

# IAWRT

International Association of Women in Radio and Television

---

## WHAT IF...?

### SAFETY HANDBOOK FOR WOMEN JOURNALISTS

---



**Practical advice based on personal experience**

**Published by the International Association of Women in Radio and  
Television (IAWRT)**

**© International Association of Women in Radio and Television 2017**

**Illustrations © Doaa Eladl, used with permission**

**Abeer Saady asserts her right to be known as the author of this work.**

**Copyediting by Nonee Walsh**



**NORSK JOURNALISTLAG**  
NORWEGIAN UNION OF JOURNALISTS



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

With the support of the  
Communication and  
Information Sector



International Association of Women in Radio & Television  
[www.iawrt.org](http://www.iawrt.org)

# Contents

Introduction .....	1
Preface: The Third Gender!.....	4
1. Risk Assessment .....	10
The four stages of a safety plan:.....	10
Receiving threats .....	12
2. Profile Management, and Gender Based Preparation: .....	14
Working undercover .....	18
Developing situational awareness skills .....	20
3. Gender Based Violence and Harassment.....	24
Outside and inside the Office .....	26
Harassment by sources .....	32
Online harassment:.....	33
Rape as a weapon .....	37
4. Travel Safety.....	40
The “Grab Bag” .....	41
Mobility options.....	42
Hotels in conflict zones: .....	45
Countering surveillance .....	47
Checkpoints.....	47
5. Digital & Equipment Safety.....	50
6. Crowd Management .....	53

7. Wars and Conflicts... a Woman's Land! .....	58
Dealing with armed groups.....	58
Caught in crossfire .....	61
8. Kidnapping and Detention .....	64
How to avoid being kidnapped.....	65
Survival during kidnapping.....	66
Arrested during coverage .....	68
9. Your Stories and Psychosocial Safety.....	70
Dealing with survivors.....	70
Covering violence against women and girls (VAWG) .....	72
Self-care and dealing with trauma.....	75
10. Ethical Safety Decisions .....	78
To report or not?.....	78
Interview terrorists or not? .....	79
Report or help? .....	80
11. Legal Safety .....	82
What can managers do? .....	83
In Conclusion.....	86
Useful Links .....	88
Acronyms .....	89

---

## *Introduction*

---

The International Association of Women in Radio and Television feels strongly that there is a need for a concrete and practical handbook, with advice and recommendations on security and safety, which is specially addressed to women journalists working in war and conflict.

In recent years, we have given safety training to hundreds of women during IAWRT regular conferences to empower female media workers around the world. Participants raised the need for such a handbook covering both the general targeting of journalists and attacks specifically directed at women journalists.

The IAWRT international board's decision to draft this manual coincided with the kidnapping of freelance Iraqi journalist, Afrah Shawky, who worked for local and international Arabic language outlets. She was kidnapped from her home in Baghdad in December 2016 and held for ten days.

This attack was one of many targeting women journalists across the world. Attacks vary between brutal incidents in conflict zones, such as the one which took the life of Marie Colvin in 2012 while she was covering the siege of Homs in Syria for a British newspaper, to electronic harassment, to legal challenges targeting female journalists.

Irina Bokova, the Director-general of UNESCO, has described violence against female journalists as a "double attack" as they are targeted as women and as professional journalists. In the light of this, UN Security Council resolution 2222 passed on 27 May 2015 drew attention to "the specific risks faced by women journalists, media professionals and

associated personnel in conduct of their work” and called for an understanding of gender dimensions when considering measures to ensure journalists’ safety.<sup>1</sup>

IAWRT has been inspired and informed by guides from UNESCO<sup>2</sup> and Reporters Without Borders (RSF)<sup>3</sup>. The study, *Violence and Harassment against Women in the News Media: A Global Picture*, conducted by The International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMF) and The International News Safety Institute (INSI), was also helpful<sup>4</sup>.

The author of our handbook is **Abeer Saady**, a journalist with 27 years of experience in covering news and training in conflict zones. She is a current IAWRT international board member. Abeer has trained journalists on safety in hostile environments and on conflict sensitive reporting across the world. Here she combines her own experiences as a female war correspondent with the experiences related by women she has trained.

---

<sup>1</sup> Security Council adopts resolution 2222

<https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc11908.doc.htm>

<sup>2</sup> UNESCO Chapters on gender:

[http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/protecting\\_journalism\\_sources\\_in\\_digital\\_age.pdf](http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/protecting_journalism_sources_in_digital_age.pdf) <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/image/s/0023/002323/232358e.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Women Journalists Commitment and Challenges

<https://rsf.org/en/news/women-journalists-commitment-and-challenges>

<sup>4</sup> 2013, IWMF with (INSI) launched the first global survey of security risks for women journalists. <http://www.iwmf.org/our-research/journalist-safety/> *Violence and Harassment against Women in News Media: A Global Picture*, IWMF & INSI, 2014

<http://www.iwmf.org/our-research/journalist-safety/violence-and-harassment-against-women-in-the-news-media-a-global-picture/>

This is the first edition of our handbook. We would like to thank both the Norwegian Union of Journalists [Norsk Journalistlag] (NJ) and UNESCO for supporting it. We have plans for translations to other languages, and the development of an app, easy accessible from a mobile phone. We sincerely hope that *What if? .... Safety Handbook for Women Journalists* will be helpful for its readers – may they be female or male!

*Gunilla Ivarsson* President, International Association of Women in Radio and Television

---

*Preface: The Third Gender!*

---

“We have to use the fact that we are women,” a Greek journalist told me, after rebels entered the Libyan capital, Tripoli in August 2011. “We had finished our coverage and were eager to rest. The two main hotels were completely full of male reporters working for rich media organizations. We, as freelancers and regional reporters, had to find a place to stay. Our only option was a hotel controlled by the fighters. My colleague argued that the fighters’ Arab culture of hospitality, would prompt them to agree. Later, they allowed us to stay, not just because of her tears, but because I told them that our mission as war reporters was to tell two-sided stories, which meant we would tell their side too. One of the fighters raised cultural and religious considerations related to gender, but another said ‘Don’t look at them as women. They are journalists. We need them.’”

This valid argument reminded me of the famous quote of the BBC’s Chief International Correspondent, Lyse Doucette who filed excellent stories from Afghanistan and the Middle East. “In many conflict places I’ve worked in, western woman journalists have been regarded almost as a third gender. They are not treated as local women”. She said that to Hannah Storm for her book, *No Woman’s Land: On the Frontline with Female Reporters*, co-written with Helena Williams<sup>5</sup>.

In the 2017 IAWRT ‘women making news’ documentary, *Velvet Revolution*<sup>6</sup>, Lyse Doucette told of her experience<sup>6</sup> of being a female

---

<sup>5</sup> Hannah Storm and Helena Williams (eds.) *No Woman’s Land: On the Frontline with Female Reporters* (2012). International News Safety Institute (March 8, 2012)

<sup>6</sup> IAWRT documentary, *Velvet Revolution*

<http://www.iawrt.org/projects/2017/velvet-revolution>

reporter, which was so difficult to understand within the cultural context of Afghanistan that she was treated virtually as a man. Like her Greek colleague, she noted that they wanted the BBC's coverage. However, not all women journalists are treated as a 'third gender' and of those that are, it is not always for the duration of the assignment.

In this handbook, we consider the different categories of media women: there are international women journalists who operate in countries with cultures that differ from their own, regional journalists who travel to a neighbouring country, and local journalists and citizen journalists whose treatment reflects the gender norms of their own society. This latter category suffers the most because conflicts and wars happen in their home towns, involving people they might know. We address journalists who work in media houses and freelancers – and the vastly different financial and support resources available to journalists in these different categories.

Regarding safety, some women journalists believe their experience isn't different to that of their male colleagues. They argue that serious dangers, such as being kidnapped or shot are not gender specific. However, others believe that the fact of their gender makes them different and causes people to relate to them differently. The dilemma of gender in conflict reporting has been discussed extensively. An important publication, *Gendering War and Peace Reporting*<sup>7</sup>, discusses this argument. The book offers analytic approaches to understanding how traditional war journalism is gendered.

One important question is whether the increased presence of women in the frontline might be changing war storylines. The answer is that

---

<sup>7</sup> Berit von der Lippe and Rune Ottosen (eds.) *Gendering War and Peace Reporting: Some Insights - Some Missing Links*, International Clearinghouse on Children Nordicom, 2016

there are now a huge number of written and visual stories told by women journalists and these are important stories that were not always being told before.

Nour Kelzy, a Syrian award-winning photojournalist, was seriously injured and was on her way back after receiving treatment in Aleppo, 2013. She got many photos that her male colleagues couldn't get. One resulted in a photo story covering the return of an old woman from Turkey to Syria, carrying her grandson's dead body. The grandmother allowed Nour to do the story because she trusted her as a woman. Her photos of the grandmother giving the baby's dead body to the sad parents told the story better than many other reports on the losses that local families face.

Women can also see what male colleagues do not. Take Layal Abou Rahal Khalifa, a young Lebanese journalist who in 2017 was writing unique stories from the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, where residents of the city were fleeing areas controlled by the Jihadi organization Islamic State (ISIS). One such story was about mothers who had managed to escape, being unable to breastfeed their babies in refugee camps, because they were starving. Sometimes it takes a woman's eye to see the reality of war and displacement.

Some may not agree with my thoughts, but by the end of the book *No Woman's Land* you realize that women journalists have already raised their flag over the frontline. This has been at the cost of many sacrifices and the blood of women journalists, and it is crucial to make it as safe as possible for them to get there, and do this important work.

"As a female, you have to prove yourself to earn this opportunity." This was the advice I received after getting my first contract in Egypt, 25 years ago. Ironically enough, it came from a woman. She said that my career would be at stake if I formed a relationship or considered

marriage and children - advice which violated my personal life - something she wouldn't do to a male colleague.

Women journalists wage a war on two fronts: the war to survive, and the war against the system. They are under pressure to prove themselves, and as a consequence, they may subject themselves to greater danger. A Sudanese journalist told me she visited a conflict zone despite being at a high-risk stage of her pregnancy, to prove to her boss that she deserved the job. She had a miscarriage. For this reason, one chapter of the handbook is directed at managers.

Today, my first advice to every female journalist starting her career would be "You don't have to prove anything to anyone. Never endanger yourself physically or mentally, to prove anything to anyone."

Unfortunately, I realized that after five personal injuries, losing colleagues, and suffering trauma. I now include these experiences in my training on safety and hostile environments for female journalists around the world.

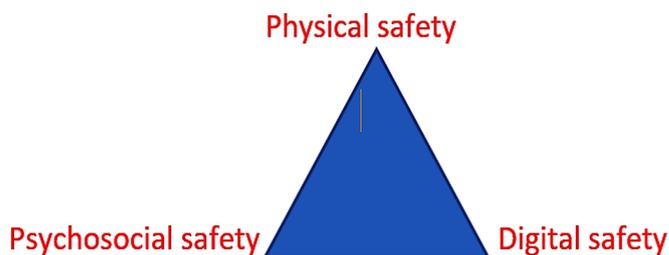
"We always have to ask ourselves whether the level of risk is worth the story. What is bravery, and what is bravado?" said Marie Colvin, the veteran war journalist who was killed in Syria, in 2012.

Five female journalists were also killed last year (2016), including 32-year-old Anabel Flores Salazar, a crime reporter for the Mexican newspaper El Sol de Orizaba, who was kidnapped on February 8. Her body was discovered the following day on a roadside, with her hands tied and her head covered in a plastic bag. I believe the message of killing and hurting women journalists is to demonize the presence of women in wars and military or civil conflict.

Researcher Heba Khatoon who works now in a *UN Women* regional office, says that the 2011 sexual assault of the CNN correspondent Lara Logan at the hands of a mob in Egypt's Tahrir Square unveiled a serious threat facing female journalists and activists who cover crowded events. However, the attack on Lara was actually one of many such targeted attacks on female journalists during the Egyptian uprising. This was deliberately designed to send a message to all women - particularly strong local women - to stay home.

We cannot undo our lives, but can ensure others don't repeat our bad practices or choices. This handbook collates the experiences, not only of my years of conflict and war reporting, but also (with permission) the experiences of other brave female journalists who spoke of their experiences during my training courses.

The advice is structured around what I call the safety pyramid. Keep this in mind as you prepare for and carry out your assignments to be as safe as possible. The holistic approach to safety was highlighted by organizations such as the not-for profit foundation, the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX)<sup>8</sup>. Physical, digital, and psychosocial safety are connected. We will concentrate on physical safety in this handbook; however, we will relate that to digital, and psychosocial safety.



---

<sup>8</sup> IREX SAFE – Securing Access to Free expression

<https://www.irex.org/project/safe-securing-access-free-expression>

In this handbook, we are not reinventing the wheel, but gathering collective experience and knowledge together. We are being selective, concentrating more on situations where women journalists face situations because of their gender in addition to the dangers which all journalists (male, female or other gendered) face.

We acknowledge the big effort which has already been exerted by journalist and women's organizations, to examine what female journalists face in dangerous situations, and to find ways to enable women reporters to be safe in hostile environments.

We hope this handbook builds on that and might be useful to you in your work. Please treat it as an open source resource and if you wish to share your personal experience or advice as women journalists, please feel free to contact me, [abeer.saady@gmail.com](mailto:abeer.saady@gmail.com) .

We may be able to incorporate your advice into future editions or translations of the handbook, or when we are able to turn it into a mobile application which expands to cover a range of specific situations which female reporters may face.

I would also like to thank my colleagues and friends, Egyptian cartoonist Doaa Eladl for her generous contributions and from Australia, Nonee Walsh and Bronwen Blight for editing and proofreading.

*Abeer Saady*, Trainer and IAWRT board member.

---

## 1. Risk Assessment

---

“You can’t control the danger, but you can manage your risk” states Shaymaa Adel, a Middle Eastern war reporter, stressing that risk assessment is a skill that all journalists should have. “The importance increases for me as a female journalist. I do risk assessment and planning whether I am covering a regional war or for local coverage.”

