical segregation in the news media where women are largely absent from key editorial decision-making roles based on stereotypical believe that women are better at, or more interested in, covering soft news, while men are associated with higher-status hard news stories. Barton and Storm in Munoz (2014:3) noted that:

For some women journalists, this insecurity extends to the workplace, as the prevalence of sexual harassment in newsrooms across the globe is well-documented. ...women journalists' chronicled widespread harassment that ranged from gossip and character assassination to touching and demands for sexual favours. While some newsrooms adopt anti-harassment policies, the personal and professional implications of workplace harassment mean some victims never report the abuse.

These insecurities are further compounded by the documented prevalence of sexual harassment in newsrooms worldwide, ranging from character assassination to demands for sexual favors, perpetrated by various actors, including government authorities, criminal gangs, co-workers, and sources (Munoz, 2014).

In the pursuit of an effective democratic system, media plays a vital role by offering a plurality of voices online and offline. However, journalists, in general, have become targets of both

online and offline attacks, creating a worrisome environment. For female journalists, this double burden extends to being attacked as journalists and as women, particularly evident in election reporting, which generates intense debates and tension among different players (Munoz, 2014). Election reporting is a peculiar area of media practice which generates serious debates and views often creating a tensed atmosphere among the different players simply because nobody wants to lose out.

Despite the participation of both male and female professionals in election reporting, gender imbalance remains a challenge, influenced by factors like gender discrimination. Many factors have been suggested as possible causes of this trend including gender discrimination which characterizes the experience of women. Although the OCHR (2016) report showed that the majority of journalists killed as a result of their work worldwide in recent years are men, sexual violence and online harassment are more frequently linked to women journalists just like reputational smearing campaigns (often of a sexual nature) and potential physical attacks against members of their families are common. The International Center for Journalists and UNESCO revealed that three quarters (73%) of women journalists have experienced online abuse, harassment and threats. In the same vein, Reporters without Borders reported that the number of detained women increased by 35% from December 2019 to December 2020. This figure has further increased in recent years despite the fact that more female journalists have joined the newsroom in recent years. There was a surge of 20% increase in the number of female journalists arbitrarily put behind bars in 2021 representing 60 out of the 488 journalists and media workers detained (VOA, 2021). In addition, 48% of women journalists in 50 countries had experienced gender-based violence such as sexual harassment, physical violence as well as verbal, psychological and economic abuse in the course of work. The Coalition of Women in the first quarter of 2021 reported 348 cases of violence and threats against women journalists globally (Made for Minds, 2020; Organisation for Security and Cooperation, OSCE 2021). China tops the list of five countries ranked as the biggest jailer of journalists and holds same record for female journalists. A total of 19 female journalists were detained in China and Hong Kong in addition to 17 women out of 32 journalists detained in Belarus while Myanmar has 53 detained all in 2021. Afghanistan and Mexico equally contributes to these figures.

Contrasting the experience of women journalists in the Western media with that of developing countries such as India and Nigeria, Rehman, an award winning print journalist and author based in India, recalled that many media outlets do not cater to the needs of women journalists reporting conflict and in hostile environments as in the case of elections (ICFJ, 2021). There are cases of female journalists facing sanctions in Nigeria such as Mary Ekere, the Akwa Ibom photo journalist who was arrested for taking pictures of an illegal police raid in 2019. Deborah Coker, who works for the News Agency of Nigeria was among the three journalists arrested in Edo State sometime in May, 2022 for covering a factional primary election of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). Although she and others were later released, she spent several hours behind bars before she was bailed (OSCE, 2021). This shows that among other concerns for female journalists in Nigeria is the fear of being arrested at unexpected times in the line of duty. Female journalists equally reported that they are constantly flirting with danger when reporting conflicts; they have the fear that things may go wrong while carrying out the assignment even

as their mental safety equally heightens (Gangji, 2021). Recalling her experience in the course of covering elections for more than 14 years, Ijeoma Onyeator of Channels TV mentioned that:

a lot of things go on especially in the election situation room putting the female journalists in precarious situations due to the fact that these rooms can be any room with poor lighting and no attempt by government or INEC to improve and put in place extra security. Most female reporters covering elections just find their own way since there are no place to relax and when results are about to be collated, they find themselves in a very tight cramped crowded room full of men making it unattractive to many. Hence, many female journalists have become political analysts”, she recounted (African Women in Media, 2018)

ICFJ and UNESCO confirmed that politics and election reports are the second story theme most likely to attract harassment and abuse of women journalists after gender issues (UNESCO, 2020). Given the significant role of women journalists in election reporting and the challenges they face, this study examines the types of online and offline threats confronted by female journalists covering elections, their safety concerns, and how these concerns affect their election coverage. The study also investigates the level of adoption of safety measures by female journalists and assesses the support they receive from their workplaces, government, and the Nigerian Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ). Through this research, we hope to advocate for gender equity, foster a safe reporting environment, and sustain the invaluable voice of women in election coverage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical framework

