

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Women journalists should be encouraged to discuss their particular needs for support and protection with their colleagues – male AND female – and ensure that these are met.
- Colleagues and managers should be aware of the unnecessary pressure women can experience to prove that they are capable of doing 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.
- If working as an embedded reporter, don't assume anything in terms of your personal safety. Do all you can to be clear in advance about the conditions you will face. Ask who will meet you, where you will sleep, etc, so you know what to expect.
- If possible, women journalists should be allowed a say in who they would like to work with in a team.
- Women journalists (including freelancers) should also, if possible, have the opportunity to train in self-defence.
- Hostile environment training courses should directly address women's needs – which will in turn help raise awareness among their male colleagues.
- Women need smaller and properly-fitted body armour which they can wear comfortably.
- Colleagues – male as well as female - should take the initiative to ask women they're working with if they need more feminine supplies.
- Before any assignment, female employees and their managers should make sure they know of any local customs specific to women.

- Female – and male - freelancers deserve the same support as their staff colleagues.
- For men and women alike, it's not a good idea to bottle up emotional distress. Find someone you trust who you can talk with – male or female. Offer to listen – without judgment - to the concerns of colleagues.
- Free and confidential counselling should be available for women – and men - who wish to use it after experiencing conflict or other traumatic events.
- Some woman-to-woman practical advice:
 - Carry a personal attack alarm.
 - Wearing a wedding ring can deter unwelcome attention.
 - If visiting Muslim countries, pack a head-scarf/ chador just in case.
 - Take care before going out with wet hair. In some cultures, this can be misinterpreted as a sexual signal.

For Further Information See:

On physical safety:
www.newssafety.com

For tips on looking after yourself
or colleagues emotionally:
www.dartcentre.org



Frontline Reporting

WOMEN WORKING IN WAR ZONES

Guidelines for Reporters, Managers & Editors



INTRODUCTION

Newsroom cultures often run on the assumption that, working in the news business, there's not much real difference between men and women.

In some ways, that may be true. But women working in journalism do have safety and health concerns that are not shared by male colleagues, especially in hostile environments and conflict zones.

The challenges that confront women journalists are easily overlooked – particularly where they work as freelancers.

Sometimes, women's needs and experiences are felt to be just too embarrassing or inconvenient. In most cases, though, managers and colleagues are just unaware.

This leaflet highlights issues raised in debate, consultation and research with women journalists initiated by the International News Safety Institute (INSI) and the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma.

We hope that bringing these concerns into the open will help both journalists and their employers – both male and female – to recognise and be supportive of the concerns of women working in war zones and hostile environments.

Some Underlying Issues

- **THE "PROVING CULTURE":** Women will sometimes take unnecessary risks to prove that they are 'as tough as the guys'. Sometimes they feel that they have to work harder to compete.
- **HARASSMENT:** 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.
- **RAPE:** The risk and fear of it can be a woman journalist's constant, usually unexpressed, fear. War is violent - and violence breeds aggressive behaviour of all kinds. Rape is a very real threat. Yet very few women talk about it with their male bosses. Whether it happens or not, there can be a great deal of shame attached. As well as the fear that raising the issue might adversely affect careers. That should not be so.
- **FLAK JACKETS:** These are usually 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.
- **WOMEN'S HEALTH:** Menstruation can be an awkward issue. Women journalists can find it embarrassing to ask for feminine hygiene products in the field. Neither is it uncommon for pregnant women journalists to have miscarriages – and tell no-one.
- **MODESTY:** Unlike men, most women journalists prefer at least a bush, a tree, a wall or a ditch to be able to relieve themselves – and will sometimes avoid drinking before an assignment to avoid having to pee in public. No-one should be ashamed of asking for or giving help in finding them a convenient way to meet that need.
- **RELATIONSHIPS AND FAMILY:** Many women journalists working in war zones are single. Some are mothers, with childcare responsibilities at home. Women journalists' experiences of relationship and parenting can be very different from those of their male colleagues – and that needs acknowledging.