Risk assessment starts by identifying the risks, then estimating the level of risk and managing them through a security plan. The management ranges from dealing with risks to avoiding them completely and dropping the assignment. Once assigned to a story, start risk assessment and planning.

### The four stages of a safety plan:

- 1) Preparation (risk assessment and gender related preparation)
- 2) Travel to site (mobility preparations: transportation, times, and routes)
- 3) Implementation of mission (situation awareness)
- 4) Returning home

When planning an assignment, use the following six questions to form a security plan. For women journalists, think what gender considerations might apply in answering each question.

1. **What** are the possible threats and risks in this mission? (Threats can include civil unrest, attacks, weather...etc.)
2. **Where** are the possible threats?
3. **When** can danger occur? (Example: night can be more dangerous for women journalists)

4. **How** can danger turn into threat?
5. **Who** can be a threat (potential attackers)?
6. **What if?** Visualize yourself in possible dangerous situations – wounded, sexually harassed, kidnapped/abducted – think out responses (medical planning and nearest hospital, transport/extraction, communication plan).

Risk assessment is done according to your individual profile. You should be aware of the effect that your profile has on your safety. Your gender, appearance, race and digital profile as a person and a journalist, and your behaviour, collectively make up your profile. (See Profile Management Chapter 2) Larger media corporations tend to do risk assessment for assignments, but very few media houses train journalists in how to do risk assessment themselves. Moreover, there is an increasing number of freelance journalists with even less resourcing from employers who compete to be paid for their stories.

In this handbook, we are using the risk formula as explained in Front Line Defenders' Security Workbook'. FLD is an NGO supporting non-violent defenders of human rights, founded in the Republic of Ireland<sup>9</sup>. This can be presented in the following equation:

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Threats x Vulnerabilities}}{\text{Capacities}}$$

**Risk assessment:** The level of risk facing journalists increases in accordance with **threats** that have been received and the **vulnerability** to those threats. **Capacity** is any resource, including abilities and contacts, which improves security.

---

<sup>9</sup> Front Line Defenders: The Holistic Security Manual <https://holistic-security.tacticaltech.org/>

Example: when Egyptian reporter, Sahar Ramadan, goes to cover demonstrations in an area where females have been harassed, she realizes that the threat can increase because she is a female journalist. Her capacities are: managing her profile, wearing suitable clothes, communicating with her office, and having a colleague with her. She usually estimates risk according to this equation. When the vulnerabilities decrease, thanks to the capacities and good preparation, she takes the calculated risk and covers the story.

When Mallika Bhattarai, an IAWRT member in Nepal, was covering the earthquake in 2015, she took into consideration the difficulties of travel among so much damage and the threat of more earthquakes or tremors. She increased her capacities by moving with the civil guard troops and communicating with her family most of the time. She reduced her vulnerability to building collapse by only approaching low buildings. An excellent Risk Assessment template is available from the Rory Peck Trust website.<sup>10</sup>

## Receiving threats

Risk refers to possible events, however uncertain, that may result in harm, while threat is the declaration of an intention to harm.

'N' is a female Libyan journalist who had to leave her family and life in Tripoli after her best friend and colleague was killed in 2015. "We made it clear in our reports that a civil state shouldn't be controlled by militias. This was responded to by militia supporters defaming the female journalists and bloggers who had critical views. We hadn't taken the threats we received seriously until we were shocked by the news that [human rights activist] Intisar Al Hasairy and her aunt were found dead in their car. Attackers sent Intisar false information about a

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://rorypecktrust.org/resources/safety-and-security/risk-assessment>

needy family. The bodies were found in the boot of a car. Our online accounts were later hacked. I was not the only female reporter or blogger to leave the country,” ‘N’ told me during a training session held in Tunis.

Neglecting threats was also not the right decision for a Tunisian blogger and citizen journalist, ‘P’. She documented demonstrations opposing radical Jihadi groups in Tunis. Police warned her after troops discovered her name among others on an assassination list. She was assigned police protection which restricted her activities as a reporter. However, this plan is still the only valid one, according to the risk assessment.

Many journalists receive threats directly or indirectly. Female journalists who have attended our workshops and training revealed many threats, particularly online. On some occasions, threats turn into reality.

### **Assessing threats**

- 1) Establish the **facts** surrounding the threat.
- 2) Find out whether there is a **pattern**.
- 3) Find out the **objective** of the threat.
- 4) **Source** - who is making the threat?
- 5) Will the threat be put into **action**?

‘N’ explained her risk assessment. She assessed the threats by listing them by method of delivery (phone, letter, online, passed on through contacts or officials) and looking for any pattern and identifying objectives. After the kidnapping and assassination of her colleague, she realized that the threats against her could be put into action. She prepared her safety plan accordingly, and took the decision to leave her Libyan home.

---

## *2. Profile Management, and Gender Based Preparation*

---

Your own profile is relevant to the types of threat you might receive. Your exposure is a big issue that varies according to circumstances. As soon as you are exposed and identified, the countdown starts to the point in time when you cease to be safe.

Gender, religion, race, nationality, tribe, location, education, language (accent and dialect), attitude, profession, official documents, clothes, equipment, and political views can affect your profile. As a professional journalist, you have a profile according to how your audience receives your output. Be aware that your profile is composed of who you know you are and how others see you. Be aware that your profile changes as you change location. For example, even in your own country moving from an area of wealth to an area of low employment can significantly change your profile and risk levels. That is also the case in a foreign country - I may speak the language, even live there comfortably, but still find that in some areas I am in danger as a foreigner.

Risks will differ, depending on the location, the patterns of threats and attacks, the perpetrators, the degree of impunity, and the journalist's identity, profile, activities and location. Part of the profile management, especially for women journalists, is related to culture and health (discussed below in Health Considerations).

### **Gender related preparation**

I cannot stress enough that cultural awareness is a key to profile management. You must be aware of cultural norms and practices in the region from which you are reporting. However, sometimes you will only be able to think through a quick checklist.

- How are women looked upon and treated by the public?

- Are there any direct threats against journalists or females?

### **What to wear?**

There are clothing considerations that may help women journalists stay safe:

- Respect the local dress code and be on the conservative side.
- Many female journalists gave me some shopping advice on preparation. In any visit abroad, or to a remote area, buy suitable middle-class clothes that you can use if you are assigned to report there in the future.
- To avoid attracting attention, do not wear tight fitting or revealing clothes. Loose-fitting clothing may be more appropriate as well as shirts covering the hips and thighs. Generally, clothes that makes you shapeless are better in conservative countries or areas with a record of harassment of girls and women.
- Scarves can be used in Muslim countries as a hair cover, and are useful things. Pack a headscarf/chador just in case.
- If you are blond, covering your hair with a hat or local scarf will decrease your exposure.
- For Muslim veiled journalists, be aware of areas in western countries with a record of right wing extremist attacks or harassment. Islamophobia is rising in parallel to terrorist attacks.
- Flat, sturdy shoes that are easy to run in (with your loose-fitting clothing).
- Wearing a wedding ring can prevent unwelcome attention.
- Don't wear expensive jewellery. Generally, don't wear anything that increases your exposure to threats or theft.
- Take care before going out with wet hair. In some cultures, this can be misinterpreted as a sexual signal.
- Do not wear a ponytail or a necklace which can be easily grabbed. Wear a sturdy belt.
- Carry a personal attack alarm.
- Most flak jackets or bullet proof vests are made for men - physically larger than women and of course differently shaped –

wearing the wrong kind of armour can give women journalists back problems. Worse, some will avoid using flak jackets at all because they're too heavy.

### **Attitude preparation:**

- Always be alert. Beware of discussing details of your work with people you do not know. It may sometimes be better to pretend to work in an alternative profession, such as teaching.
- Your attitude rests on feeling a level of security: finding the right fixer, sources and local persons as drivers and translators is essential along with locating a safe place to stay.
- Your attitude to your fixer must be based on full trust. A failure to brief a local fixer - who is often a journalist - about your mission can endanger both of you. Example: a female photo journalist in an authoritarian Middle Eastern country came under police surveillance when an international reporter she was working for arranged public meetings with activists, without briefing her. He left with his story, she ended up having to flee her country or face arrest and a long jail sentence.
- Brief yourself on language and traditions, and be aware of cultural norms about dress.
- It is important to find out about local cultural attitudes to women. In some countries women journalists will need to remember that men will not shake hands with women. As well, a woman journalist in some countries may not be given the same respect as a male reporter.
- Be aware of how your contacts and sources might perceive you and avoid creating cultural misconceptions.
- Some types of conversation or acts can be inappropriate in some conservative cultures. Example: visiting a single man or inviting a man to your room can be misunderstood by him or the others.
- Think about limiting or avoiding alcohol consumption in places where it is considered taboo for women to drink.

- Body language differs among cultures. Examples: eye contact sometimes can be considered flirting while in others it can reflect disrespect. I was advised by women journalists in South Africa, Uganda, and Sudan not to make eye contact with men. However, be aware of cultural differences within countries: in South Africa, for instance, in some tribes (nations), eye contact is disrespectful whereas in others, no eye contact is disrespectful.
- Control emotions which show in your body language. Example: I myself was injured by ISIS when they stopped our car in Syria in 2014 because of my angry body language: they noticed me reacting to a personal insult by raising my shoulders, even though I was wearing a black dress covering all my body. My profile management saved my life. (more details below)
- Prepare a cover story. If wearing a wedding ring, imply a husband and children to fend off unwanted attention or carry photos of male relatives, if you're alone and facing unwanted attention, use it – 'I am waiting for my husband/boyfriend or colleague to arrive'.
- Be prepared to consider taking a male colleague with you into potentially volatile situations.

### **Health considerations:**

- Before long missions, have a health check. If you have any issue, prepare by a visit to the relevant doctor, especially the dentist.
- Physical needs, such as visiting the toilet, are a safety consideration for female journalists. Some journalists avoid drinking liquids during missions because of this, but that is a risk to health. Example: a British female journalist used to be subjected to mean jokes from her male colleagues whenever she needed to find somewhere private to urinate. "Not only was it dangerous to go by yourself in the dark, it was also a humiliating experience," she said. Unlike men, most women prefer at least a bush, a tree, a wall or a ditch to relieve themselves in private.
- No-one should be ashamed of asking for or giving help in finding a convenient and safe way to meet that need. Example: Galina

Sidorne, needed to visit the toilet during an external coverage in Kabul. Concentrating on that need, she hadn't noticed her colleagues and local fixer moving away. She ended up alone. She survived the situation, but learnt to always stay alert. Her story is in Hannah Storm's book *No Women's Land*.

- Menstruation can be an awkward issue and sometimes involve breaching cultural taboos. Take supplies, women journalists can find it embarrassing to ask for feminine hygiene products in the field. Sometimes they are simply not available.
- Decide about risking your pregnancy and have a medical back up plan. It is not uncommon for pregnant women journalists to have miscarriages – and tell no-one.

### Working undercover

Good profile management and a good cover story are essential for all female reporters in conflict areas. However, a reporter who works undercover should always be alert to exposure, even after her story has been broadcast or posted.

When a Syrian journalist from Al Raqqa, which was controlled by ISIS in 2015, went undercover on a dangerous mission, she did 'profile management'. She wore clothes like those worn by women who live under ISIS control. Even when talking at the beginning of her report, she didn't reveal her identity. She used the name of 'Razan'.

When she resumed her normal life, things were going well until someone revealed her identity and the fact that she had lived in France as a refugee, thus putting her back in danger.

A British journalist from the BBC, working undercover in the UK on the documentary *ISIS women unveiled*, had her identity revealed during her undercover work, but when someone threatened to expose her she asked for police protection.

The same situation is faced by many journalists doing investigative reporting in hostile environments. We have heard about this from female journalists in Latin America reporting on the rampant crime and corruption associated with the drugs trade.

### **Tips for women journalists working undercover:**

- Reduce your exposure as much as possible. Be cautious and always alert; study the hostile environment very carefully; how do people, especially women, dress? What is the culture, and religion? What are the traditions like, especially in dealing with women?
- Be aware that a culture which silences women can protect you from challenges. Example: if you don't know the local language or dialect, you can simply be silent. In religiously conservative societies let the male fixer handle the conversation.
- Respect religion and culture. Some sources will take your respect for their culture into consideration, according to advice given by colleagues covering the Middle East and Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.
- Take care when choosing the fixer, the driver or the local person who will assist you.
- Anger and emotion management is crucial to controlling the body language aspect of your profile.
- Never access social media during missions. You may navigate, but never publish, especially not your location. Generally, never have Facebook and Twitter apps on your mobile phone.
- Be especially careful with photographs, Facebook and Twitter updates and geolocation facilities on phones and computers.
- Never create a cover story that is completely fictional. Use minor misinformation/ fictions, maybe about your job, the rest should be true.

- When you are safe, never expose those who helped you, that can endanger them and you. Have in mind that if you are covering armed groups who work internationally they can reach you anywhere.

## Developing Situational awareness skills

Safety depends on developing your situational awareness to avoid potential attacks. Examine the scene beforehand. Situational awareness varies depending on where you are working: outside or inside, during the day or night. Continually ask yourself ‘are there any people or events that seem out of the ordinary?’, and ‘who might present a threat?’

A journalist should pay close attention to her surroundings before starting work and ask herself questions such as ‘what are my exit routes?’ Example: On 2 February 2011, Hala Gorani, a CNN reporter, was standing between demonstrators who organized a sit in inside Tahrir square calling for the toppling of Egyptian Former President Mubarak and supporters of Mubarak outside the square. She wrongly assumed there would not be any confrontation. Mubarak supporters attacked the sit-in with camels and weapons in what was known as “The Camel Battle”. She had no plan and was taken by surprise. Local thugs tried to attack her and a male demonstrator helped her out.

However, be aware that some structures and environments away from the immediate threat, may themselves pose an additional threat or danger. A back street away from a demonstration or the home of an unknown person might not be a genuine refuge.