The spiral of silence theory and the feminist theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. The spiral of silence theory is a political science and mass communication theory which states that an individual's perception of the distribution of public opinion influences that individual's willingness to express their own political opinions. It was propounded by a German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann based on the assumptions that:

Human beings usually fear isolation; people constantly observe the climate of opinion to determine which opinions and what behavior are suitable for public display; people refrain from publicly expressing their opinions if they feel that their opinion is losing ground; while more and more followers of the losing opinion fall silent, their cause become less and less visible in public resulting in a spiraling process which has the power to marginalize an entire opinion camp (Roessing, 2014:2-3).

According to Pillay (2016), Noelle-Neumann's discovery in an election research conducted during the 1965 German federal election campaign gave birth to the spiral of silence theory. The theory suggest that most people have a natural and mostly unconscious – fear of isolation that prompts them to constantly monitor the behavior of others for signs of approval or disapproval. In applying the spiral of silence to mass communication studies such as this,

‘threats’ of isolation could come in form of criticism, scorn, laughter, or other signs of disapproval could lead to a spiraling process of silence due to fear of being alone especially when the issue is controversial with a strong moral component such as the debate on whether women should be given equal reporting rights with men when it comes to reporting dangerous beats such as politics or elections.

The feminist theory on the other hand began with the works of Mary Wollstonecraft between 1759 and 1797. Described as one of the first feminist writers in the liberal tradition, the theorists argue that women should enjoy the same political and economic rights as men, including rights to speech, religion, bodily autonomy and political expression. Also known as feminism, feminist theory is the belief in full economic, political and social equality of the sexes. Feminism theory does not discriminate against any gender as it advocates equality for both men and women using different approaches including liberal feminism, socialist feminism and radical feminism. Although there are differences in opinion among different feminists including male and females, most feminists agree on five basic principles and these are increasing equality, expanding human choice, eliminating gender stratification, ending sexual violence and promoting sexual freedom. (What is Feminist Theory? - Definition & Overview, 2015) Most feminists advocate for the elimination of those laws, policies and practices that subordinated women while also discouraging hostile and intimidating environments including the work place (Zeigler, 2009). Feminists have always confronted the devaluation of women’s contribution to civic and cultural life arguing that if the barriers preventing women from having the same opportunities as men were removed, women will accomplish as much as men (Encyclopedia.com, n.d). In communication and media studies, power imbalances of gender are understood as intersecting with power relations of class, race, sexuality and other categories including religion and ethnicity. Many scholarly works relating to feminism in communication studies have largely focused on three major dimensions including gendered content and dominant ideologies in communicative texts; objectification and male gaze as well as third wave and post-feminism focused on development of mainstream media culture beyond the incremental inclusion (or rejection) of feminist ideas. While there are three different forms of feminism namely liberal, social and radical feminism, this study finds application in the liberal stand point which posits that gender inequalities are rooted in the attitudes of our social and cultural institutions, hence individuals should be free to develop their own talents and pursue their own interests.

The silent voice of female journalists

Although the early Nigerian media were political as they served as watchdogs to the colonial administration sensitizing the people to oppose the imperialists’ government while advocating for self-governance, women were also not key players at this critical point in the development of Nigerian politics. Women were restricted by social and gender norms in colonial Nigeria when it comes to practicing nationalist and agitational journalism. It was regarded as too dangerous and daring for women who were seen as weak, needed protection and should be tending the home (Ibrahim, Abba-Aji, Adamu and Vi, 2020). Sanusi and Adelabu (2015) recounted that the first breakthrough women had in the practice of journalism was with feature

