

## Country Report:

# “Media and Gender in Pakistan”

Part of the IFJ Media and Gender in Asia-Pacific Research Project





## Media and Gender in the Asia Pacific Region

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## Introduction to IFJ gender and media research

This report has been prepared as part of the “Research Study on Media and Gender in Asia-Pacific” undertaken by the International Federation of Journalists, and supported by the UNESCO in partnership with UN Women. In line with UNESCO’s Communication and Information Programme for 2014 to 2017, the project comprises research on gender and media conducted in partnership with national stakeholders in seven countries of the Asia-Pacific region (South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific): Cambodia, India, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu.

This study includes an overall analysis of women in the media in Pakistan and offers recommendations for action addressed mainly to the national media association, working in partnership with other key stakeholders, especially media organisations.

## Pakistan’s vibrant and rapidly growing media

From a single, state-owned television and radio monopoly, Pakistan today boasts a vibrant and largely free media. After a long struggle against periodically oppressive press policies and censorship under successive military regimes, the print media opened up in the 1990s and today enjoys more freedom than ever before.

Pakistan’s 2002 policy of liberalisation led to the rapid growth of private electronic media, both TV and FM radio. Further expansion has also come through cross-media ownership with almost all media houses with print media as their main business having established or planning to launch their own TV channels. Today, Pakistan has over 50 privately-owned TV channels, 170 FM radio channels and more than 250 news publications, including both newspapers and periodicals. In addition, almost 80 million Pakistanis use the internet and an equal number use mobile phones.

The media landscape, while fairly large, remains concentrated in the cities. Tribal areas and conflict zones like Balochistan, Swat and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are less well-covered by the media. The latter especially are extremely difficult locations from which to report and the reality is that few women journalists venture into or are present in these areas. Ultimately, this means there is inadequate media coverage of the issues women living there face.

A brief survey on the number of journalists in conflict areas was undertaken specifically for this report. Executive body members of press clubs and journalists’ unions were directly contacted for statistics on journalists in these areas.

According to the clubs and unions in Pakistan’s conflict areas, the only women journalists represented in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa area were 20 women journalists in Peshawar (20) compared to 380 of their male counterparts; and in Balochistan, there were two journalists in Quetta compared to 133 male journalists. There were no women journalists in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas including Kurram Agency, Khyber Agency (Landikotal, Jamrud and Bara), Mohmand Agency, North Waziristan, Chinar, Parachinaar, South Waziristan, Bajour, Kurram Agency and Sadda. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, there were no women journalists in Bannu, Swat, Hangu and Dera Ismail Khan. And in Balochistan, there were no women journalists in Khuzdar, Punjgoor and Gawader. Outside of Peshawar and Quetta, whose numbers are stated, most of these centres had between 20 to 50 male journalists.<sup>1</sup>

It is also true that Pakistan’s large, vibrant, ever-expanding and relatively free media has yet to be used as an effective and credible tool to advance messages relating to human and women’s rights



and gender equality. The main reason for the enduring gender-insensitive nature of content of much of news and current affairs, as well as entertainment shows churned out, is the fact it is done using a male lens. It could also be that it tends to look at issues in the light of circulation figures, ratings, commercials and one-upmanship.

At the global level, changes in the status and role of women in the media and the portrayal of women in the media have been slow but visible. Pakistan is no exception, as revealed by the Pakistan Country Report of the Global Media Monitoring Project Report (2010)<sup>ii</sup>. The report found that media content, including the portrayal of girls and women, remains largely patriarchal, gender-insensitive and sometimes in violation of consumer rights, as well as media responsibility and accountability.

Today there is widespread evidence of both print and broadcast media reasserting and perpetuating negative stereotypes of girls and women, but this is often run alongside other empowered and empowering content.

Consultations with various media houses in Islamabad for the IFJ research revealed that news content is essentially determined by all-male boards. The staunchly patriarchal mind-sets of men who participated in the discussions were evident in comments such as “women are bad decision-makers” and “women are physically and mentally weaker than men”. Women were missing from the top tiers of these media organisations, partly because they did not stay on long enough, most leaving their jobs after marriage. So too, despite the mushrooming of media houses over the past decade, the number of organisations owned by women is negligible.

The presence of women at decision-making levels in Pakistan’s media has improved over the years but the numbers are still dismal, especially when compared to their male counterparts. Women presenters and anchors on television and FM radio are visible and audible, but women bureau chiefs are rare. Organisations like the news agency Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) have not yet had a woman director general (DG). Similarly, Pakistan Television (PTV) has had only one woman DG since its inception. Women have served as station directors at radio stations, as resident editors in leading newspapers like *Dawn*, *Nation* and *Jang* but such examples are few and far between.