Where possible, a journalist should cultivate relationships with local women and follow their lead, locally or on foreign assignments. “If I am in a situation and there are no other women present, that’s usually a

good sign for me that I need to be extra vigilant about my safety,” said one U.S.-based journalist.

Think about how to hide, defend, or protect yourself, given that attacks may come from individuals, groups, or mobs, often without warning. This does not have to be complex action. For example, if a group of men are paying too much attention, or seem hostile, it is time to move, get yourself into a mixed sex group.

Additionally, “Trust your instincts – they are almost always right. The dodgy dirt road, the guy behind you in the street, the free Wi-Fi connection – if it feels like it’s not a good idea, it rarely is,” said one Southern Africa-based correspondent.

When a journalist becomes so involved in covering a story that she fails to take stock of her surroundings to mitigate potential threats, problems can start to escalate. Use all senses, be vigilant, and learn to spot the signs of danger before they materialize into an attack.

### How to make an emergency communication plan

“You are in danger when no one knows where you are. This rule saved my life,” says a Tunisian female photojournalist who was saved from an attack in a side street near a sit-in protest that she was covering. She contacted her colleague before following a person who promised to introduce her to the leader of the demonstration. Her colleagues realised she was missing, and arrived at the right time to save her and the equipment.

An emergency communication plan is necessary when working in conflict or hostile zones and is particularly important for safety in coverage of large crowds.

Here are some tips for your plan:

- Develop check-in protocols with someone you trust as a colleague, friend, or family member. When travelling, have an established time for checking in. A clear contingency plan should be ready for activation should you fail to make contact. If travelling alone, always tell someone where you are going, how you plan to get there and when you expect to be back. If you are meeting someone, leave a name and number for them with someone you trust.
- Journalists in hostile environments should work in teams as much as possible. Prior to beginning coverage, they should discuss with whom they will team up and where they will head for safety. Exit routes should always be planned.
- Drivers, fixers, and other team members should be vetted. Establishing passwords or security protocols is a good precaution when making initial contact with a driver or fixer, such as being picked up at the airport.
- Write down important contacts (in case phones or computers are stolen/damaged) and store them in multiple places, giving a copy to the contact person.
- However, female journalists should be extra careful of sharing contact details, plans and accommodation details with people you don't know very well.
- A journalist should consider carrying a basic phone that nobody would want to steal and have it pre-programmed with emergency numbers on speed dial.
- While social media may be useful in allowing friends to know your movements, ensure that any online profile does not compromise your safety or that of people around you.
- Never agree to meet a visitor whilst you are alone in your workplace. If this should ever happen, do not reveal that you are alone. Make a telephone call after the visitor has arrived, telling someone that you will get back to them at a certain time after your visitor, Mr X has left. This acts as both an information

call and a deterrent. You can also get someone to call you at specific times.

- Even in a large workplace, you may find yourself meeting callers in a quiet area. Always make sure that someone else knows where you are and who you are seeing. Meet first time visitors in a public place, such as reception, and tell someone where you going to talk to them. If you are unsure about a first-time caller, make sure you have a colleague with you.

---

### *3. Gender Based Violence and Harassment*

---

Gender based violence is one of the most common threats to women in general and female journalists everywhere. In March 2017, I asked a group of female Sudanese journalists to produce a list during a UNESCO training session. They made two lists: one of types of violence targeting women in society and the other of violence against female journalists.

According to them, violence against women includes: domestic violence, gender discrimination at home or work, verbal violence, physical violence, mobility restrictions, circumcision, early marriage, denial of educational or social rights, unfair traditions and culture, threats, verbal and physical harassers on public transport ... etc.

Violence against female journalists includes harassment on top of this: limitation of media jobs in general, reducing opportunities for women within media houses; media employers not taking women's privacy needs or women's multiple social responsibilities into consideration; harassment of female journalists by sources. Defamation of reporters was listed as another type of violence.

Similar lists were produced by female journalists in other training courses in Pakistan, Nigeria, Somalia, Iraq, India, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia.

Across the globe gender based harassment varies in scale, who the harassers are and the medium of harassment. But whenever we hold or attend discussions about threats facing female journalists, this topic is raised. Saying that it starts from online bullying ranging up to rape threats is misleading, because character assassination of journalists in many countries can lead to such a serious social backlash that it can lead to female journalists having mental breakdowns or self-

destructive impulses. Example: many trainees have told me they considered suicide after serious public attacks which defamed their personal morality.

Sexual harassment is always mentioned in our training as a threat. Sources and even work colleagues may be the harassers. Gender based violence in public spaces is not limited to countries with conflicts or traditional cultures, but is common in stable areas such as Europe and America.

### **What is sexual harassment?**

According to the Australian Human Rights commission, sexual harassment is unwelcome sexual conduct which makes a person feel offended, humiliated, and/or intimidated where that reaction is reasonable in the circumstances. It can involve:

- unwelcome touching, hugging, or kissing
- staring or leering
- suggestive comments or jokes
- sexually explicit pictures, screen savers or posters
- unwanted invitations to go out on dates or requests for sex
- intrusive questions about an employee's private life or body
- unnecessary familiarity, such as deliberately brushing up against someone
- insults or taunts of a sexual nature
- sexually explicit emails or SMS messages
- colleagues accessing sexually explicit internet sites
- behaviour which would also be an offence under the criminal law, such as physical assault, indecent exposure, sexual assault, stalking or obscene communications.

It is not sexual interaction, flirtation, attraction or friendship which is invited, mutual, consensual or reciprocated. Sexual harassment is a legally recognised form of sex discrimination and it is unlawful in the workplace in Australia and in many countries around the world.

## Outside and Inside the Office

“When we talk about safety for the media, we often think in terms of staying safe in war zones, during civil unrest and environmental disasters, but how often do we think of the office as a hostile environment?” said Hannah Storm, INSI Director and author of *No Women’s Land*.

According to the IWMF/ INSI global survey of violence and harassment of women in the news media, two-thirds of women journalists have experienced intimidation, threats, or abuse in relation to their work. Most of those threats and other instances of violence occurred in the workplace, and were committed by male co-workers. “... targeted by their colleagues, and because they are let down by the very people they should be able to trust, the violence and harassment they face goes widely unreported and therefore unpunished.”

The harassment of female journalists is both a gender and a media management issue.

## Harassment inside the office

“My eyes are up here,” she snaps at the reporter as, mid-conversation, his attention drifts away from her face towards her chest. He giggles; she shrugs it off as just another display of myopic male mentality.”

That is a Pakistani journalist, Atika Rehman, quoting a colleague, in her report about gender based harassment inside the office.<sup>11</sup>

There is a wide gap between the upholding of laws, where they exist, to protect women in the workplace and the reality for female journalists competing to keep and excel in their careers. While it is clearly the role of your management to address sexual harassment, it is often left to women to create the culture in media houses which makes sexual harassment unacceptable.

Sometimes laying official complaints may be counterproductive to your career, even if that is your right under law. However, if you are being stalked or fear for your life, and your employer will not act to remove the threat, go to the authorities. Write down the names of the officers you talk with, take a witness, and request a copy of the police report.

I have listed a range of ways to deal with sexual harassment inside the office. It includes advice from American journalist Sherry Ricchiardi<sup>12</sup> and other female reporters:

- Dress professionally and conduct yourself with confidence and pride in your role as a journalist.
- Make it clear you will not tolerate inappropriate touching or comments from support staff, colleagues, or sources.
- Make clear that suggestive comments, crude jokes, and inappropriate touching are offensive to you.

---

<sup>11</sup> Atika Rehman, [Women in journalism: Harassed at work](http://www.Pakistangendernews.org)  
www.Pakistangendernews.org

<sup>12</sup> Sherry Ricchiardi, <https://ijnet.org/en/blog/advice-female-journalists-facing-harassment-job> International Journalists Network

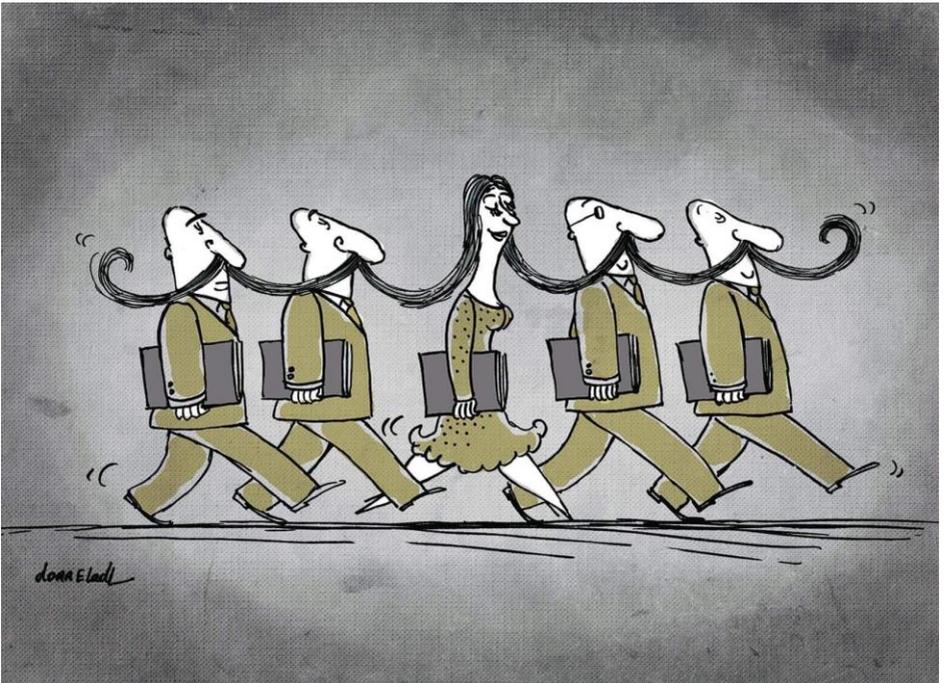
- In a calm but resolute manner, remind the guilty party that you are a professional woman and that you demand the same respect that males in the newsroom receive.
- Sometimes it is useful to ask the abuser, ‘Would you speak to your mother, sister or wife this way? Would you want someone treating them the way they are treating me?’
- If a source harasses you, use your social intelligence (your ability to effectively navigate and negotiate complex social relationships) <sup>13</sup> to make him back off or withdraw. Tell him his harassment is unacceptable.
- If the behaviour of a colleague hinders your work and well-being, ask him to stop or report him. Talk to someone you trust. This could range from a colleague to your boss or your union.
- Don’t rule out the possibility of being able to have your superior take disciplinary or legal action. Keep a written record of what was said or done to you. Record time, date, place, and your response. Add the names of any witnesses.
- When reporting to management, take a witness to observe their attitude and behaviour towards you. That is particularly important if you are reporting sexual harassment by a superior.
- If sexual harassment is coming from your boss, and this is a growing problem, avoid him and tell him this is not acceptable. If you have a higher authority inside the media house, report him and ask for protection. Involve your journalists’ union.
- Check out legal recourse and support networks through NGOs or women’s organizations. It is not always easy. When I was Vice Chairperson of the Egyptian journalists’ syndicate, I received complaints from female journalists. In some cases, the

---

<sup>13</sup> Social scientist Ross Honeywill believes social intelligence is an aggregated measure of self-and social-awareness, evolved social beliefs and attitudes. [http://www.jofamericanscience.org/journals/am-sci/am110315/004\\_28107am110315\\_23\\_27.pdf](http://www.jofamericanscience.org/journals/am-sci/am110315/004_28107am110315_23_27.pdf)

women withdrew their complaints, fearing revenge or the stigma of being seen as immoral in a conservative society. I remember in one case a brave female journalist continued the battle, until the harasser - her manager - was named and shamed. During that process, he threatened me as well, because of the support the union gave her.

- Encourage company management to create a system for reporting sexual harassment, including peer support, and penalties for offenders.



### **How to deal with harassers in the field**

Firstly, minimise risk. Here is a checklist offered by Judith Matloff, a veteran foreign correspondent and teacher at the Columbia School of

Journalism, aimed at minimizing the risk of sexual aggression in the field:<sup>14</sup>

- In general, try to avoid situations that raise risk. Those include staying in remote areas without a trusted companion; getting in unofficial taxis or taxis with multiple strangers; using elevators or corridors where you would be alone with strangers; eating out alone, unless you are sure of the setting; and spending long periods alone with male sources or support staff.
- Especially in conflict zones, women journalists might find themselves living in intimately close quarters with colleagues or sources, sharing scarce hotel rooms, vehicles, or tents – and on the receiving end of unwelcome advances. Women journalists can think that being hassled is part of the job. It doesn't need to be that way.
- Keep in regular contact with your newsroom editors; compiling and disseminating contact information for yourself and support staff is always good practice for a broad range of security reasons. Carry a mobile phone with security numbers, including your professional contacts and local emergency contacts.
- Be discreet in giving out any personal information.

Tips based on media women's collective experiences dealing with violence and harassers:

- Learn a self-defence sport. This was the number one advice from many journalists. Sometimes there is no one to help you or no one willing to intervene. Your martial art teacher will tell

---

<sup>14</sup> Judith Matloff, Safety Tips for Female Correspondents - How to minimize the risk of sexual assault while on the job

[http://archives.cjr.org/campaign\\_desk/safety\\_tips\\_for\\_female\\_corresp.php](http://archives.cjr.org/campaign_desk/safety_tips_for_female_corresp.php)

See also CPJ security guide addendum on sexual-aggression.

<https://cpj.org/reports/2011/06/security-guide-addendum-sexual-aggression.php>

you retreat is the first option with violent threats, but feeling strong will be reflected in your behaviour.