writing when the *Nigerian Daily Times* was established. More women came into journalism in the 1950s although they were restricted to only reporting women and domestic issues. Doyin Abiola is however noted for her pioneering role in bringing to the forefront different issues on the women's pages. Other notable names such as Ronke Ajayi who edited the *Nigerian Daily Mail* established in 1931 came into journalism amidst jesting as her appointment was believed to be as a result of her being a friend to the publisher – H. Antus Williams who also perceived her role as a joke. In the long run, writing features, women content and gossip pages became the inroad into journalism practice for women (Jamil, Coban, Ataman & Appiah-Adjei, 2020). Globally, there have been concerns over the fact that when it comes to the coverage of elections, the voices of female journalists are almost silent. Stakeholders have expressed concerns that such “misogynistic attacks can create a chilling effect that silences their voices online” (Munoz, 2017) and offline leading to the denial of freedom of expression which will eventually hamper the freedom of the press. Apart from the fact that journalism as a profession is male-dominated, it is also obvious that election is deemed a serious and sensitive issue which women may not be able to handle. On July 21, 2019, Thomsen of News @ North-eastern noted that even though there is an increase in the number of women in American politics, female reporters on the 2020 America campaign beat are in the vast minority which raises a serious concern on how the story will be told. This is the reality even though there were six women running for president after the narrow defeat of Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election. Heckman, a female assistant professor at North-eastern described the situation as frustrating simply because “there has been a persistent gender gap in journalism for decades” and it appears that the coverage of the then election was not different despite that in the history of America that was the first time there will be as many as six women running for the race. At the end, these women faced serious challenge with the fact that most of their stories were largely told by white men (News@Northeastern, 2019).

Larrison Campbell was denied a request by Robert Foster's campaign simply because the republican candidate for Mississippi governorship election wants to avoid being accused of having an extramarital affair when she is seen in his company. The only condition on which she will be allowed to be a part of the 15-hour campaign trip is that she comes with a male colleague. Foster remains adamant in spite of all efforts made by Campbell and her editor to make him see this request as sexist and a waste of newsroom resources (*The Guardian*, 2019)

In Nigeria, the experience of female journalists especially those reporting election is not far from what is obtainable globally as one of the challenges seem to be gender discrepancy. Desmond and Danielwicz (2010) cited in Ademuyiwa (2015) lamented that female reporters focus more on human interest and health stories while their male counterparts report on politics. The year 2019 and 2023 witnessed elections at the national, state and local government levels in Nigeria and as usual, not many women were opportune to report on election issues. The study targets a few of them, who have had an opportunity in time past or recently.

Ibrahim, Abba-Aji, Adamu and Vi (2020), examined the safety of women journalists in Nigerian news media: Exposing the hushed gender-based discriminations. Using a qualitative survey approach, the interview approach specifically, 25 women journalists, 10 men who are

broadcast journalists and management staff of broadcast media houses were purposively selected in addition to two human resource management staff (a man and a woman) were interviewed over a period of two weeks in media organizations located in Yobe, Jigawa, Gombe and Borno in order to understand their experiences. The study revealed that Nigerian women journalists experience different types of gendered unsafety including discrimination in newsgathering and production, as well as sexual harassment.

Problems faced by female journalists' reporting elections in Nigeria

Njoku, Dike and Vincent (2018) surveyed journalism practice and gender constraints among female journalists in Port-Harcourt with the objective of finding out the challenges they face in view of their proportion when compared to their male counterparts based on appointment, promotion, posting and progression. Using the mixed methods approach, the study established that there are gender issues affecting female practice of journalism in Port Harcourt which hampers the growth of the profession. Culture and the attitude of males towards women practicing this profession were largely the cause of this problem which seems unresolved despite all efforts that have been made. The authors recommended more sensitization, monitoring and sanctioning as ways of curbing this problem.

In examining public perception of female journalists in North-East Nigeria, Jubril and Abubakar (2018) found that the public have positive perception of female journalists and also agree that females have roles to play in journalism profession. Interestingly, the study concluded that their opinion was not influenced by any religious or cultural values.

A global report published in 2014 which sampled about 1000 women in the world on harassment and violence against female media workers revealed that about two-thirds of these women have experienced some form of intimidation, threats or abuse in respect to their job. They have suffered from name-calling to death threats with majority happening at the workplace perpetrated mostly by male bosses, supervisors and co-workers. Further, the study revealed that most of these incidents were not reported with most of the women suffering not just physically but psychologically. Lastly, on preparedness, prevention and protection, the study found a low percentage in terms of responses showing that the individual organizations take measures to protect them, prepare them for work-related violence, and provide training or resources for protection, amongst others (Barton and Storm in Munoz ed., 2014).

In a related report published in 2018 by the Troll-Busters.com and International Women's Media Foundation titled attacks and harassment: the impact on female journalists and their reporting, it was established that different actors are using physical and social media strategies against women journalists and media workers as a way of intimidating, sowing disinformation, discrediting the journalists and the news media and creating significant professional harm. The report reinforced the fact that women journalists work in a hostile environment directed to weaken freedom of expression worldwide so that the voices and stories of women can be silenced. This is because some of the respondents reported that they have had to abandon the pursuit of specific stories and even experience difficulties with their source as a result of threats or abuse. Some have even had to leave the profession.