Women have a presence in the regional media, from newspapers and magazines to radio and television. Although fewer in number, they face more or less the same issues and problems as their counterparts in the Urdu media: low wages, poor working conditions, and greater vulnerability to sexual harassment due to job insecurity and the absence of mechanisms to deal with such incidents.

The English-language media in Pakistan, which caters primarily to the elites, tends to be more progressive in its outlook. While the class distinction is apparent in print media, the lines are more blurred in the electronic media. More gender-sensitive and positive portrayals of women and girls can be found in the English-language press, whereas stereotyping, sexist images of women and derogatory language are more prevalent in Urdu and other Pakistani language media, in both print and electronic.

What is missing in the gender equity picture is there is no definitive national level information available on the state of women in Pakistani media. Where there have been research studies and surveys, these are relatively small scale. This lack of information becomes an impediment in discussing the future of women in media in the country.



However, the good news is that the state and civil society are attempting to bridge the gap. The Alliance for Gender-Just Media, initiated in March 2012<sup>iii</sup>, brought together media professionals, policy planners, civil society organisations (CSOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and women activists to begin a process of debate and dialogue on issues concerning women and the media. Media portrayal of women, strategies for women’s empowerment through the media and the formulation and implementation of a national code of conduct for the media are foremost on the agenda.

There is an urgent need for a collective understanding of what affirmative actions must be undertaken to combat gender insensitivity in the media and what it would take for stakeholders to address and redress the situation.

**Demographics of Survey Respondents**

A total of 137 media practitioners from across the country participated in the survey. Among them were 79 women (57.66 percent of the total), 51 men (41.61 percent) and one person who identified as ‘other.’ All but three of the respondents were Pakistani nationals.

The majority of respondents (48.91 percent) were aged between the ages of 26-35 years. This was followed by 21.90 percent in the 36-45 age bracket and 17.52 percent in the 18-25 age bracket. The greatest percentage of women (41.78 percent) was in the 26-35 year age bracket.

What is your age?	Total	Female	Male	Other
18 – 25	24	21	3	0
26 – 35	67	33	34	0
36 - 45	30	18	12	0
46 - 55	11	6	5	0
56 and above	5	1	3	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>1</b>

Respondents were represented from all the major provinces of the country, although the majority were from larger provinces like Punjab (21.90 percent), Sindh (28.47 percent) and the Islamabad Capital Territory (26.28 percent). They lived in more than 20 cities, towns or villages.

In terms of religion, the overwhelming majority of respondents (95 percent) were Muslims. Less than one tenth (9.49 percent) said they were from an ethnic or religious minority – mostly identified as a religious minority such as Shia. Athiests, Buddhists and Christians also identified in the survey.

Education levels of respondents were high. Most respondents (75 percent) held a post-graduate university degree. A relatively large proportion (25 percent) had ‘professional qualifications’ in courses such as degree, diploma or certificate in journalism or photography.

The gender breakdown across the education level of respondents was evenly distributed, except in the case of professional journalism courses which 33 percent of men had completed as compared with only 20 percent of females.



It is worth noting that an earlier locally conducted research<sup>iv</sup> had indicated that the female to male ratio in the mass communication departments of universities or media schools was 60:40 but this was reversed when it came to actually joining the media for work, with fewer women doing so, possibly due to pressures from their families and/or society.