- Carrying a weapon is criminalized, but some everyday items – such as hairspray and spray deodorant – may be used as weapons and can deter an attacker.
- Pepper spray is available and legal in many countries to protect you against uncontrolled animals. However, in Sweden it is considered a weapon and requires a licence. This is an example of why legal awareness for every assignment is required.
- Journalists should consider carrying a whistle or a rape alarm in their hand or in an accessible part of their bag. But if flying, they should check beforehand if it can be carried on the airline.
- Know what the community would do to sexual harassers. In some cases, it is better to say, 'a thief' than 'a harasser'. One of my Egyptian trainees did that and found it useful.
- If you are alone and being harassed, use your cover story, such as saying 'I'm waiting for my husband – or colleague – to arrive' and if possible, you should consider moving to join a mixed sex group, even if they are strangers. Personally, I was harassed by a racist man in the Concord area in Paris. I asked a French family if I could join them for a while. He left when he realized I was not alone.
- Ask for the support of people around you, and show that you don't accept harassment.
- Seek and shout for help especially if there are women nearby. If they can't help directly, ask them to get help.
- If you are alone with the attacker and he is physically more powerful, start talking to him. Using emotional reasons, such as being a mother or pregnant, can stop some sexual attackers, others can be stopped if you claim that you have HIV or your period.
- If they are several sexual attackers try to seek help from one of them. In some cases, such a person can protect you. This

succeeded when a group attacked a female colleague in Tahrir square.

### Harassment by sources

The relationship with sources should always be professional. However, some sources try to cross the line. In cases where the source says or does something that the female journalist considers to be sexual harassment, strategies differ.

A journalist from South Africa and another from Norway told me they tend to act as if they didn't understand and then try to leave. Another American journalist laughed and took the whole thing as a joke and continued her work professionally. A third used body language to create boundaries, to prevent a male source from kissing her by shaking hands with him while holding his elbow with the other hand, to keep or push him away. Another Italian trainee confronted the source to stop the harassment. She then reported him to authorities.

To avoid such incidents, it is better to have control over the situation. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the location where you meet the source might be a key here.

- It is always safer not to meet someone in their own home. If that is the only way, go with a colleague. Use a communication plan. If you have doubts and a colleague is not available, trust your instincts and request a telephone interview or cancel.
- Never agree to meet a source while you are alone. If this should ever happen, don't reveal that this is the case, make a telephone call as described in Chapter 2, which acts both an information call and a deterrent.
- You can also get someone to call you at specific times.

## Online harassment

Dunja Mijatović, former media freedom representative for OSCE, recalls the experience of a female journalist whose phone number was shared on a sex dating website. Anonymous articles with lies about her and her family were also posted online. Her email and other accounts were hacked and she received death threats on Skype. Mijatović believes that these kinds of attacks “cause severe psychological trauma for journalists and their families. Many female journalists may re-evaluate the issues they choose to cover. In this way, such attacks pose a threat to free media and the society as a whole.

During my training sessions for female journalists in many countries, I noticed that online harassment is becoming one of the most reported sources of assaults and violations.

Females, especially journalists, are not being protected. At a regional conference in South Africa 2016, IAWRT discussed the issue of online harassment. The cases presented there showed that in some more conservative cultures there may be a dramatic impact on physical safety when a harassed woman is defamed and then stigmatised by the society, and hate speech is utilised to incite attacks.

In 2014 a study conducted by the think tank Demos in the UK found that on Twitter, female journalists receive nearly three times as much abuse as male journalists.<sup>15</sup>

International organizations such as IWMF and the Global Editors Network (GEN) have launched campaigns against online harassment. In one Twitter campaign, women with high public profiles retaliated and

---

<sup>15</sup> Misogyny on Twitter

[https://www.demos.co.uk/files/MISOGYNY\\_ON\\_TWITTER.pdf](https://www.demos.co.uk/files/MISOGYNY_ON_TWITTER.pdf)

shared their everyday life experiences of sexual harassment. Australian women journalists and bloggers such as Clementine Ford have gone public about the sexual abuse they have received online, leading to apologies or prosecutions of the harasser. Another debate about women exposing and confronting online attackers took place in the wake of the Swedish TV documentary *Men Who Hate Women Online*, in 2013.

Sidsel Wold is a Norwegian award-winning journalist. Most of the online harassment she gets is because she covers events in the Middle-East, especially the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, her male colleagues don't get the same level or the same kind of abuse. She theorised during a conference, *Gender, War and Conflict* in Oslo, 2015, "It's easy to attack females because they are almost like a soft target, especially if attackers sit behind the screen."

Natasha Tynes wrote about her experience dealing with online harassment and threats on Twitter from fans of ISIS. In a blog post published in the Huffington Post, she said "Occasionally, I would post pictures of my children or mention places I'm traveling to. Not anymore! It is a scary world out there. I also make sure to turn off my geolocation option on Twitter. Did ISIS succeed in instilling fear in me? The answer is a definite yes." <sup>16</sup>

Michelle Ferrier, who was the first female African-American columnist at the Daytona Beach News Journal, was forced to quit her job and leave the state, but she turned her experience of online harassment into something positive. With other female journalists and tech experts, she helped create Trollbusters, a platform that allows women in digital media experiencing online harassment, to type in the URL of

---

<sup>16</sup> Natasha Tynes, The Scary World that is Arabic Twitter.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/natasha-tynes/the-scary-world-that-is-arabic-twitter\\_b\\_6713570.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/natasha-tynes/the-scary-world-that-is-arabic-twitter_b_6713570.html)

an offensive message to locate the troll. The platform received the top prize at the Ford Foundation/IWMF *Cracking the Code* hackathon. When asked for advice to journalists facing online harassment, Ferrier gave the following tips:

- If they're threatening you with bodily harm, go to the police and document the harassment (i.e. keep screenshots of threatening/abusive messages).
- If they're insulting you (but not threatening you), step away from the computer.
- If they're attacking your professional reputation, you might want to get friends to support you and provide you with professional endorsements.

As mentioned, some journalists have dealt with the problem by outing trolls. No research has been done regarding how successful this has been (and the time and effort it takes) but it does alert others to potential trolls.

Norwegian victims of such abuse told Aina Landsverk Hagen of Kilden - Information Centre for Gender Research in Norway - that it is not the victim's responsibility to respond. In her book *The Courage of Convictions – online harassment and freedom of speech in Norway*, she reported that nearly half of all Norwegian journalists and editors had experienced bullying during the past five years.<sup>17</sup> Female journalists between the ages of 25 and 35 were twice as likely to be bullied and threatened as male colleagues of the same age.

Hagen believes that young women should be prepared for the potential shock of experiencing the high levels of harassment now

---

<sup>17</sup> Aina Landsverk Hagen, [Meningers mot: Netthat og ytringsfrihet i Norge](#) (The Courage of Opinions: Online Harassment and Freedom of Speech in Norway). [Cappelen Damm Akademiske](#) 2015.

associated with a media career. She says that “since the bullying is not likely to disappear, we have to take seriously that online harassment affects some journalists to such an extent that they might not be able to do their job properly or write about the topics close to their hearts.”<sup>18</sup>

Hagen gives the following advice:

- Support those who have been subjected to online harassment. It is not the victim's responsibility. The media houses in general need to take more responsibility and improve their routines around their own journalists and their freelancers.
- Being part of a community is an important counter strategy when you're being bullied: “having someone to talk to, perhaps someone who has experienced the same, may diminish the effect of the threats and the bullying. The community may help put the experiences into words and turn them into something less shameful.”
- Name and shame the online harasser. Reveal the identity of those who post bullying messages and expose them. However, Hagen underlines that demonizing the bullies by calling them internet trolls and referring to the comment sections as sewage is not the way to go. She asserts that this is a phenomenon we should deal with as a society.
- Moderating the comment sections and preventing people from being anonymous may help a bit.

Hagen believes that a better solution would be to develop what she calls harassment competence, such as learning how to distinguish between various forms of bullying, as her interviewees did. They distinguished between ‘the angry’, ‘the crazy’, and ‘the dangerous’

---

<sup>18</sup> Beate Sletvold Øistad, Young women twice as exposed to cyber bullying as men

<http://scienorden.com/young-women-twice-exposed-cyber-bullying-men>

bullies. The ‘angry’ are people you can respond to, and perhaps even make them understand that you’re a person who might get hurt by their utterances. Harassment coming from ‘the crazy’ and ‘the dangerous’ had better be ignored, according to the journalists, since a reply often makes the bullying even worse.

To conclude the journalists’ advice:

- Online violence is an extension of offline violence.
- Realize that sexual online abuse is completely traumatizing.
- Start social media literacy education with a gender lens.
- Complain to police if your life or safety is under threat.
- Campaign for laws to protect women where they do not exist and sensitive enforcement where they do exist.

### Rape as a weapon

“I was threatened with rape myself,” a young Indian female journalist told me during an IAWRT training session. She was threatened with rape if she continued her story about violations and abuse of women in her area.

The worst nightmare is when rape and sexual violence are used as weapons. I heard several such stories in some African and Middle Eastern countries. During conflicts, as in Rwanda and Darfur in the 1990’s, rape was followed by killing the victim and mutilating her body. Female journalists had to be more cautious than ever. Some of them had to leave their countries.

Nareen Shammo, an Iraqi Kurdish Yazidi journalist, had to leave her country in 2015 because of her coverage of the kidnappings and sexual assaults and organized rape of Yazidi girls and women by the Islamic State, in northern Iraq.

The risk and fear of rape can be a woman journalist's constant, usually unexpressed, fear. War and conflicts are violent - and violence breeds aggressive behaviour of all kinds. Moreover, rape and sexual assaults happen in the most stable societies.

Certainly, rape is a very real threat. Yet very few women talk about it with their male bosses, whether it happens or not. As well as the fear that raising the issue might adversely affect careers, there can be a great deal of shame attached. If it does happen on assignment, apart from the shame issue for some, others don't report it for fear of breaching the golden rule that a journalist should never become the 'story'.

**Tips to deal with rape threats** (based on INSI advice and collective experiences):

- Consider a rape whistle or alarm, and shout.
- Protecting and preserving one's life in the face of sexual assault is the overriding objective, experts say. As mentioned above, journalists can learn self-defence skills to fight off attackers, but some security experts argue that fighting off an assailant could increase the risk of fatal violence.
- Factors to consider are the number of assailants, whether weapons are involved, and whether the setting is public or private. Some experts suggest fighting back if an assailant seeks to take you from the scene of an initial attack to another location.
- Sexual abuse can also occur when a journalist is being detained by a government or being held captive by irregular forces. Developing a relationship with one's guards or captors may reduce the risk of all forms of assault, but journalists should be aware that abuse can occur and they may have few options. Protecting one's life is the primary goal.

**If your defences fail, keep looking after yourself.**

- If you are attacked, never feel guilty.

- Record the incident or confront witnesses, usually harassers and rapists, with their actions.
- If you are subjected to sexual assault or violence, seek medical help as quickly as possible.
- Be aware that you may go through a range of emotions, so consider seeking emotional support immediately.

Seek professional help to overcome the trauma and where possible, ensure your employer gives you all necessary support.

---

## 4. Travel Safety

---

Travel doesn't only mean long distances. It can be getting from one location to another nearby.

- Mobility planning is part of the preparation stage of every mission. If a story requires travel to a new environment, research the location, language, culture, and customs in advance to make informed decisions about how to conduct the work.
- When appropriate, establish local contacts vetted by your news organisation, colleagues, or other reliable sources in accordance with your communication plan (Chapter 2).
- Be clear about your travel arrangements and schedules, even when field reporting locally. Leave contact details with a trusted person and have the appropriate documents, including relevant permits, press passes and insurance.
- Carry out a risk assessment, have the appropriate training and equipment when possible and ensure there is a contingency plan to get out of trouble if the situation deteriorates.

Questions you might consider are:

- Press acceptance: how are journalists looked upon by the public?
- How are women looked upon and treated by the public?
- Are there any direct threats against journalists or females?
- Are there illegal activities such as drug trafficking operations?
- Are there common threats such as robberies, phone extortions, assaults, pickpockets?

## The “Grab Bag”

“The region where I was staying in Libya came under fire,” said Safaa Saleh. So, she had to leave quickly with one item. It was her ‘Grab Bag’.

The ‘Grab Bag’ should be the nearest thing to you in hostile or challenging places. Backpacks are best as they are easy to carry on your front or back. Your location and the security situation should dictate the kind of equipment you should pack. The following list does not include personal protective equipment, such as masks, goggles, or body armour:

- necessary papers, passport, ID cards, driving licence, passes, permits and tickets (Keep a copy of your passport and documents with you. Always store the originals in a safe place.)
- local and foreign currency, credit cards
- water and snacks
- medical first-aid kit, prescriptions, and essential drugs
- hygiene products, sanitary towels or tampons, wet wipes, and toilet paper
- communication equipment such as mobile phone, charger, power bank
- written copy of essential numbers and maps. Emergency contact numbers – hard copy (I use a simple phone for calling in hazardous situation, smartphone in the bag when you need it.)
- compass/map/ tracker/ torch with spare battery
- hat, sweater, jumper/jacket, depending on temperature
- If visiting Muslim countries, a headscarf/ chador just in case
- a wedding ring to deter unwelcome attention
- journalist equipment such as laptop, recorder, camera.

### Optional items and advice:

- Female Journalists should consider carrying a whistle or a rape alarm in an accessible part of their bag. If flying, check if it can be carried on the airline.

- Be aware that some items – such as hairspray and spray deodorant – may be used as weapons and can deter an attacker. However, you can't carry them in the plane cabin.
- Sanitary provisions may not be available, make sure you have enough with you.
- Black clip microphones are more suitable than normal size microphones. Attach them to your shirt or grab-bag. Normal size microphones increase your exposure and people do not feel comfortable talking into them.
- Use earphones to make sure you have recorded clearly.

### Mobility options

“Despite my requests, the taxi driver continued driving fast up the dangerous, dark road to the mountain area,” said Yasmin Hany. She arrived to cover the conflict in Lebanon, yet she recalls this situation as the most dangerous.

In Darfur, female journalists had to travel long distances over bad roads between towns in Sudan, requiring extra caution when moving around for coverage in that conflict zone. Here are some tips for transportation and accommodation.

#### **If traveling on foot:**

- Be aware of who is around you.
- Walk confidently, with your head up, and as if you know where you're going.
- Avoid walking alone, especially in poorly lit areas, quiet streets and alleyways.
- If possible, try to walk close to groups of people.
- Arrange to meet people in well-lit and busy areas.
- Where possible avoid carrying handbags, but if it is necessary wear them across your body.