The result of a preliminary analysis of the 2020 America's presidential Election Coverage Tracker conducted by *Storybench* showed that only 32.3% of the online stories were written by women in over a six-week long election coverage. Further, resonating the fact that the coverage of election changes when women are involved, a study of the 12 largest newspapers in the United States in 2015 revealed that "female reporters quote women 42 percent of the time in their stories, while male journalists quote women at a rate of 28 percent. Likewise, a study conducted by the Women's Media Center in 2018 revealed that 60 percent of online news were written by men with women writing only 26 percent of U.S. election stories (News@Northeastern, 2019).

In fostering a way out, many stakeholders have suggested different measures including Munoz (2017) who advocates for the creation of a holistic culture of safety embedded within all levels of news organization. In other words, it is not just enough to create awareness; it must be a concern among all and sundry. Beyond promoting good practices and sanctions, government especially need to demonstrate real commitment to journalist safety. Continuing, Munoz suggested increased training and access to resources for journalists such as digital security training, mental health training as well as access to emergency assistance. She advocates for an increased security protocol for journalists working in hostile environments or covering dangerous topics as the case may be when reporting elections in addition to the suggestion that media organisations should conduct risk assessments before dispatching journalists. Munoz concludes that:

journalism schools should include safety training, especially digital safety; educate their students to expect and demand safe environments from their employers; and include courses on international laws and human rights standards, as well as national laws and the cultural, ethnic, religious, historical and political relations of the states or regions in which they may be reporting (Munoz, 2017:para.15)

Emphasizing the need for a collaborative move in combating harassments of female journalists during an Internet Freedom Festival held in Valencia, Spain in 2016, some suggestions were put forward as tips on how newsrooms can help female journalists fight online harassment. Among others, media organizations are to create cyber-harassment hotline, create networks so that journalists do not feel alone and learn from each other, connect groups within countries and across borders to identify solutions as well as devote editorial resources to the coverage of these issues.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The explanatory sequential mixed method design was adopted in the study. This is because the study began with quantitative data collection and analysis and then follows up with qualitative data collection and analysis leading to interpretation. This helped to understand more in-depth the safety issues arising from elections coverage and assessment of support provided for female journalists reporting elections in Nigeria. The population for the study are female journalists in Lagos working in 9 media organisations within Lagos. The total number of female journalists in Lagos could not be obtained. The erstwhile president of the National Association of Women

Journalists, Asabe Baba Nahaya affirmed that the organization did not know the number of women journalists which necessitated the move to establish a database showing the membership directory and information on women (UNDP Nigeria, 2019). As such, the respondents for the qualitative and quantitative aspects were determined using the purposeful and purposive sampling techniques, specifically the snowball sampling which helped to reach female journalists who have reported election. At the end, 42 female journalists were drawn from owned media houses including Channels Television, TVC communications, *Acada extra* magazine, *Chief Detective* magazine, *The Nation*, *the Sun* and *Frontline News Online* all located in Lagos state, Nigeria. Quantitative data were gathered with the use of a structured questionnaire. Sectioned into five parts, the questionnaire items captured the demographical details of respondents, types of offline and offline threats female journalists are exposed to, safety concerns of female journalists covering elections, how these concerns affect coverage of elections and the level of adoption of safety measures by female journalists. The instrument was validated using a type of construct validity namely convergent validity based on the theoretical relevance of the study. Quantitative data were derived from a questionnaire tested for reliability with a pilot test which yielded a Cronbach Alpha score of 0.721. Results were presented in simple percentages and average mean score.

Qualitative data were drawn from the responses of two female journalists who are currently occupying management positions from two media organisations in Lagos namely *Frontline News Online* and *The Sun Newspaper* with an interview guide. The responses of the participants were targeted based on their wealth of experience as female journalists reporting elections for more than ten years. Their opinions were sought on their assessment of the support female journalists get from their workplace, government and NAWOJ. Five interview questions were posed to know the level of support females reporting elections get from government; their assessment of the support media organisations get from media organisations when reporting elections; their suggestions on what to be done to improve the support provided from the workplace; their assessment of how the support from the workplace can improve their professional development and their assessment of the role of NAWOJ in enhancing the support provided to females reporting elections. Interviews were conducted online and responses were reported using thematic analysis as the technique of data analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Details

Variables		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Name of organization	Acada Extra Magazine	1	2.5
	Channels Television	22	55.0
	Chief Detective Magazine	1	2.5
	The Nation	4	10.0
	TVC Communications	12	30.0
	Total	40	100
Type of Organization	Private	40	100
Average Years of Experience	7.81		

From Table 1, participants were mainly from private organizations, with average years of experience of almost 8 years. Majority of the respondents were from Channels Television (55%), followed by those from TVC Communications (30%) and *The Nation* (10%); while *Acada Extra Magazine* and *Chief Detective Magazine* had the least proportion of respondents.