### Many women still relegated to ‘soft beats’

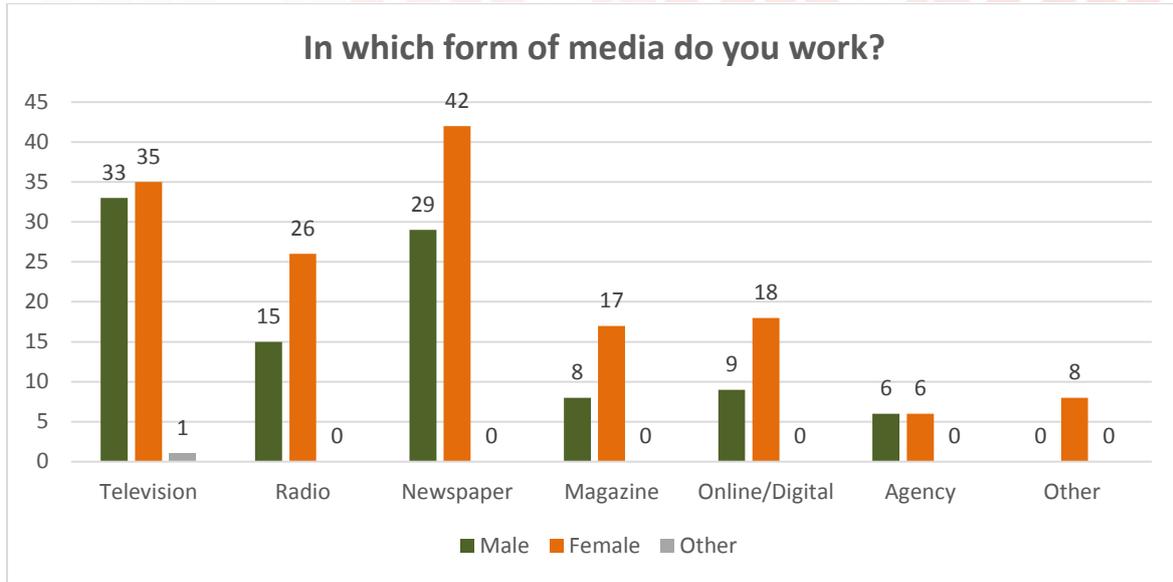
‘Love of journalism’ appears to have motivated the majority of respondents (65.69 percent) to join the media profession, followed by ‘to make a difference/ call the powerful to account’ (37.22 percent). Respondents were able to select multiple responses as to why they joined journalism. Women and men were almost equal in the first response, while more women (40.50 percent) said they were eager ‘to make a difference’ or ‘call the powerful to account’ than men (33.33 percent).

The fragile nature of work conditions in Pakistan’s media is perhaps reflected in the fact that only 5.1 percent of respondents chose ‘job security’ as a reason to join the industry. Even fewer chose ‘remuneration’ or ‘power’ (both 2.9 percent of all responses). ‘Family tradition’ was cited by 9.5 percent of respondents and ‘fame/glamour/opportunity/prestige’ by 10.22 percent.

According to just over half of respondents (54.01 percent), their families were supportive of their choice of profession. Marginally more men (56.14 percent) than women (51.90 percent) selected this answer. A third (32.12 percent) said their family response was ‘neutral’ and 10.95 percent of all respondents said they faced a ‘negative’ response. More women (12.66 percent) received a negative response than men (8.77 percent).

What was your family’s response to your career choice?	Total	Female	Male	Other
Neutral	44	25	19	0
Opposed/Negative	15	10	5	0
Other	4	3	1	0
Supportive	74	41	32	1
Grand Total	137	79	57	1

In determining where respondents work, the survey allowed respondents to choose one or more media. More than half of all respondents (51.82 percent) worked all or part of their career in newspapers, followed by television (50.36 percent). This was followed by radio (29.92 percent). Online/digital represented a much smaller (19.70 percent) segment. These high number of responses across these questions clearly suggest that media workers are regularly working across mediums.



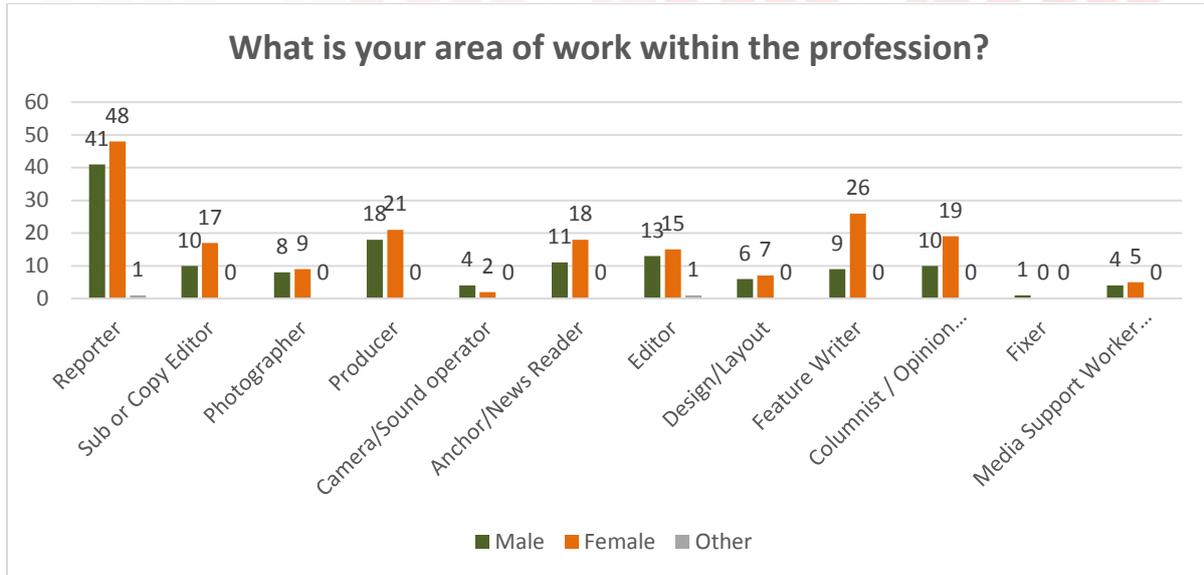
The largest proportion of female respondents work for newspapers (53.16 percent), compared to 50.87 percent of men. The most popular response for men was television (57.89 percent). Interestingly a large proportion of women (32.91 percent) worked in radio compared to only 26.32 percent of men.