- If you suspect you are being followed, try to find a busy place: hotel, shop etc.

### **When using taxis:**

- Avoid travelling at night if possible.
- Always keep someone informed about where you are, but never put this on social media.
- Don't use unlicensed taxis even if they are cheaper.
- Agree the cost before you leave if the taxi does not have a meter.
- If using a service such as Uber, be extra cautious. Send the contact details of the driver to your contact person and tell him/her when you arrive. (communication plan)
- Where possible, book a taxi or a minicab in advance. Ask for the name of the driver. Confirm this when they arrive. Carry the number with you.
- If you are ordering a cab in a public place, keep your voice down. Anyone could pretend to be your cab.
- Beware of suspicious passengers and the driver.
- Insist on safe driving.
- Do not put up with intimidating behaviour from taxi drivers. Get the number of the cab when you get in so you can report any disturbing behaviour.
- If you feel worried, trust your instincts, and ask the driver to stop in a busy area and get out.
- If the driver won't stop, use your mobile to call police and wave for help from other drivers and pedestrians.
- Brief the driver as little as possible and never give personal information.
- Limit conversation with anyone with you in the car. Don't talk on the phone.
- Do not browse your phone while you are being driven by taxi or hired vehicle, observe where you are being taken instead.

- If alone, try not to sit in the front of the taxi. If you are in the back and being troubled by the driver, you have two doors from which to exit - but remember some cabs have automatic locking when the car is moving.
- Do not sit behind the driver, because he can block you by sliding back his seat. The back right seat (ie diagonal to the driver) is the safest place in the car.
- Have an emergency plan in case something goes wrong.

### **When using your own car:**

- Drive well. Most incidents are the results of road accidents.
- If you are driving to a location that is not known to you, plan the route, keep a map or a navigator handy so you don't have to ask for directions.
- Have all essentials, such as a spare car tyre, and enough fuel. Learn how to fix the car yourself. I am writing this handbook with a dislocated shoulder because I dropped the tyre while changing it in an isolated area!
- If you suspect that a bomb may have been planted on your car, search it carefully.
- Always keep the car clean to spot anything unusual.
- When traveling between countries, use more than one car.
- Make sure your mobile phone is fully charged in case of emergencies.
- In multi-storey car parks, make a note of where you have left your car.
- Avoid poorly lit car parks.
- Keep car doors locked even whilst driving. Keep your bag out of sight whilst driving. Many thieves use traffic lights to open cars suddenly and snatch women's bags.

### **Using public transport at night:**

- Female journalists should only take public transport at night if necessary.

- If travelling by bus, avoid the back, and if possible, sit in a seat nearest the driver. If your stop is in a remote area, get someone to meet you or get off in a busier area and get a cab for the remainder of the journey.
- If you are travelling by train late at night, remain alert. Make sure the carriage you choose is busy with people. Avoid empty carriages on trains and deserted stations at night.
- Do not use your mobile phone unless necessary. Stay alert. If you need to respond to a call be brief and don't give details. Some people entertain themselves by eavesdropping on others.
- Avoid discussing details about yourself with people you do not know.

### Hotels in conflict zones:

The most dangerous hotels I used during wars, were in Iraq, and Libya. One was bombed and the other was targeted because of the presence of a nearby military base. However, I remind myself that even in very calm luxurious hotels crimes happen and danger exists, especially for women.

Any situation can present risk. As one foreign correspondent put it, "men in powerful positions staying in your hotel can be even more threatening than border guards in a conflict zone."

Especially in conflict zones, women journalists might find themselves living in intimately close quarters with colleagues or sources, sharing scarce hotel rooms, vehicles or tents. They can think that being hassled is part of the job. It doesn't need to be that way.

### Tips for staying in a hotel:

- Hotels should be found beforehand where possible.
- Check the reputation of the hotel among local women.

- If there are colleagues in the same hotel, remember their room numbers.
- If travelling alone, choose a good standard hotel where security is of a higher standard than one you might stay in if travelling with male colleagues.
- Choose a hotel with 24/7 reception and that has evacuation procedures.
- Don't take hotel rooms with easily accessible windows or balconies.
- Avoid exposure or attracting attention.
- If you suspect you are being followed, stay in busy places and avoid walking in deserted corridors or taking lifts.
- Do not wear clothes that attract unwanted attention.
- In a conservative society, wear a wedding ring. I usually do this in war zones.
- Try not to attract unwanted attention by striking up conversations or making eye contact with strangers. It can sometimes be misinterpreted as flirting.
- Ensure the balconies and doors are locked. Use the chain lock on the main door.
- Don't open the door to strangers unless reception confirms with you.
- It is preferable to put out the 'Do not disturb' sign at all times. Call housekeeping for cleaning while you are in the room.
- If it isn't possible to lock the door of the hotel room, barricade it with luggage or furniture, but ensure you can escape the room in a hurry if you need to.
- In war zones use security measures, such as door wedges, to keep intruders from entering the room. Many female journalists buy a door alarm for use in hotels.
- Journalists should have a plan in case someone does gain entry, and consider having a legal form of self-defence near to them, such as a small can of hairspray.

- Do not leave any valuables or important papers in the room. Always check if someone has searched your room while you are out. (Note or photograph how you have left it.)
- Be certain to locate an alternative escape route in the event of fire.

### Countering Surveillance

- Always be aware of your surroundings.
- Don't use digital equipment that takes your full attention.
- If there is a possible threat, don't move alone.
- Don't walk in empty or dark streets.
- Have a communication plan to inform someone of the threat.
- Identify the purpose of the surveillance: gathering information, harassment, potential attack, or kidnapping.
- If you think harassment is the object of the surveillance, reveal no information and try to join a mixed sex group.
- If you suspect you are being followed, go to a busy place such as a hotel or a shop, and if possible and appropriate, consider informing somebody in authority about your suspicions.
- If you have a whistle or a rape alarm or a spray, keep it handy.

### If you are under surveillance

- Make sure of the surveillance threat.
- Establish the threat and the capabilities of the surveiller, and what the surveiller is prepared to risk.
- Decide on one of two options - reveal that you know if you think that is going to stop them, or act normally and apply your emergency plan.
- Avoid getting into confrontation.

### Checkpoints

“How many prayers does a Muslim perform daily?” a member of an ISIS armed group asked me in 2014 at a checkpoint in the north of

Syria. I thought I managed my profile successfully as I was completely covered. However, my Arabic dialect would have revealed my Egyptian identity. I used sign language to answer, yet the man pushed me; I fell and hurt my knee. I was lucky to get through this checkpoint with only this injury, while many journalists covering areas controlled by armed groups didn't. My colleagues and friends James Foley and Kinji Goto were kidnapped from checkpoints and later beheaded in the infamous ISIS YouTube videos.

Checkpoints represents a major threat in conflict areas controlled by militias, whether armies or non-organized troops. In training, we do role-plays designed for different situations.

Here are some tips to deal with check points:

- Preplanning is essential when you are in a hostile environment.
- Profile management means that you dress to suit your mission.
- The cover story is important. Again, no false story. You may hide the part of your identity that may cause you trouble, such as being a journalist in some areas. If you must lie, just use one lie among otherwise truthful information.
- Don't carry documents or data in digital equipment that contradicts your cover story.
- Knowledge of the context, culture, religion, social norms, and position of women in society is a must.
- If this checkpoint belongs to Jihadi armed groups such as ISIS, women can't be with non-relatives in one car. Avoid the checkpoint if possible or create a cover story that includes a relation. How you dress is extremely important. Don't talk, let the men do the talking. The culture serves as a protection in that respect.
- If possible, report that you have been stopped at a checkpoint to someone who is part of your communication plan.
- Study the checkpoint. This depends on your data collecting skills. Yasmine Ryan, a war correspondent from New Zealand who covers the Middle East, says some checkpoints are fake to

seize people who pass through them. She experienced this during the Libyan war.

- Try not to be alone. However, be aware of who is in the same car.
- Approach the checkpoint slowly after turning down the lights.
- Only the driver talks.
- Internal light on and keep hands visible.
- No sudden moves. Conversations limited.
- Language and expressions used should be chosen carefully.
- Be aware of body language.
- When you leave the checkpoint report to the communications contact person.

---

## 5. Digital & Equipment Safety

---

Amany, a female journalist from an Arab Gulf state was blackmailed with photos taken from her mobile. A digital expert found that the attacker sent a link that she opened, allowing him to control her mobile camera. Another Jordanian journalist's data was taken when a waiter at her regular café offered to charge her telephone. The waiter connected the phone to a laptop and easily synchronised the data. She later found out the corrupt company she was investigating paid him to do that.

Blackmailing stories are related to technology you use. I heard stories from female journalists in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. Photos taken from Facebook accounts are taken, photoshopped and published on pornographic websites when a victim doesn't respond to blackmail. The attackers understand the conservative nature of societies and use it against their victims.

This handbook is not mainly about digital safety; however, some digital tips should be included. Here we will address mobile safety, relating it to social media:

- Part of your profile is your digital profile. The equipment that you carry sometimes reflects who you are. Also, the digital profile includes your social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.)
- The safety countdown starts when you start using equipment such as cameras. Exposure in conflict or crowded places is too dangerous. An Egyptian female television correspondent was brutally harassed in Tahrir Square because she conducted long interviews and the camera was visible for more than 40 minutes.

- Always close all the cameras and phones of your devices with a plaster; your computer, mobile, iPad and laptop.
- Online, never open any untrusted link. Many women, especially journalists, face blackmail through spy and surveillance programs.

The Rory Peck Institute also offers digital risk assessment documents for download.<sup>19</sup>

There is a limit to how far you should go to protect your equipment. Your own physical safety is your first priority before your digital and psychosocial safety. I was seriously injured in 2001 because I defended my camera and refused to hand it to an angry demonstrator. He broke my jaw and I suffered for 16 years. Seham, a female Syrian journalist, was wise enough to evacuate her home in northern Syria during an airstrike. Her laptop and camera were destroyed and she had to use her old smartphone to deliver her stories, but the most important is that she realized her priorities and so survived.

### **Mobile safety**

When you carry a telephone in a hostile environment, it is part of your profile and exposure. That means you are carrying your contact list, log of calls (forwarded, dialled, lost, received), diary or schedule, text messages (SMS) records (sent, received, saved), media preferences (radio stations, news sites) pictures, videos, audio, and on smartphones, your social media, games, chats, etc.

If your phone is stolen:

- Report to the authorities and try to use the locating function if you have it.
- If you can't, let your contacts know you have lost your telephone.

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://rorypecktrust.org/resources/digital-security/digital-risk-assessment/downloads>

- Invest in a new phone and try to use theft insurance.

#### Useful safety procedures:

- Apply digital ‘hygiene’ to your devices by deleting previous activities on a regular basis. If you suspect surveillance, keep the phone as clean as possible: erase call logs, and SMS folders. If you need to discard your device, erase all the information from the phone and remove the sim card.
- Encrypted messaging programs are better, however, deleting sensitive text messages as soon as they are sent or received is still good in case someone opens your phone.
- Don’t use location services in case of possible digital surveillance. Be aware that some applications do that by default, so you should check and deactivate them.
- Always backup your data and information.
- Don’t login by default to your emails or social media accounts through applications on your mobile. In case of theft or surveillance, or if your mobile is being checked by armed groups, your profile is completely exposed. Not only may you lose your accounts, but compromise your safety and that of contacts as well.
- An important tip we got from journalists in training sessions is to create alternative social media and mail accounts and keep them on the device you will use in conflict zones.
- Photos and videos should not be kept on your device while in a hostile environment.
- Sim cards and mobile passports are important.
- Set emergency contacts such as health care providers and police on quick dial.
- Use pseudonyms for sensitive contacts.

A general tip to those performing dangerous missions: never take your smart phone with you. Use a cheap functional one that is hard to track if you remove the battery. This kind of phone stays charged for a longer time too.

---

## 6. Crowd Management

---

The Pakistani senior journalist Quatrina Hosain was assaulted by a group of 30 men at a political rally before elections. Hosain told *The Express Tribune*, “I don’t know if they were told to teach me a lesson, but I do know that the nature of the assault was really horrific. There were multiple people grabbing at various parts of my body. I was scared that if I fell, or any of my clothes were torn, no one would have been able to prevent a rape from taking place. I felt like a cornered animal.”

In the aftermath of the incident, Hosain “had flashbacks, ... I was rude to people who were offering to help me with my bag at the airport. I felt vulnerable and my brain was wired into flight mode. In public spaces, I would desperately search for women so I could go and stand near them,” she says. She says she was mortified when people on social media accused her of concocting the story to “boost ratings” for her show.

Hosain explains that she did not register a complaint because she did not want the episode to become a political issue. “It happened to me because I am a woman. Men ask us ‘why were you there’. Luckily for me, I reached out to friends and family and got therapy. I am not afraid to talk about it.”

I dealt with similar stories as Vice President of the Egyptian Journalist Syndicate in the aftermath of the 25 January 2011 uprising. The suffering of female journalists covering crowds was well known internationally after the American journalist Lara Logan was attacked in Tahrir square. When the phenomena were exposed, we found out that the attacks were organized to target female activists, politicians,

and journalists. The intention was to demonize the participation of women.

Exposure is a powerful weapon. Actually, exposure of barbaric tactics is very important to counter demonization. It also helps to mobilise public opinion against the attackers.

Generally, working in big crowds is one of the most dangerous situations where violence often starts, especially for female journalists. Covering revolutions and uprisings in the Middle East was challenging. Female journalists, even experienced female war correspondents, were subject to attacks and assaults.

During the Egyptian uprising we found that we needed to combine gender considerations with often contradictory safety considerations to deal with crowds. International journalists had challenges related to cultural awareness and hatred of foreigners, while local journalists faced ethical dilemmas and trauma associated with covering conflict inside their home country.