Online and offline threats female journalists are exposed to

Appendices-1

Figure 1 Online and offline threats female journalists are exposed to

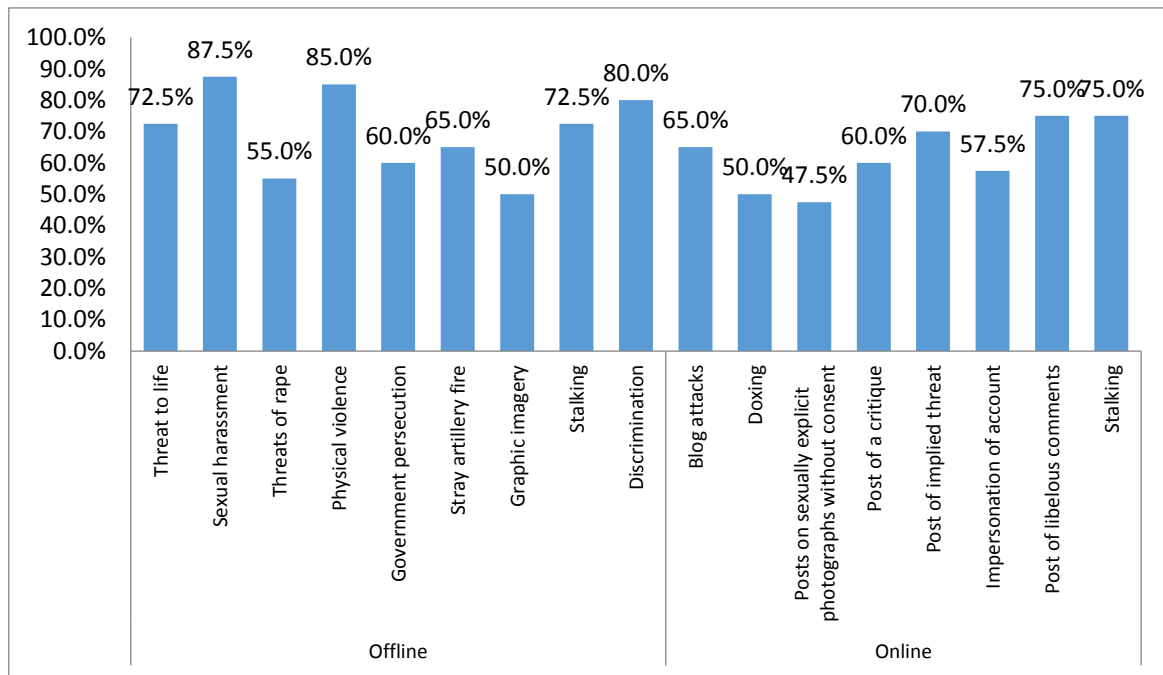


Fig 1: Types of safety concerns experienced by female journalists reporting election in Nigeria

In Fig. 1 (see Appendix 1) offline threats commonly experienced by female journalists reporting election include sexual harassment (87.5%), physical violence (85%), discrimination (80%), threats to life (72.5%) and stalking (72.5%). However, threats of rape (55%) and graphic imagery (50%) were also mentioned. Female journalists reporting election agreed that some online threats include post of libellous comments (75%), stalking (75%), implied threats (70%), blog attacks (65%) and critiques (60%); while the least online threats were doxing (50%) and sexually explicit photographs without consent (47.5%).

Safety Concerns of Female Journalists when Reporting Election

Table 2: Safety Concerns of Female Journalists when Reporting Election

Items	\bar{x}	SD
I am worried about stray bullets when covering elections	4.18	1.17
I feel scared when someone begins to stalk me over a report on elections	4.08	1.12
I am concerned when someone threatens me in regard to a report on elections	3.98	1.39
I am worried when I get sexually harassed for a report I wrote on election	3.95	1.43
Impersonation of account can be very disturbing	3.93	1.23
I am disturbed by government sanctions issued on election reports	3.80	1.31
Libellous comments arising from election reports worry me	3.73	1.13
I am afraid of rape threats when I report on elections	3.68	1.59
Gender discrimination is one of my concerns when covering elections	3.45	1.36
Blog attacks on election reports gets to me	3.10	1.55
Criticisms on election reports gets me unsettled	3.00	1.26
Maximum Scale Score = 55; Actual Scale Score= 40.88; Average Mean =	3.72	1.32

(Note: Items are on a five point scale, maximum score for each item is 5 least is 1) Decision Rule: if \bar{x} is ≤ 1.49 = No Extent; 1.5 to 2.49 = Very Low Extent; 2.5 to 3.49= Low Extent; 3.5 to 4.49= High Extent; 4.5 to 5 = Very High Extent