Over half the respondents (58 percent) use Urdu as the primary language for work. Pakistan has a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic population and while Urdu is a link language, large numbers of Pakistanis speak languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Pushto, Brahvi, Balochi, Saraiki etc.

While the Sindhi newspapers, *Kawish* and *Ibrat*, have both been dominant voices of Sindhis (belonging to Sindh province), other languages have not been very visible, partly because some – like Baluchi – do not have a separate script. Television channels, however, exist in several languages: besides the Sindhi *Kawish* Television Network (KTN) and Sindh TV, there are the Saraiki-language channels, *Waseb* and *Rohi*, *Khyber* news in Pushto, *Apna* in Punjabi, and *Vash* TV in Balochi.

Most respondents (41.60 percent) were employed in large media organisations employing more than 1500 people. A quarter (24.81 percent) were in organisations of 100-1500 people. Very few (10.94 percent) were in organisations of less than 100 people. These results would align with trends in Pakistan identified already of large media companies expanding across a number of sectors. It is clear there are very few niche operators in the scene.

The majority of respondents (65.69 percent) indicated that their area of work within the profession was ‘reporter’, this represented 60.75 percent of women and 71.93 percent of men. Respondents, again in this question, could select all the areas that applied to their current work and most selected numerous responses.



‘Producer’ also figured highly with over a quarter of all women (26.58 percent) and 31.57 percent of men. Sub or copy editor was also popular with a fifth of all women (21.51 percent) compared to 17.54 percent of men. Most jobs were reasonably aligned by gender except in the area of feature writer – which comprised 32.91 percent of women, compared to only 15.78 percent of men.

In terms of nature of employment, more than half the respondents (57.66 percent) reported that they were full-time, regular employees of their media organisations. A distinctly higher proportion of males (71.92 percent) were in full-time regular work than females (46.83 percent).

On the other hand, more women (11.39 percent) were in part-time regular work than men (3.50 percent) and more than a fifth of women (21.51 percent) were in (part-time contract and freelance roles) compared to only 5.26 percent of men. This might suggest job flexibility for some but would also highlight concerns about recruitment practices of companies that favour men in full-time roles.

According to Salma Soomro, a reporter for *Daily Ibrat*, and sub-editor for Marvi (a weekly women’s page): “Women do write articles for newspapers on a freelance basis but they are generally not paid well. The situation for freelancers is not gender-specific though. Even men are not given formal appointment letters. Female journalists who work for newspapers full time often work without a formal appointment letter ... I have been working for three years without an appointment letter... my salary is always paid very late and often only half the monthly amount is paid at a time.”

The greatest proportion of respondents (42.33 percent) had been in the media industry for 10 or more years, though an almost equally large group (37.95 percent) had been in the industry between 3-10 years. Proportionately fewer men (8.77 percent) had been in the industry less than three years, compared to women (27.85 percent). This would suggest an influx of women to Pakistan’s media industry over the past few years.

In terms of present career status, more men (45.61 percent) described themselves as ‘senior’ whereas more women (39.24 percent) were at ‘mid-level’. Only a third of women (29.11 percent) described themselves as ‘senior’. Women were also overrepresented at junior levels (22.78 percent) compared to only 1.75 percent of men. Again this may suggest an increased influx into the industry by women in recent years.



Challenging stereotypes and entering previously male bastion of journalism, women in Pakistan are managing to shatter the glass ceiling.

Asma Shirazi's career in media plays a big part in her life. Now the executive vice president and senior anchorperson of BOL (an upcoming TV channel), Shirazi says that now that she is in a decision-making position, she is determined to offer every opportunity, without discrimination, to women who have a passion for the field and is endeavouring to create an environment conducive to the needs of female professionals. Under her watch, she says there will be equal opportunities for women and zero tolerance for sexual harassment at the workplace.