### **Tips when covering crowds, demonstrations, or civil disorder:**

- Pre-planning and situation awareness are essential. Be alert at all times.
- As with reporting from war zones, the same principles of planning ahead and assessing risks apply. Just because the riot or civil unrest is in your local town, this doesn't mean that you are not at risk.
- Reading the crowd is extremely important. A very calm crowd can become extremely hostile within a few minutes. This can be triggered by the spreading of rumours or speakers that hit emotional buttons can trigger.
- Identify the groups of people present and estimate the risk each one represents to you. Demonstrations are confusing because there are so many different types of people involved.

For example: demonstrators, anti-demonstrators, police in uniform and others in plain clothes. Journalists are finding that they are increasingly open to attacks from both police and demonstrators, so you need to remain alert. There are more people there to consider, media people, NGO representatives, people who live nearby, shop owners, street vendors, thieves, thugs and rioters, and sexual harassers. Ask yourself which of these categories is dangerous to you as a journalist and a woman.

- Make sure you remain aware of your situation and remember that peaceful crowds can soon become dangerous. If there is ethnic conflict you may need to know about safe and unsafe areas and it is important to find out as much as possible before you set out. Before the demonstration starts it is useful to reconnoitre the area to plan routes out of the area.
- Some countries protect you when you wear a visible press vest, whilst in others it increases your exposure and makes you a target. Decide accordingly.
- Carry your press ID, only show it when you believe it is safe to do so, but keep it accessible so you can show it quickly.
- If you are a reporter you don't have to be located within the crowd until you can't see what's happening. Search for a location to see the full situation better.
- If you are a photographer or camera operator, try to shoot from a higher point.
- Understand the culture and be aware of your surroundings. Don't mingle in a predominantly male crowd; stay close to the edges and have an escape route in mind.
- Remain aware of what is happening around you, even if you are interviewing – sometimes crowds can surge suddenly and you can find yourself caught up in the middle of a situation which can be frightening and dangerous.

- Always try to attend a demonstration with a colleague. Travel with colleagues and support staff. If something does happen to you, it will be useful to have help at hand or at least a witness.
- If you are working with a team you may become separated. It is therefore important to pre-arrange contact points and times in case mobile phones are damaged or lost.
- Pre-load your mobile with an emergency number on the speed dial facility.
- If police seize equipment, you may be stuck for hours in the same area, so make sure you have sufficient food and drink.
- Carry a small backpack with your snack, water to last for a day in case you are unable to get out of the area.
- Include a small first aid kit. You may want to have a small towel which you can dampen with water if tear gas is used.
- If tear gas is likely to be used, position yourself as far as possible upwind. Bring eye protection such as swimming goggles or industrial eye protection.
- Be careful of lanyards as these can be caught in a crowd.

#### Reduce your exposure:

- Profile management is also an important skill here, through your clothing, body language and attitude.
- Dress conservatively and in accordance with local custom; wearing headscarves may be advisable in some regions, for example.
- Generally, wear loose-fitting clothing with long sleeves and trousers. Make sure you wear sensible footwear that will protect your toes that you can move in fast. Wear loose natural fabric clothing as this will not burn as badly as synthetic ones. Remember there is the possibility of gasoline bombs being exploded. Avoid makeup as it can interact chemically with tear gas.
- Consider wearing heavy belts that are hard to remove. Avoid wearing necklaces, ponytails, or anything that can be grabbed.

- Check the weather forecast, but ensure that your clothes are appropriate for all weathers.
- Carrying equipment discreetly, in nondescript bags, can also avoid unwanted attention. Carry a small device or thin laptop, if they are necessary.
- Consider carrying pepper spray (if not illegal) or even spray deodorant to deter aggressors.
- Try to appear familiar and confident but avoid striking up conversations or making eye contact with strangers. Female journalists should be aware that gestures of familiarity, such as hugging or smiling, even with colleagues, can be misinterpreted and raise the risk of unwanted attention.

**Remember:**

- Develop check-in protocols with someone you trust.
- Establish pre-arranged contact points with the rest of your team (photographer, camera operator, producer) in case you become separated.
- Work together with the team and all keep a mental map of your emergency escape routes.
- Always carry press identification but conceal it if it attracts unwanted attention.
- Bring a cell phone with emergency numbers pre-set for speed dialling.
- Carry a mobile phone with local contacts and a paper with the numbers disguised.
- A code word is essential between a female reporter and her team or fixer. Once it is mentioned that means it is time to leave the location.
- Have an immediate debriefing (colleagues or your newsroom) after the coverage to extract lessons from the coverage.

---

## *7. Wars and Conflicts... a Woman's Land!*

---

Despite the increasing risks and threats, more women are reporting now from war and conflict zones. Women journalists face down the double challenges there as journalists and as women.

Here we raise some challenges relevant to wars and conflict and how women can develop their skills to increase their presence on the frontline. In our next edition, we plan to add more situations such as natural disasters, based on the experiences of our IAWRT members in Nepal and the Philippines, and on health epidemic disasters.

### Dealing with armed groups

Our world today is full of armed forces. Some are representing official armies, while multiple militias are not. An example of this is the current war in Syria. Many female journalists, including international, regional, local and citizen journalists are working there. These are the most dangerous areas for reporters.

A journalist should realize how armed groups or forces see journalists in general and female journalists in particular. Many don't understand journalists' job requirements and goals. Journalists need information and armed groups often depend on confidentiality. This is a clash of objectives. Approach them with patience to gain their understanding and trust. Negotiation and communication skills are essential here. Being a woman is a challenge too.

Some female colleagues who cover Afghanistan say that the religious Taliban leaders realized they should talk to them to spread their ideas. "They treat us as a third gender. We are not male reporters and we are not women in the traditional way" said the BBC's Lyse Doucette, who

reported from Afghanistan and the Middle East. However, this is not necessarily the case for local journalists.

On the other hand, local women journalists should take on confrontations with Taliban and the authorities. “You realize you are a woman, don’t you?” an Afghan police chief told award winning Afghan journalist, Najiba Ayubi, the Managing Director of The Killid Group media network. She responded by broadcasting the report he wanted to suppress. After risk assessment, Najiba took a calculated risk, based on her power as a famous media figure who is respected within the community. She applied the risk formula we mentioned earlier. She estimated the risk based on her capacity. Risk assessment is a skill journalists should master.

Generally, Najiba insists on staying in Afghanistan even though her husband lives abroad. She established a new chapter for IAWRT in Kabul this year to encourage more women journalists to stay.

In a different way to Najiba’s experiences, our Sudanese colleague, Salma Salem, faced difficulties with the guards not wanting to allow a woman journalist to enter a government building. As she realized that the guards needed someone they know to give orders, Salma didn’t argue with them. She used her social intelligence (her connections) to call someone who had the power to help her.

### **Independent or embedded?**

If you are embedded with armed forces:

- Being with them doesn’t make you one of them.
- Follow the safety instructions they give you, but don’t completely rely on them. If a military confrontation happens, you won’t be their priority to protect. You are responsible for your own safety.

- As an embedded woman reporter, don't assume anything in terms of your personal safety. Do all you can to have a clear knowledge in advance of the conditions you will face. Ask who will meet you, where you will sleep, etc, so you know what to expect. This is part of a female journalist's preparation.
- Wear suitable protection equipment and apply the ballistic threat tips regarding flak jackets. Female journalists face problems if armed vests are not designed to fit a female body.
- Don't reveal location and don't offer secrets to any rival group. You report to your readers, listeners and viewers only.
- Try to be independent in your reporting.

### **How to work in areas controlled by radical religious armed militias:**

- Review the history of relations with media. Groups such as ISIS eliminate journalists who are not cooperating with them: working undercover in their areas is advised. Be aware that what is published can reveal your identity. The father of a journalist that I knew in Syria was executed because of what the journalist published.
- Profile management should be done as described earlier. Gender is a major issue here. It is your clothes, attitude, language, and culture.
- Be aware of general information about the local religion. This may protect you. As I mentioned in my story with ISIS, they asked me religious questions at a checkpoint.
- Try not to be alone with a man in a car or a house. Or try to prepare a convincing cover story. Men are not allowed to be in any private place with women except close family members.
- Even if you are embedded with an army in areas that were previously controlled by ISIS, still be extra cautious of snipers, suicide bombers and unexploded devices. Example: Sarah Noreldin survived a shot from an ISIS sniper in Mosul in August

2017. The Iraqi soldier who was with her was shot. She saw the sniper and avoided the bullet.

- Never begin confrontations with them. Building networks of alliances is essential.

## Caught in crossfire

Photojournalist Nour Kelzy, the first Syrian winner of one of IWMF Courage in Journalism Awards, was injured during her coverage of clashes in Syria in 2013. She was caught in crossfire, but she survived the attack and returned to work with more awareness of ballistic threats. Personally, I was caught in crossfire many times and even injured. The one time I can never forget, I was the target, but someone else was shot instead. In northern Libya during the 2011 war, when there was fighting in the city of Bin Waleed, I made the mistake of travelling in a car used by armed fighters. The other side started to target our car and the fighters I was with shot back. Then I, as a strange woman, became the target for the next shots, but the fighter next to me was hit. I stopped the bleeding of the injured rebel, using the first aid kit in my grab-bag. However, I still feel guilty.

Here are some tips on ballistic threats:

- For every action, there is a reaction. So be aware - never stay beside someone who is shooting. Carrying camera or being a journalist doesn't make you invisible to shooters.
- Never carry a weapon. It will classify you as an armed person, not a journalist. And it will not protect you.
- Be aware of the kinds of weapons used in a place, their range (short, medium and long-range weapons), users' skills, and how to protect yourself from the respective weapons.
- Classify different kinds of armed people and how to deal with each grouping.
- Armed vests and helmets should be used. Two concerns here: one is that they may not be available to local journalists in

conflict zones, the other is that some armed vests are not designed to fit a female body. The Rory Peck Trust directs freelancers how to get or rent vests and helmets and offers other safety advice and resources.<sup>20</sup>

- Journalists should always travel with a first-aid kit and know how to use it.
- The danger increases because you are a woman in a battlefield. Your exposure is high. Try to reduce this by profile management to stay under the radar of people with weapons.
- Journalists may wish to learn and practise skills to deter potential or active attackers. The focus should be on de-escalating an altercation, giving the journalist the time and opportunity to avoid confrontation and move away. Deterrence may involve simple hand and body manoeuvres that redirect an assailant while providing an opportunity to move aside and away. Such skills require practice, but even simple techniques can be effective under duress.
- If you can't run and if the shooting is not directed at you, lie on the ground, completely still.
- Life insurance is important. Never travel without it. Rory Peck Trust can help freelancers find this.

### **Escape or surrender?**

If someone is shooting in your direction, make your decision to escape or surrender (if it is an option), based on the points below:

- the kind of weapon threat (for example, mortars are dangerous because you can't predict where they may land.)
- the range of the weapon(short, medium or long)
- the users' experience of the weapon. Trained shooters or professional soldiers are a serious threat.

---

<sup>20</sup> <https://rorypecktrust.org/resources>

- the number of armed people. For example, the accurate range for using AK47 is 500m, yet this range increases with a greater number of shooters.
- The intention of the threat. Example: Is the shooting is over heads to disperse a crowd or shooting to kill?
- cultural considerations, as sometimes women won't be attacked in the field, while in other arenas women are targeted to humiliate the other side.

**Escape can mean:**

- Lying down and covering your head. This is the best option in crossfire or air strikes.
- Trying to find a proper shelter, if available.
- Running as fast as possible in a zigzag toward cover. Choose this option if the best shot for the range of the weapon is less than your position, or if you judge that the person shooting is not experienced enough to shoot accurately.
- Look for suitable cover. Knowing the capabilities of the weapons used can help you decide where it is suitable to hide.
- In a car, the strongest part that can protect you is behind the engine and the front wheel. I am talking here about short range weapons, of course.
- In airstrikes, remember that planes don't make only one strike, and so they may come back again. Never move until the strike is completely over.

---

## *8. Kidnapping and Detention*

---

“Now, I can finally talk about my kidnapping. I survived this horrible experience,” said Afrah Shawky, the Iraqi journalist who was kidnapped in December 2016 from her home in Baghdad in front of her two children. Through the Marie Colvin organization, I was giving expert support to Afrah’s family until she was freed. An armed group wanted to discipline Afrah for calling it a ‘militia’ in her articles. The support Afrah got from her colleagues and the international pressure led the group to release her. She was found 11 days after the kidnapping, thrown in front of her home in a terrible state.

Subsequently, she had to leave the country after receiving threats. “I was traumatised, but then cherished that my mission as a journalist would be to campaign against violations and kidnapping targeting female journalists. I wish no woman go through this experience,” she stressed.

Shymaa Adel is an Egyptian journalist who was detained by Sudanese authorities while reporting demonstrations in Sudan in 2012. The authorities denied knowing where she was until we were surprised by the announcement that she would face spying accusations. Through diplomatic efforts between the two countries Shymaa was freed. The mistake she made was publishing a sensitive interview before leaving the country and using Facebook Messenger through a net cafe.

Those are two examples of being kidnapped, one by an armed group and the other, detained by authorities. However, I have heard many such stories from my trainees in Somalia, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria and Afghanistan.

In terms of classification, there are three kinds of motivations for kidnapping: criminal, political, and terrorist. The motivations do mix,

especially in South American countries. There are planned and opportunistic kidnappings. Techniques differ according to locations. However, I will try to sum up some points found in safety manuals and reported experiences.

“Don’t be the easy target,” a female South African journalist told us during training. ‘Easy’ means unprepared so that you make yourself the target because you have not estimated and mitigated risks. (See profile management and risk assessment.) Kidnappers, especially the opportunist type, can be deterred if you are seen to be cautious.

The same advice came from other journalists in South America and conflict areas in the Middle East and Asia, where kidnapping became a profitable business. Women are more targeted. Authorities usually detain or arrest.

### How to avoid being kidnapped

Estimate the threat of being kidnapped/detained in a risk assessment.