Table 2 shows that generally, safety was a concern to female journalists reporting election to a high extent ($\bar{x} = 3.72$). Specifically, female journalists reporting election were worried about stray bullets when covering elections ($\bar{x} = 4.18$), felt scared when someone began to stalk them over a report on elections ($\bar{x} = 4.08$), were concerned when someone threatens them in regard to a report on elections ($\bar{x} = 3.98$), worried when they got sexually harassed for a report they wrote on election ($\bar{x} = 3.95$). However, female journalists reporting election had the following safety concern to a low extent: gender discrimination when covering elections ($\bar{x} = 3.45$), blog attacks on election reports ($\bar{x} = 3.10$) and criticism on election reports ($\bar{x} = 3.00$).

How Safety Concerns of Female Journalists Affect coverage of elections

Table 3: How Safety Concerns of Female Journalists Affect coverage of elections

Items	\bar{x}	SD
Rape threat will prevent me from attending an election rally	3.43	1.196
Government sanctions issued on election reports will influence how I write my report	3.05	1.108
I will not attend a political event for the fear of being hit by a stray bullet	2.95	1.176
I will adjust an election story if my life is threatened	2.83	1.107
Criticisms on election reports will make me reconsider my view	2.70	0.966
Gender discrimination can make me agree with a wrong view	2.58	1.107
Libellous comments arising from election reports will affect my news judgment	2.53	0.847
Stalking will make me falsify information on election	2.48	0.847
I will bury a report on election if I get sexually harassed	2.45	0.986
Blog attacks on election will affect objectivity	2.38	0.979
Impersonation of account will make me compromise my stand	2.33	0.944
Maximum Scale Score = 55; Actual Scale Score= 29.71; Average Mean =	2.70	1.02

(Note: Items are on a five point scale, maximum score for each item is 5 least is 1)

Decision Rule: if \bar{x} is ≤ 1.49 = Undecided; 1.5 to 2.49 = Strongly Disagree; 2.5 to 3.49= Disagree; 3.5 to 4.49= Agree; 4.5 to 5 = Strongly Agree

Table 3 indicates that generally, female journalists disagreed that these safety concerns will affect reporting elections (\bar{x} = 2.70). They disagreed with all the items on the scale such as: rape threat will prevent them from attending an election rally (\bar{x} = 3.43), government sanctions issued on election reports will influence how they write their report (\bar{x} = 3.05), they will not attend a political event for the fear of being hit by a stray bullet (\bar{x} = 2.95) and impersonation of account will make them compromise their stand (\bar{x} = 2.33).

Female Journalists' Level of Awareness of Safety Measures

Table 4: Female Journalists' Level of Awareness of Safety Measures

Items	\bar{x}	SD
Female journalists can report to monitoring/security agencies	4.40	1.08
Female journalists can fight back with digital security	4.33	1.05
Surveillance self-defense is an effective way of responding to safety concerns	4.25	0.90
Security helplines are effective for coping with safety issues	3.85	1.27
Advocacy groups like Women's media center and International Women's Media Foundation can solve some of these safety concerns	3.60	1.45
Digital defenders are effective means of coping with threats	3.55	1.48
Maximum Scale Score = 30; Actual Scale Score= 23.98; Average Mean =	4.00	1.20

(Note: Items are on a five point scale, maximum score for each item is 5 least is 1) Decision Rule: if \bar{x} is ≤ 1.49 = Not Aware; 1.5 to 2.49 = Very Low; 2.5 to 3.49= Low; 3.5 to 4.49= High; 4.5 to 5 = Very High

Table 4 depicts that generally, female journalists had a high level of awareness of safety measures (\bar{x} = 4.00). They were highly aware that female journalists could report to monitoring/security agencies (\bar{x} = 4.40), female journalists could fight back with digital security (\bar{x} = 4.33), surveillance self-defense (\bar{x} = 4.25), security helplines (\bar{x} = 3.85), advocacy groups like women's media center and International Women's Media (\bar{x} = 3.60) and digital defenders (\bar{x} = 3.55).