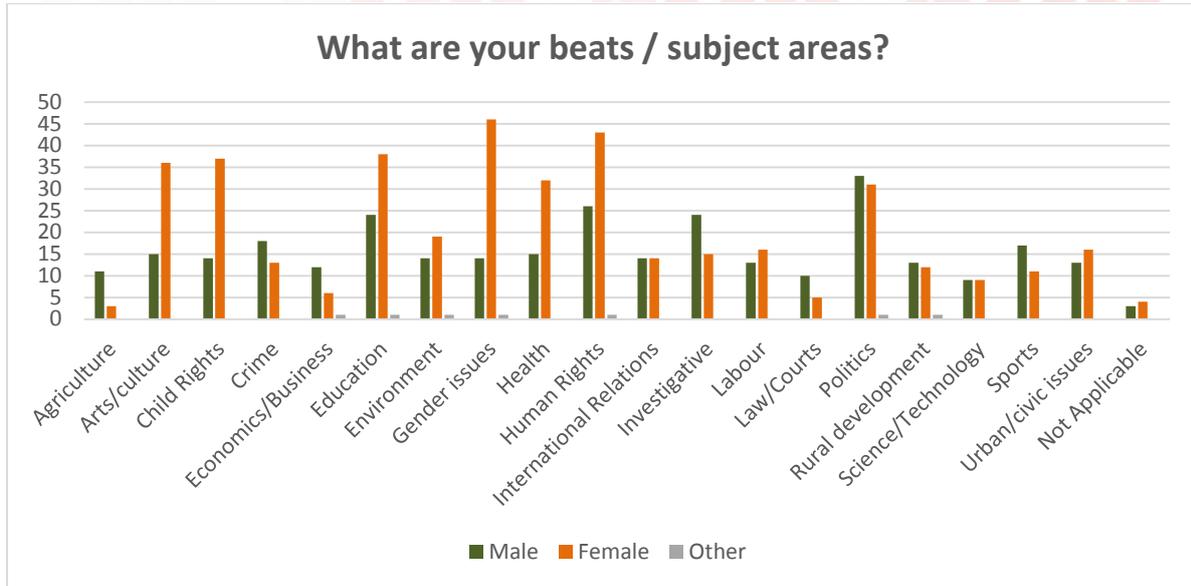
Starting her career with Radio Pakistan in Islamabad, she worked in various departments, including FM and the world service, before going on to prove her potential in television. From 1991 onwards she gained varied experience in the media, including reporting from war zones and conducting current affairs shows. Shirazi got her best break when she was anchoring a five-minute segment on GEO TV's *Parliament Cafeteria*. She has since hosted a one-hour prime time show, besides hosting two other popular television talk shows, including one on parliamentary affairs that was eventually banned during the time of former president General Pervez Musharraf when he clamped down on independent news coverage.

Talking about her work-related experiences so far, Shirazi said she enjoyed the challenges her career presented, but it had not been an easy journey. Since she wanted to work in the field and not just be tied to a desk, she worked as a reporter for over five years. Importantly, her family supported her as she tried to balance family life with a career, with her husband helping her to strengthen her resolve if she ever felt discouraged.

Shirazi says reporting is generally considered a man's job in Pakistan, not only in the context of the social and cultural environment, but also the myriad political, criminal and other issues that beset the country. However, women who are willing to work hard are making their mark in the field even though female reporters are still vastly outnumbered by their male counterparts.

Female journalists in Pakistan often complain about being assigned 'soft' beats and 'forced' to work on issues that have been 'given' to them rather than those that interest them. Yet, interestingly, nearly a half of respondents (47.44 percent) in the IFJ research said they had the opportunity to choose their beats. More than half the men (57.89 percent) they could choose their beats, compared to 40.50 percent of women.

Survey respondents could select a range of areas where they worked. From the most popular, these were human rights, politics, education, gender issues, arts/culture and child rights (the latter two were equal). For women, the most popular beats were (from top) gender issues, human rights, education, child rights and arts/culture. For men, the most popular beats were (from top) politics, human rights, investigative journalism and education (the latter were both equal).



In terms of determining the content of their work, more men (43.86 percent) said they could ‘always’ choose the content of their work, compared to just 27.85 percent of women. But more than half the women (51.90 percent) said they could choose the content of their work ‘most of the time’. The person defined as ‘other’ in the survey said they could ‘never’ determine the content of their work.

In a consultation held at one media house, female journalists working in the print media said there is a trend to assign ‘hard’ beats such as crime and politics to male journalists and ‘soft’ beats to females, confirming what has been highlighted by women in news media at several forums in the past. The oft-stated reason for this gender-based division of labour were social norms and values and long working hours. Women did cover parliament, with sessions often continuing late in the evenings but the beat was considered easier for women to be part of the team of four to five reporters generally assigned to the legislature. In contrast, covering crime would require individual journalists to move around late at night visiting crime scenes, police stations and hospitals whenever necessary.