- Profile potential kidnappers/detainers.
- Understand when you are vulnerable. Ask yourself: what do you have and what do others need from you? It might be a ransom, information, data, or pressure to do something or to put pressure on others.
- How might your gender, race, profession, make you a potential victim?
- Reduce your exposure through profile management. (See Profile Management, chapter 2.)
- Develop your skills of situational awareness and surveillance recognition. Always be alert and observant. Use your senses.
- Mobility and travel planning: control your movements and always update one trusted person about your movement plan. (Communication Plan, chapter 2)
- Don’t move alone and avoid empty places.

- Never publish your travel plans on Facebook or any social media. (Digital and Equipment Safety, chapter 5)
- Avoid following certain routines that the kidnappers might predict.
- If seriously concerned, change where you spend your night.
- Be diligent in vetting local support staff, seek recommendations from colleagues.
- For arrest cases, always memorize the phone number of your lawyer. Knowledge of relevant local law is essential.

### **Kidnapping moment**

No accurate safety manual can tell you exactly what to do at the moment of kidnapping. It is a very delicate moment and things can develop quickly and dramatically. Some people have resisted, then escaped, and some were harmed while trying this. Others surrendered. We have to leave that to your own evaluation, according to the situation. Usually professional kidnappers are more determined to keep you unharmed. They have kidnapped you for a value that they want realized. (Some tips on rape from Chapter 3 might be useful.)

### **Survival during kidnapping**

Remember that outside strength starts from inside you. Psychosocial safety is the way to master your physical safety.

#### **Tips on how to survive:**

- **Control your emotions.** Stop blaming yourself. It is ok to be afraid, but don't collapse. You need your mental health to function well.
- **Think positively.** Don't think your life has ended, because you have survived until this moment. Think of your loved ones and think that you will certainly be with them again. Be sure that you will be released. If you are religious, this is the time to

draw on your faith. Your memories and the dreams you want to achieve are part of positive thinking.

- **Create a routine.** Activate your mind by creating details of your day. A writer who was kidnapped thought of writing a novel whilst a hostage. He was not allowed to write, so he kept it all in his mind. Then he designed a cover for the book and then imagined that he would buy a house and thought of the details of the house. Later he was released and achieved all these dreams.
- **Be observant.** Try to understand what is surrounding you. Try to guess where you are. Who are the captors? What are their motives, points of strength and weakness? What are their routines? This information might be useful later.
- **Dealing with your captors:** this starts with your attitude. Never challenge your captors, but don't be too submissive. Try to see their human side. Treat them with respect. Don't argue with them about politics or religion. Try to deal with them to survive this situation. Even if you feel you understand their cause, remember that you are not there to support them by choice - they kidnapped you. This reality should be clear in your head. A mental illness was called the 'Stockholm Syndrome', after hostages experienced a symbiosis with their kidnappers in a 5-day hostage situation during a bank robbery in Sweden in 1973.
- **Negotiate for better captivity conditions.** Food and hygiene are important. Never refuse the food. If you can persuade them to improve the quality, this would be great. Example: When Shaymaa Adel was imprisoned in Sudan, while covering demonstrations there, she thought of going on a hunger strike as a protest against her arrest. She realized this would only affect her physical and mental health. She decided not to do it.
- **Gender consideration is important.** Negotiate for your privacy as a woman. Be aware of the danger of sexual assaults. It is a dangerous situation because you are under their control.

However, use your social intelligence to find protection from one of the captors.

- **You may be asked to make a statement.** Say what they tell you.

### **To escape or not?**

- Never try to escape without calculating the risk and the price of failure.
- Start by noting the routines of the kidnappers to look for weak points.
- Collect information about the location of your room in the building and the building's location relative to safety.
- Consider your health capability and the consequences of failure.

### **To negotiate for a kidnapped colleague...**

- Look for a good negotiator unless you have the local cultural and political knowledge and skills to handle it yourself.
- Ask for a proof of life.
- Maintain emotional control.

#### Negotiation skills

- Establish the demands and negotiate them.
- Inform the authorities, but be cautious about what you make public, because some information might harm the hostage.
- Use public pressure wisely and only when absolutely needed.

### [Arrested during coverage](#)

Virginity and pregnancy tests are violations two of the female journalists I trained faced in two Middle Eastern authoritarian countries. They asked to stay anonymous because of the stigma their society might put on them. The journalists were arrested during coverage of demonstrations and, before detention, faced one of the

two humiliating procedures. The military police in the two countries claim that they do that to counter any claims that the women were raped during detention!

You should know your rights if detained during your work.

- You usually have the right to remain silent and to be assisted by a competent and independent lawyer of your choice.
- You have the right not to be subject to torture, intimidation, deceit, and other forms of coercive harassment.
- You have the right to be informed of these rights and to be told that anything you say may be used against you in court.
- If you are detained, you must be treated as a human being and are entitled to due process.
- When being questioned don't be defiant and don't be challenging. While waiting, try to appear confident and dignified. Most interrogators in non-democratic countries can use their limitless authority and inflict physical harm on you. Yet there is anecdotal evidence that interrogators may be less harsh on people who maintain their dignity.

**When returning from detention or kidnapping, a person needs ...**

- medical care.
- union with family or loved ones.
- to give authorities a briefing.
- trauma treatment, even if the person says she is fine.

---

## 9. Your Stories and Psychosocial Safety

---

As noted above, reporting on war, conflict or violence can also affect your psychosocial health – particularly when getting close to damaged citizens. In the main, the best protections are offered by applying the lens of ethical journalism. Humanity is one of the five core principles of an IAWRT partner organisation, the Ethical Journalism Network(EJN). “Journalists should do no harm” is a key principle behind the advice which follows.<sup>21</sup>

### Dealing with Survivors

“Treat them as survivors, not as victims” advises Tunisian investigative journalist, Hanene Zewis, who lives in Kurdistan, in the north of Iraq. Her reports about Yazidi Kurdish girls who were taken by Islamic State militia in the summer of 2014 were based on interviews with girls and women who had been kidnapped. They were taken as slaves to ISIS fighters in Syria and Iraq, where they were subject to rape and other violence before being on-sold.

The National Union of Journalists, (NUJ) in the UK, states a similar guideline: “In the case of an attack that has not resulted in death, do not use the word ‘victim’ unless the woman self-identifies as one. If she has survived the attack, she is a ‘survivor’.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, the former High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary Robinson told a 1999 IAWRT Biennial conference that refugees are not victims – they are survivors displaced by violent conflict.

### Tips on Interviewing Survivors.

---

<sup>21</sup> Ethical Journalism Network – [Five core principles of journalism](#)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nuj-guidelines-on-violence-against-women/>

This is compiled from the Dart Centre for Trauma, a global network of journalists, journalist trainers and health professionals dedicated to improving media coverage of trauma and conflicts,<sup>23</sup> and the personal experiences of female journalists.

- Interviewing victims is different from interviewing public figures such as politicians and state employees. Victims have no obligation to answer questions. Approach them with respect and explain why the interview matters.
- Identify yourself clearly as a journalist and say where and how you intend to publish the interview. Make sure they don't think that you work for a humanitarian organization and don't make promises of assistance which you can't fulfil.
- Develop your skill of active, non-judgmental listening.
- Take into consideration the crisis this person has been through. Be humane.
- Treat them respectfully, but do not be too afraid to ask about their experiences. Journalists walk a fine line, aiming to be sensitive but not timid.
- Never ask "How do you feel?" or say "I understand how you must be feeling." It is best to simply introduce yourself and say "I am sorry for your loss/what happened."
- Start by comforting the person as much as possible. And use open questions that gently prod them into telling their story.
- Find common ground to gain their trust. Example: in the Middle East, people accept their fate due to their religious and cultural concepts.
- Give victims a sense of control. Ask if they would be more comfortable sitting or standing or whether they would like to go somewhere more private to talk. Example: a woman

---

<sup>23</sup> Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma: <http://www.dartcenter.org>

suffering from domestic violence or rape can't talk about this in front of her family.

- If publishing the victim's name would cause harm, use a false name. (Take care when filming, even if only doing hand shots, her jewellery may be recognisable).

The following applies to most survivors of violence but is particularly important in cases of sexual violence:

- **Sexual violence is associated with high degrees of self-blame, guilt and shame.** Avoid any language that might imply the interviewee is responsible in some way. Be careful of asking "why" questions.
- **Don't be surprised if accounts only make partial sense.** Frequently survivors of sexual violence 'shut down' emotionally: their recall may be fragmentary, they may even block out an event entirely. They struggle in making sense of what happened.
- **Never say you know how they feel – you don't.**
- **End the interview well.** Ask them if they would like to add anything else. Bring the conversation back into the things that the interviewee finds safe speaking about.

It is also important to address the question of how you are personally dealing with hearing such survivor stories.

### Covering Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a collective term for human rights abuses or crimes relating to women because they are women (e.g. female genital mutilation) or which disproportionately affect women and girls (e.g. rape and domestic violence).

It also includes, but is not limited to: sexual assault, 'honour' based violence, forced marriage, sex trafficking, forced prostitution and

sexual harassment. Covering such stories through the stories of survivors can be harrowing for reporters from the very start.

**“The first obstacle starts within the newsroom”**

says Alyaa Abou Shahba, an Egyptian journalist, highlighting the challenges women journalists face when reporting VAWG issues. “Patriarchy is not a man. It is a system that everyone contributes to,” she explains. Alyaa’s investigative reports about ‘female genital mutilation’ shocked the society with stories of female victims. FGM is deemed to be a violation of the human rights of girls by the World Health Organisation, amongst others, but Alyaa had to convince the management of her media house that the issue was important and needed further coverage.

Those stories involve fear and danger. Victims are afraid to report and while in some cases being a woman eases your entry to private clinics that conduct FGM, Alyaa recommends some precautions for reducing the dangers:

- Go with trusted people who are known to the doctors who commit this illegal act.
- Use your risk planning: a good communication plan with the office. Alyaa also recommends coordination with someone in the neighbourhood.
- The golden rule is to leave once the reporter has enough information.

Putting an argument to management about VAWG stories – whether yours or those of your colleagues - can be informed by some of these guiding aims which are based on an outline by the NUJ:

- Frame violence against women and girls as gender equality and human-rights abuse stories, rather than as a ‘mishap’, ‘bad relationship’ or the consequence of women undertaking activities that would be unremarkable for men (walking alone, being out after dark, drinking in a bar, etc.).

- Take care not to contribute to the sexualisation of women and girls in the media.
- Take care not to imply that a survivor of gender-based violence might be to blame for the violence, nor assume that any of her behaviour or dress might have triggered the abuse.
- Do not refer to abusers as ‘monsters’, ‘fiends’, ‘maniacs’ or ‘beasts’ to bolster the myth that abusers are noticeably and substantially different from ‘normal’ men.
- Consider reporting more fully on prosecutions of those accused of violence against women, as well as women’s success in recovering and rebuilding their lives.

**Honour killing** is another major issue which raises safety issues in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and some Arab and African countries, where such murders originated, as well as in Europe, the US and other countries where women might have assumed they were safe. I heard many stories, during my training sessions, from female journalists who cover those stories and then receive threats from the families of the women.

“Banaz: A Love Story” is an Emmy and Peabody award winning film by Deeyah Khan. It was a documentary about an honour killing crime that happened in the United Kingdom. An Iraqi Kurdish British girl was killed by her family and her body put in a suitcase because she dared to ask for divorce from a husband who continuously tortured her. No one helped Benaz except the female police officer who investigated her murder case and Deeyah Khan, the film director who spent months making the film. Deeyah understood Benaz’s case as she herself was born in Norway to a Pakistani father and Afghan mother. Although living in Europe, threats reached Khan from her Pakistani community. Her parents couldn’t protect her, and she had to leave for Britain. Deeyah Khan became an example of how female journalists and filmmakers can make a difference by their work. She spoke out to give

voice to voiceless women. Her credibility increased because of her personal background.

However, the threat is greatest to local women journalists who report such stories. I heard more than one such story, but can't report them for safety reasons.

Even if your physical safety is not threatened, as mentioned above, reporting sexual violence can be traumatic for all participants. The Dart Centre warns that reporters should not "... underestimate how your own reactions to traumatic detail can influence the conversation." In interviews, it suggests "if you are finding the material challenging, acknowledge that silently to yourself, and bring your focus back to what is being said."

Be aware of your own delayed reactions to hearing such stories. It is natural for women to feel empathy for the survivor of this type of attack, which is a threat to all of us. Follow the guidelines below for dealing with a trauma, if needed.

### Self-care and dealing with trauma

"I can't go to any shopping mall even here in London," says a Kenyan journalist who survived the terrorist attack on the mall in Nairobi. She had the courage to cover the attack then help the victims, but is suffering from the trauma even after relocating to Europe.

Some of my former Syrian female trainees who now live as refugees in Europe told me that fireworks at New Year's Eve upset them. It reminded them of the airstrikes back home. The priority when experiencing danger is to survive; the uncontrolled reaction often comes once you are safe.

A journalist should also understand that reactions to threat and danger can vary. She should know that channelling her reactions in crisis situations into behaviour that can help rather than harm, is not necessarily dealing with the trauma.

Leslee Udwin, an award winning British filmmaker, was subjected to harassment in 1986. However, interviewing a rapper while shooting her documentary “India’s daughters” (2014) triggered her trauma. Once she finished the interview she called her 10 year old daughter to find relief and overcome the situation. Leslee didn’t know her limits, however she tried to mitigate herself and manage her reaction.

Practical suggestions from the Dart Centre:

- Know your limits.
- Keep life as normal as possible.
- Talk about the incident and your feelings with someone you trust.
- Eat regularly and get enough sleep when possible.
- If distressed, seek professional help from a mental health trauma counsellor.

Do not:

- isolate yourself.
- bottle up your emotions.
- drink alcohol or caffeine in excess.
- go without sleep or eating for long periods of time.

How colleagues can help each other:

- Take time to let someone who’s been through a bad time tell their story.
- Ask them open-ended questions. Listen to what they want to say. Don’t interrupt or come back with your own experiences.
- Don’t tell them you know how they feel. You can’t.

- Don't put down their experience or imply they only need to pull themselves together.
- Never be judgmental.