Female Journalists' adoption of safety measures

Table 5: Female Journalists' adoption of safety measures

Items	\bar{x}	SD
I report to security agencies/monitoring units when I have safety concerns	3.90	1.46
I fight back when I have safety concerns online and offline	3.38	1.61
I use self-defense skills when faced with threats	3.28	1.62
I use digital defenders when I have safety concerns	2.98	1.58
I use security helplines when I have a safety concern	2.85	1.61
I belong to female journalist advocacy groups	2.35	1.58
Maximum Scale Score = 30; Actual Scale Score= 18.74; Average Mean =	3.12	1.58

(Note: Items are on a five point scale, maximum score for each item is 5 least is 1) Decision Rule: if \bar{x} is ≤ 1.49 = Not Adopted; 1.5 to 2.49 = Very Low; 2.5 to 3.49= Low; 3.5 to 4.49=

High; 4.5 to 5 = Very High

Table 5 shows that generally, female journalists had a low level of adoption of safety measures ($\bar{x} = 3.12$). Female journalists, however adopted reporting to security agencies/monitoring units when they had safety concerns ($\bar{x} = 3.90$) to a high level. Female journalists had a low adoption of the following: fighting back when they had safety concerns online and offline ($\bar{x} = 3.38$), use self-defense skills when faced with threats ($\bar{x} = 3.28$), use of digital defenders when they had safety concerns ($\bar{x} = 2.98$), use of security helplines when they had a safety concern ($\bar{x} = 2.85$) and that they belonged to female journalist advocacy groups ($\bar{x} = 2.35$).

Analysis of Interview responses

The interviews with two senior political reporters provided valuable insights into the support and challenges faced by female journalists reporting on elections in Nigeria. The analysis of their responses revealed the following key themes:

Government Support

It was evident that there are no special arrangements or support provided for female journalists by the government or the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) or any security agencies involved in the organisation and conduct of elections. One of the participants who has reported elections since 2011 revealed that Female journalists are treated similarly to their male counterparts by security agencies and media organizations, without any specific consideration for their gender.

Media Organizations' Support

The participants highlighted that media organizations do not offer special cover, insurance, or support to female journalists reporting on elections. Training on safety during elections is generally provided to all journalists, irrespective of gender, often organized by local or foreign NGOs and development partners. Some media organizations, however, provide logistics to ensure political reporters have the necessary resources for effective election coverage.

Improving Support in the Workplace when reporting elections

Female journalists expressed the need for improved support from media organizations when reporting on elections. They called for the provision of security personnel to accompany them during elections, improve remuneration as journalists are poorly paid, also, majority of the media organisations fail to remit pension and other statutory deductions such as the National Health Insurance or the NSITF which cover workers when they suffer injury or lose their lives while at work. Participants also emphasized the need to discourage the practice of assigning women to less lucrative beats and advocated for women to be given equal opportunities to serve as desk heads and title editors. Women who do not have filial or marital connections with men make it into executive positions or as CEOs of media houses. This is against the principle of equity and justice on which journalism as a profession rests. More serious is the fact that women's leadership capability are denied, hence there is no adequate presentation of their needs whether as practicing journalists or as members of the society.

Benefits of Workplace Support

Female journalists highlighted the significance of workplace support in empowering them to overcome socio-economic and socio-political challenges prevalent in Nigeria's patriarchal society. They stressed the importance of maternity allowance and scholarship awards to enhance their academic qualifications. Adequate remuneration, a non-toxic work environment, and regular on-the-job training were deemed essential for creating a conducive work environment that fosters career development and productivity.

Role of Nigeria Association of Women Journalists (NAWOJ)

NAWOJ plays a crucial role in providing on-job training for female journalists, particularly during election coverage. However, funding limitations present a significant challenge to its effectiveness. Unlike the Nigerian Union of Journalists, NAWOJ's dues are voluntary, leading to financial struggles. Improved funding for NAWOJ would enhance its capacity to assist its members effectively during election reporting.

In conclusion, the interviews shed light on the need for comprehensive support systems for female journalists reporting on elections in Nigeria. To address safety concerns and promote gender equality within the profession, media organizations should provide adequate security measures, better remuneration, and equal opportunities for career advancement. Additionally, enhanced funding for NAWOJ would strengthen its ability to support female journalists and foster an environment where they can thrive in their reporting roles.

DISCUSSIONS

Online and offline threats faced by female journalists

The study's findings align with previous research, indicating that sexual harassment is a prevalent offline threat, a problem not limited to Nigeria but also observed in other countries like Afghanistan, Colombia, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Nepal, Pakistan, Somalia, and the Philippines (IMS, 2019). The study confirmed that while attacks occur offline, it also occur online with social media users in Afghanistan questioning the integrity and respectability of women. The report of IPC and MFWA (2023) on the state of safety of female journalists in Nigeria reaffirms this, highlighting that female journalists encounter patronizing attitudes, condescension, and subtle threats from the public and superiors offline. Also, the study of ICFJ-UNESCO corroborates these findings, revealing that online violence is also a significant concern for female journalists, with 73% of women journalists across 113 countries experiencing such abuse, one in five women have been attacked or abused offline while the story theme most often identified in association with increased attacks was gender (47%), followed by politics and elections (44%), and human rights and social policy (31%) (ICFJ, 2020). A report by Troll-Busters.com and International Women's Media Foundation revealed that different actors are using physical and social media strategies against women journalists and media workers as a way of intimidating, sowing disinformation, discrediting the journalists and the news media and creating significant professional harm. The report reinforced the fact that women journalists work in a hostile environment directed to weaken freedom of expression

worldwide so that the voices and stories of women can be silenced. This is because some of the respondents reported that they have had to abandon the pursuit of specific stories and even experience difficulties with their source as a result of threats or abuse. Some have even had to leave the profession.