Tazeen Akhter, the editor of [Daily Azkar](#) said all their journalists are employed as either part-timers or freelancers since the organisation cannot “afford” full-time staff at present. An Urdu language on-line newspaper based in Islamabad, *Daily Azkar* launched in October 2011 and now attracts over 100,000 visitors per month. The editor is a man, as are the administrator, the photographer and the graphics designer. Of the ten journalists working as reporters and sub-editors, four are women.

Akhter says there is no gender differentiation in the recruitment policy or employment practices but work assignments depend on women’s ability or willingness to work late into the night, do crime reporting or take up other “hard news” beats.

It is true in Pakistan today there are no longer any “no-go areas” or “taboo” fields for women working in the media. Women are now seen reporting from battlefields where terrorist and sectarian organisations operate as well as areas devastated by disasters such as earthquakes and floods. It is a different matter that men reporting from disaster zones tend to only portray a picture



of helpless, vulnerable, suffering women, wholly ignoring some inspiring stories of women's and girls' survival, courage and heroism.

So are women influencing the coverage of news and views in the place they work? Just over a third (37.97 percent) felt they could influence news in their organisation 'to some extent', slightly more than men (33.33 percent). More men (35.09 percent) said they could influence coverage 'most of the time', compared to a quarter of women (26.58 percent).

As editor of *The News on Sunday*, Farah Zia feels she is in a position to ensure that both female as well as male journalists have an even playing field in terms of obtaining jobs. Zia began her career in 1992 as a feature writer with *The Frontier Post*, Lahore. After four years she was promoted to the post of magazine editor. *The Frontier Post* was rather unusual in that the owner of the newspaper was female. Perhaps that contributed to the fact that there were many female reporters in the newsroom as well as in the magazine section.

Today, Zia said she is conscious of the fact that men are generally given preference in certain posts in the media, and that few women made it to the top positions. She believes there should be balance not only in hiring policies but also where news bylines are concerned. Zia wants upcoming female journalists to know that the media, as opposed to many other fields of work, are progressive, dynamic and open to all women who are committed to the profession.

Nargis Baloch, the editor of *Daily Intekhab* (Urdu) in Hub has been associated with the newspaper for 30 years. She was the first and remains, so far, the only female president of the Press Club in Hub. Having visited every part of Balochistan as a journalist and as a speaker on many platforms about the insecure situation in the province with various non-state actors threatening the lives of journalists, she says journalists in the region are forced to work under immense pressure.

According to Baloch, several women write for newspapers in Balochistan although they cannot be found in the field. Despite raising her voice in various forums to request funding to conduct training courses, her requests have been received with silence.

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## **Riding the radio wave**

A decade ago, Pakistan only had one television channel and one radio station – both state-run. In contrast, today the audience has numerous TV and radio channels to choose from. This media boom has altered Pakistan's social paradigm.

Even though television is the most popular medium in Pakistan, radio's strong presence cannot be denied. More and more people are tuning in to the variety of road shows on radio, especially during city commutes through heavy traffic, when the latest news and updates prove useful. Many now access radio through their cell phones. There is no doubt that radio today has a large following in Pakistan.

Radio has always been considered a 'safer' profession than TV in Pakistan and there has always been a strong presence of women in the medium. Even in the past, when society was much more conservative, women worked in radio, not only as radio jockeys (RJs) but also in production, research and the technical departments. A substantial part of the programming on radio is women-centric, with talk shows on issues relating to women's rights, as well as more traditional areas such as parenting, fashion, home décor and cookery.



Daniah Naz is a 24-year-old working as a producer at a Karachi-based radio channel, FM 107. She produces a show based on social issues, especially those concerning women. “I have seen a lot of women being harassed in the workplace and always felt angry that they are too scared to stand up for themselves,” she said. “So when I got this opportunity to produce a show I decided to discuss such topics and hope it will enlighten women across society.”

Describing the show’s focus, she said, “We invite successful women from a variety of professions to not only speak about their careers but also provide important information and guidance to anyone who wants to join the profession or is already working in it. “Our guests include everyone – teachers, lawyers, social workers, doctors, etc – and they are requested to speak on different subjects that women should be aware of, not only relating to the workplace but life in general. The show also allows our listeners to ask the guests questions or seek guidance on various issues.”

“Women at home are always under estimated,” she pointed out. “But the majority of our callers are stay-at-home mothers and they have a lot of important and relevant questions, and sometimes opinions, on various topics. So we customise the show’s topics accordingly.”