Employers:

- Free and confidential counselling should be available for women – and men – who wish to use it after experiencing conflict or other traumatic events.
- Freelancers deserve the same support as their staff colleagues. If it is not provided, try the Rory Peck Trust.

---

## 10. Ethical safety decisions

---

### To report or not?

No story is worth dying for, and that applies to your sources as much as to you, the reporter.

Shireen Ibrahim is a Kurdish Syrian radio journalist who decided not to air an interview because it would cause the source to be harmed. The source didn't estimate the threat well and wanted to be on the record. Later the source thanked her for protecting her life by that decision. "I would have not been able to live with that guilt," Shireen says.

To report or not to report? This is a common question I am asked while conducting training, especially by locally based female journalists. It is sometimes an ethical question and a safety question in other cases. Generally, conflict sensitive reporting is required for both categories. Even if it is a purely ethical question, the consequences will influence your psychosocial safety.

### **Questions to answer before deciding whether to publish:**

1. Is the story important to the public interest? If Yes, go to next question.
2. Is there someone who will be harmed as a consequence of this story? If yes, go to 3.
3. Are there alternatives to not publishing the story? If answer is No, go to 4.
4. Can the harm that would be caused by publishing be reduced? If No, go to the last question.
5. Can I defend my decision to myself and everyone else? If Yes, then publish.

For photos or film, generally, take the photo/footage if it is safe to do so and then decide whether to publish by answering the same questions. Always be aware of the consequences of what you publish for yourself and for others.

### Interview terrorists or not?

Interviewing terrorists can shock the public, who often think it indecent, and it can antagonise the authorities, who are tempted to denounce media complicity. UNESCO recently published (2017) the handbook *Terrorism and the Media*, written by Jean-Paul Marthoz. The following are tips from the chapter “To Interview or not to Interview?”

Ultimately, the choice mainly depends on each media house’s editorial policy, but there are some basic rules upon which most media agree:

1. Remain completely in control of the journalistic mission, and refuse any limits on questioning that the terrorist group would like to set.
2. Favour a documentary or ‘auteur article’ format over a conventional question-and answer interview, which provides less scope for the introduction of context, complexity, or corrections to the statements of the interviewees.
3. Clearly and transparently explain to the public the reasons for which the interview was requested and the conditions in which it was conducted.
4. Correct the false or fallacious statements that may have been uttered by the interviewees and give voice to the other players involved (authorities, victims, etc).

In many cases the female journalist’s gender, race, and religion reflects on the feedback others direct to her story. This has become obvious lately in terrorist stories.

Caroline Kamel is a Coptic (Christian) Egyptian journalist covering religious and minority issues in the Middle East. After covering the

latest bombings of churches by an ISIS terrorist group and doing relevant interviews, she faced threats and criticism from both Muslims and Christians. Those who threatened or criticized her confused her identity as a Christian woman with her job as a professional journalist. Some online attacks stooped to provoking hate speech.

### Report or help?

Local journalists who are covering conflicts near their homes face this question most often. However, the rule of not being part of the event you are covering is challenged for all reporters when they feel that they should be involved in rescuing victims or colleagues or facing down human rights violations. A Palestinian journalist was traumatized because she didn't stay to help a colleague during an airstrike on Gaza in 2014. She blames herself for running to leave the building without locating her colleague first.

The most difficult to convince of the rule that they should not involve themselves in the events they are covering were the Middle Eastern female journalists. Most of them witnessed the uprisings, revolutions, and wars (known in the west as the Arab Spring) and the violent aftermath, and became very emotionally involved.

The Egyptian female journalist Nora Younis was able to make the hard choice. She was covering the infamous Egyptian police crack-down on demonstrators on Kasr El Nile bridge on the 28 January 2011. Her mother, son and husband, were among the demonstrators. She knew that she couldn't find them among thousands and there were no mobile networks that day to locate and help them. She could have left trying desperately to help. It was a hard decision, but she stayed and filmed the only existing video that showed how hundreds of civilians were brutally killed before entering Tahrir Square.

“So many things happened in history, only those which were covered and published are the ones we know about,” Nora said in explanation of her decision, stressing that “This is why the role of journalists is so important.”

### **Considerations before taking the decision to be involved:**

**1. Is helping the person who is attacked going to put me in danger?**

If it is more probable you both would be injured or die if you try, then don't do it. Call for help and report the violation instead.

**2. Are there others who are rescuing victims?**

If people are doing rescue work, concentrate on your job as a journalist and cover the event. Although a Pakistani female journalist told me sometimes she helps female victims if cultural and religious gender considerations prevent male rescuers assisting.

**3. If there is no one to help, is there a moment to take the photo?**

This is not only an ethical issue, but also a safety one. Kevin Carter won a Pulitzer prize for a photo of a Sudanese girl who was dying while a vulture stood nearby, during the East Africa famine of 1994. The South African journalist was unable to answer questions about the girl's fate, although he said he had scared the bird away. Widespread criticism of what viewers thought he had done was believed to be a contributing factor to his suicide, a year later.

---

## 11. Legal Safety

---

“How can I prove she said this? I was changing the battery of the recorder when she said it and now she denies!” said Hoda Rashwan. Her female source said in the interview that “wearing a scarf is not a religious obligation”. That was considered against an article in law protecting faith. As Vice President of the Egyptian Journalists Syndicate in 2013, I attended the investigation with Hoda, who was in her last month of pregnancy. If she had been convicted, she would have faced at least two years in prison or a large fine. She was saved from that, but such legal cases are common.

Like their male colleagues, many female journalists face legal threats. Here are some general tips to journalists:

- Legal awareness is essential. You should read relevant laws and amendments, as well as relevant clauses applicable to journalistic work.
- Always keep records of what your sources say. If they refuse to be recorded, write your story, then let them revise and sign. Remember that sources may deny what they said.
- Be aware of libel and defamation legislation and the massive variation from one country to another. Be especially aware of religious law and laws relating to royalty.
- Keep a lawyer’s number in your pocket to call when necessary. Some press syndicates and unions provide legal services to members.
- In the absence of ombudspersons, or legal departments within media houses, some international journalist organizations, such as the Rory Peck Trust, can provide legal advice to freelancers. Legal training is important if available.

- Laws differ between countries. For example, as mentioned above, on the issue of self-protection, in Sweden pepper spray is considered a weapon, and therefore possession is forbidden, unless you have a weapons license.
- Women's rights and legal issues differ between countries. For example, in Saudi Arabia women don't have the right to drive.

## What can managers do?

According to your location, be aware of journalists' rights, especially regarding women.

Often labour law can be your best friend. In the UK, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employers to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of their employees. Similar provisions apply in Australia. In such countries, the employer has an obligation to ensure that any potential risk of violence is eliminated or controlled. Employers are required to consider the risks facing their staff and decide how these can be prevented or controlled, and to develop clear guidelines on how to achieve this. Larger state media corporations such as the BBC and ABC and many European broadcasters do have such guidelines for reporters in the field.

The consequence of the attacks on media women globally is to undermine the work of women journalists and is a media freedom issue. Therefore, the safety of women journalists is an issue that managers and media unions should (and many do) take up as an issue.

I will always remember an Egyptian female colleague who was sitting alone in a dark room writing her work in a state of trauma. Not only had she experienced sexually violent attacks targeting female journalists and activists during a demonstration in Tahrir Square, but her male colleagues made fun of her being harassed. She wanted to continue working to prove that she was qualified to do her job. She

was one of several female journalists I met when I was Vice President of the Egyptian Journalists Syndicate who refused to officially report assaults and violations because they were afraid of losing their jobs or being stigmatised.

Women journalists should be encouraged to discuss their needs for support and protection with their colleagues and managers to ensure that they are met. They can do this directly and through journalists' unions and other civil society organizations.

It is important to stress that in addition to violations that may happen inside the office, there are some discriminatory practices that impact women journalists. For example, the 'bar culture' in some countries and the 'coffee culture' in others are often male dominated. Usually male reporters can socialize with their managers. This reflects on their work positively. Women with multiple social responsibilities often don't have this advantage. This is why having fair office rules and transparency is important.

Managers should take into consideration that women journalists' experience of parenting can be very different from that of their male colleagues, and that this needs acknowledging. A colleague from South Africa persuaded her manager to acknowledge some rights of young mothers in her media organization. The pressure on female journalists during this stage of their lives pushes them to take risks to prove themselves, or leave the field.

The following is a list of what managers can do or provide:

**In the office:**

- equal employment rights and opportunities to women journalists.
- awareness of the unnecessary pressure women can experience to prove that they can do the job. Journalists should never fear reporting gender based violence experienced on the job.

- It must be made explicitly clear to everyone that sexual harassment and uninvited sexual advances are unacceptable. Male bosses should be aware of, and acknowledge, the threat and fear of rape.
- Developing a workplace policy on domestic violence in consultation with the employer will clearly demonstrate that domestic violence is not tolerated within or outside the workplace. The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) has suggestions for such a policy.<sup>24</sup>
- Ensure a safe working environment by making it clear that personal details of staff are to be kept confidential.
- Respect female social roles. Linda, a journalist from South Africa campaigned with her colleagues to get the right to breastfeed their babies by having a small room on the premises.

#### **For journalists reporting on war and conflict:**

- Safety training for staff who are likely to go into a hostile environment, including first aid and knowledge of the dangers involved in conflict areas.
- Hostile environment training courses should directly address women's needs – which will in turn help raise awareness among their male colleagues.
- Training in self-defence to women journalists, including freelancers.
- Risk assessment and follow up with women journalists reporting on conflict – whether embedded or in the field.
- Providing suitable safety equipment, such as flak vests designed to fit women, and helmets.

---

<sup>24</sup> NUJ Guidance on Domestic Violence as a workplace issue.

<https://www.nuj.org.uk/documents/nuj-guidance-on-domestic-violence-as-a-workplace-issue/>

- Some journalists are reluctant to report sexual abuse because they do not want to be perceived as being vulnerable while on dangerous assignments. Editorial managers should create a climate where you can report assaults without fear of losing future assignments and be confident of receiving support and assistance.
- If possible, women journalists should be allowed a say in who they would like to work with in a team.

**Freelancers:**

- Freelancers and female citizen journalists should make sure that they obtain training and appropriate equipment before entering war zones.
- Life and health insurance should be obtained wherever possible.

---

*In Conclusion*

---

This handbook is not about one woman's experience, but about the collective experience of many women journalists. If you have your grab bag of preparation techniques - risk assessment, profile management, situational and digital awareness and a safety plan along with your physical grab bag - your ability to survive dangerous situations is enhanced.

However, the range of situations faced by women journalists around the globe is vast.

As well as those whose careers do not survive gender based office harassment, I have met citizen journalists who evaded militias in a war torn country in order to get training to pass on to colleagues, top flight

well known international journalists who died in situations which they thought they could manage, survivors of kidnap and imprisonment, women who reported on major disasters without knowing if their own families had survived, under-resourced community radio reporters who put themselves at risk by exposing military atrocities or corruption by giving a voice to the people who are threatened, and female journalists who continue work after surviving rapes, miscarriages and the trauma of witnessing deaths.

I have been very impressed and humbled by every one of these professional women from so many countries, who do a job that matters. The IAWRT is proud to be able to put their collective experiences together in this handbook designed to improve the safety of women who continue to cover important stories.

Through the support IAWRT received from UNESCO and Norsk Journalistlag, we were able to prepare this handbook. Special thanks should go to Nonee Walsh and Bronwen Blight for editing and proofreading and to Doaa Eladl for the generous contribution of her illustrations.

When we started this task, we didn't start from scratch. We know that there are many great references and studies and we have referenced some of them - we hope this handbook builds on that and might be useful to you in your work. We also invite you to share any personal experience or advice which you think would add value to any future editions of this handbook. Contact Abeer Saady [abeer.saady@gmail.com](mailto:abeer.saady@gmail.com) or [webjournalist@iawrt.org](http://webjournalist@iawrt.org)

Often the reality in our business is that it is fast work at short notice, so we hope this fills a gap with a quick and easy read on the way to your next assignment.

---

*Useful Links*

---

Committee to Protect Journalists: <http://www.cpj.org>  
Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma: <http://dartcenter.org>  
International Association of Women in Radio and Television:  
[www.iawrt.org](http://www.iawrt.org)  
Ethical Journalism Network: <http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/>  
International Crisis Group: <http://www.crisisweb.org>  
International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies:  
<http://www.istss.org>  
International Centre for Journalists: <http://www.icfj.org>  
International Federation of Journalists: [www.ifj.org](http://www.ifj.org)  
International Research and Exchanges Board: <https://www.irex.org/>  
International News Safety Institute:  
<http://www.newssafety.com/index.htm>  
Marie Colvin organization for women journalists:  
<https://mariecolvinnetwork.org/en/>  
International Women in Media Foundation: <http://www.iwmf.org/>  
Poynter Institute for Media Studies: <http://www.poynter.org>  
Reporters Without Borders: <http://en.rsf.org/>  
Rory Peck Trust for freelance journalists: [www.rorypeck.org](http://www.rorypeck.org)  
The International Women International News Safety Institute:  
<http://www.newssafety.com>  
UNESCO: [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)  
UN Women: [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)

---

## *Acronyms*

---

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation

CNN Cable News Network US based subsidiary of Time Warner

EJN Ethical Journalism Network

GEN Global Editors Network

INSI The International News Safety Institute

ISIS Islamic State in Iraq and Syria Jihadi organization, or IS

IRES International Research and Exchanges Board

IWMF The International Women's Media Foundation

NJ Norsk Journalistlag - Norwegian Union of Journalists

NUJ National Union of Journalists UK

RSF Reporters Sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders)

SMS short message service - phone text messages

UN United Nations

UNESCO United Nations Economic, Scientific and Cultural organisation

VAWG violence against women and girls



# IAWRT

International Association of Women in Radio & Television

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



**NORSK JOURNALISTLAG**  
NORWEGIAN UNION OF JOURNALISTS



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

With the support of the  
Communication and  
Information Sector