Safety Concerns of Female Journalists when Reporting Election

The global report published in 2014 on harassment and violence against female media workers demonstrates that a significant number of women have faced intimidation, threats, and abuse related to their job, including death threats, often perpetrated by male bosses, supervisors, and co-workers.

How Safety Concerns of Female Journalists Affects coverage of elections

Although the female journalists in the current study asserted that safety concerns would not affect their election reporting, evidence from other studies, such as the one conducted by IPC and MFWA (2023), suggests that approximately 40% of women journalists avoid certain stories to evade online harassment. The study by the Centre for the Protection of Afghan Women Journalists (CPWAJ) supports this, reporting that nearly 100 women journalists have abandoned their careers due to safety concerns, leading to limited representation of women in media content and reduced access to female sources

Female Journalists' Level of Awareness of Safety Measures

The high level of awareness of safety measures among female journalists in this study may be attributed to technological advancements and improved access to information through various campaigns such as 'leave no sister behind' and the '#MeToo movement,' among others. Initiatives like 'Dominemos las tecnologías,' sponsored by the Association of Progressive Communication (APC), provide women with training in communication and information technology, digital policies, and safety measures through women's support organizations (Ogundare, 2018, IMS, 2019).

Adoption of safety measure by female journalists

Despite the high awareness, the adoption of coping strategies appears to be low among female journalists in this study. This may be due to perceived lack of support and the fear of having to fight alone, compounded by gender-related issues in the practice of journalism by women (Njoku, Dike, and Vincent, 2018). Barton and Storm in Munoz ed., (2014) also found that organizations' response to women's safety concerns is generally inadequate. Moreover, Ibrahim, Abba-Aji, Adamu, and Vi's study (2019) on safety of women journalists in Nigerian news media revealed that female journalists often resort to risky coping strategies, possibly because many media organizations lack policies and frameworks to address such issues.

Female journalists' assessment of support received from stakeholders during election coverage in Nigeria

Interview responses highlight the lack of sufficient support from media organizations when reporting on elections. Although on-the-job training is provided, female journalists expressed

the need for better security, improved pay, and insurance coverage against hazards. The IPC and MFWA (2023) study echoes these sentiments, stating that poor welfare, lack of institutional support, and job insecurity are significant challenges faced by female journalists in the profession. Moreover, the study revealed that media organizations lack safety procedures for journalists, leading to issues like sexual harassment, threats, hateful feedback, and bullying during election coverage (IPC and MFWA, 2023). A related study by Olorunda (2023) confirms that the safety of journalists during elections in Nigeria is moderate, with no significant difference in how both genders perceive safety concerns.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed among other things that female journalist just like their male counterparts have some safety concerns based on their experience online and offline. These female journalists however disagreed that these safety concerns will affect their coverage of election. Whereas they have a high level of awareness of safety measures, there is a low level of adoption of these measures. These implies that female journalists may not be fully safety conscious when covering elections and these may further lead to more harm to the gender in this profession. This will further put them at a disadvantage when it comes to providing a pluralized view essential for a healthy democratic society such as Nigeria. Low level of adoption of safety measures simply implies that the voices of women can be easily drowned when safety is not guaranteed. It is therefore important to improve sensitization among female journalists to understand the importance of the available safety measures that can help protect them from harms and live to tell their stories. Government should support media organizations to ensure that the safety of women is of utmost importance to leadership.

Also, adequate training on safety measures during election reporting by female journalists should be included in the curriculum of schools of communication and the importance of this should be well emphasised. Female journalists suffering from various kinds of abuse or harassments should be encouraged to report and not silenced by the members of the society such as citizens, regulatory authorities and even the workplace.

Of equal importance is what Munoz had pointed out that to ensure the best implementation of journalist safety measures, there is a need for all stakeholders involved to collaborate and share results and best industry practices. In addition to resolving the issue of sparse data, female journalists need to participate in studies aimed at providing data to support their cause. This is a problem this present study encountered and that is why it recorded low number of responses. In addition, there is a dearth of studies on the safety concerns of female journalists during elections rather there are more reports on trainings done for journalists on how to protect themselves during elections.

Declaration of interest statement

The authors declare that there are no competing interests to declare.

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