Kiran Naz, also 24, works as a news anchor at FM 105, another Karachi-based radio channel. Having been in the field for three years, she says she prefers her work in radio to her earlier occupation as a part-time actor. “Our society has many levels with two extreme poles – the conservatives and the liberals,” she said. “Although a large number of women probably still face restrictions due to the conservative nature of their families, many of them have managed to prove themselves in the media. Radio has provided such women a chance to work without necessarily interacting with strangers, which is considered a bad thing by sections of our society.”

“My own family didn’t like me working in the entertainment media because it meant long and late hours,” she explained. “I must say I felt relieved after opting to join radio station. Radio allows one to use one’s intellect. The audience is quite sharp, you cannot get away with being pretty -- you need to have a brain and be able to speak well because your voice and what you say are your only connections to the listeners.”

Qurat ul Ain joined Radio Pakistan Islamabad in 2000. According to her, 15 years of working as an RJ has not only given her fame and respect, but also enabled her to learn a lot in the process. Unfortunately, her family was not supportive of her work, especially when she returned home late, and others, such as relatives and neighbours, were also critical. “I was very young when I joined the radio station and had to endure harassment from colleagues and producers, but I learned how to deal with them,” she said. “You can survive in this field if you have passion and confidence.”

Kiran Naz pointed out that the media are among the largest employers in Pakistan and many women work in different positions in media organisations. “Many of my friends from university wear hijabs but they have no problems working in the media,” she said. Interestingly, most of them have joined TV channels and many are working as reporters in the field. I suppose this shows that in many ways our society is not as rigid as it is thought to be.”

Neither Kiran nor Daniah Naz want to shift to TV because they are quite comfortable working for radio, where they feel the audience concentrates on their work rather than anything else. “TV needs glamour more than anything else,” said Naz. “Even a news presenter on TV has to be careful about her appearance – her clothes, accessories, makeup and hairstyle. As a RJ I don’t need to get dressed



up. All I need to do is impress my audience with my voice and keep them engaged. Radio gives you more freedom to work on the content.”

She said while they “may not be providing breaking news like the TV channels”, they give constant alerts about traffic situations and/or diversions; updates about road blocks, strikes and riots (common in Karachi) which are helpful to listeners on the move around the city,”

According to Kiran Naz, at least in Pakistan, television does not have the luxury of pursuing cultural or literary issues since there is always something political happening in the country. On the other hand, certain radio shows focus on paying tribute to singers, lyricists, poets and writers, which she believes is a good thing.

“Since we have to be constantly speaking on the radio, I think it helps us to give more information across a larger spectrum of topics. This allows us to talk about issues that are ignored by TV or lost among the breaking news,” she said.

Daniah Naz has a different motivation. “I am trying to get through to every woman in Pakistan through my show to teach them that they too have rights,” she said. “The journey has just begun.”

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### **Challenging the ‘equal opportunity’ mantra**

The media in Pakistan still have a long way to go to achieve gender balance. However, due to the mushrooming of electronic media houses since 2001, the number of women entering media professions has increased considerably. Glass ceilings and sticky floors are a reality for women in Pakistani media. However, there have been some exceptions, with brave women defying all norms and reaching the top.

Just over a third of respondents (36.49 percent) said their organisation had women at executive level. In top level management, almost half of all respondents (46.72 percent) said women comprised less than 10 percent of boards, executive groups and other senior company positions. The next largest group (18.24 percent) put the figure between 10-25 percent. Only 3 percent of respondents placed the number of women in top level roles above 50 percent, and this was evenly distributed between men and women.

It is a fact that the number of female owners of media houses or groups, and the number of women in decision-making positions such as chief executives or editors is still negligible. Even among that very small band, some have inherited their positions through dynastic family ownership – a trend reminiscent of dynastic politics in South Asia. Some of the most prominent names are: Sultana Siddiqui, Hum TV; Rameeza Nizami, Waqt TV; Amber Saigol, *Dawn*; Zohra Karim, *She Magazine*; Zebunnisa Hamidullah, *Mirror* (Abdullah, T 2013).

In terms of senior editorial roles, over half of respondents (51.82 percent) put the proportion of women in these positions at less than 10 per cent. This includes roles such as director, editor-in-chief, managing editor, executive producer, photographic editor, digital editor etc.

At the middle level editorial level, women held less than 10 percent of positions according to more than a third of respondents (38.69 percent). This comprised positions such as senior editor, chief of correspondents, design director, feature editor, foreign editor, etc. A fifth of respondents put the figure at 10-25 percent and 9.48 percent put it at 25-50 percent.



Most survey respondents (37.82 percent) who answered the question about the proportion of women media workers in their organisations, said women comprised less than 5 percent of their department. Another 29.41 percent said they comprised between 5-20 percent and 25.21 percent said they comprised 21-50 percent. Interestingly, 1.68 percent said women comprised 76-100 percent – so there are clearly some media out there with a strong female workforce.

As part of the IFJ research a number of interviews were conducted with media executives to explore the varying levels of gender equity in Pakistan’s major media. These views are included through this following section.

While some media houses were keen to point out their equal opportunity employer status and the numbers of women on staff and in decision-making roles, most did not have gender policies in place.

Having set up its first station in Rawalpindi in 1948, the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) now has over two dozen stations across the country, with programs in an equal number of languages. According to its controller of news and current affairs, Faqir Muhammad, the PBC headquarters has over 65 employees, comprising 12-15 women. Muhammad said the head of PBC, the director general, is currently female, and two of its 10 top-level management team are also women. PBC has 15 men and one woman at the senior management level. In middle management (including the editorial side), nine of the 40 are female.

He said PBC advertises job vacancies in the press and it does, specifically, encourage women to apply. Due to government restrictions on fresh appointments, PBC has not filled any new posts over the past year. While there are a range of full-time resource persons on contract, as well as district correspondents, PBC said that no freelancers work for the organisation.

According to Uzma Al-Karim, senior anchor and member of core committee on gender-sensitivity in Geo TV, approximately 11 percent of Geo’s staff are women. This is definitely more than the proportion of women in other media houses, she says, and it is due to the congenial and women-friendly environment at the channel. “The management believes that the presence of even such a small number of women has improved efficiency and organisational culture, as well as brand perception, of the company. Geo is seen as an equal opportunity employer and adopted a gender equality policy in 2004 and its implementation is constantly monitored by an independent committee.”

In-house training opportunities to build skills are equally available to female and male employees at Geo. Interestingly, the company has a ‘No Discrimination in Promotion’ policy, which includes no discrimination against men. Despite this, women are still missing in top positions. There are no female bureau chiefs, heads of news and current affairs or chief reporters. “It appears that the glass ceiling still exists, as do sticky floors that prevent women journalists from heading a section or department, let alone the overall set-up,” says Al-Karim.

GEO is one organisation that that has consciously determined to increase the proportion of women in the organisation. Towards this end, Al-Karim said personnel from the human resource department were to give preference to women during recruitment even if their scores were “slightly lower than those of their male counterparts”. “There is, in other words, an unwritten rule to maintain balanced representation of women and men,” she said.



English language daily *Dawn*, established by Mohammad Ali Jinnah (founder of Pakistan) in Karachi in August 1947, is today also published from Lahore and Islamabad. It has the largest circulation in the country among English newspapers, reaching over 800,000 readers, according to a recent internal survey. It currently employs 161 editorial staff: 137 men and 24 women (the latter constituting about 15 percent of the total).

*Dawn* editor, Zaffar Abbas, said the newspaper has a woman as chairperson and a man as chief executive officer. Among the seven assistant editors, four are women, and among the three resident editors, there is one woman. The news editor is a man. “The fact that more women are now working in the media has encouraged many others to join the profession,” Abbas said. “The growing numbers have helped women work on the evening shift, too. As a result we now have more women reporters as part of our team.”

The newspaper announces job opportunities through word-of-mouth or through the company’s human resources department. Jobs are not advertised because past experience with thousands of applicants makes it nearly impossible to identify the right person for the post. “We know most of the people who are already in the field, as well as those who graduate from some of the professional colleges, or those who apply for the internship program.” He said. “We choose on the basis of pure merit and avoid discrimination. Most of the women and men hired in the last couple of years came in through this system, which is working fine for us.”

Most employees of *Dawn* are full-timers. In some sections, staff are on one-year or three-year rolling contracts. District correspondents are usually on rolling contracts which are renewed each year. Very few freelancers write for *Dawn* and stories or features are commissioned only under special circumstances. Of the four journalists hired in the past year, two were women. There is no laid-down strategy, such as in-house training and mid-career skill-building, to increase the number of female staff but “conscious efforts are made” to improve the gender balance. However, the organisation has not put any monitoring mechanism in place to check this.

When she was appointed last year, Samina Pervaiz became the first and so far only woman director general of Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) in its 67-year history.

She said PBC not only provides basic facilities to its women employees but it also has 103 women working as regular employees in the organisation (these figures do not include anchors, readers, writers or contractual employees), not just in the country’s urban centres but also in remote areas in interior Sindh, Muzaffarabad and Kohat.

Geo TV Network, Pakistan’s first private TV channel, was established in April 2002 under the banner of the Jang media group. With a style that was very different from the monotone PTV (the state broadcaster), Geo (which translates from Urdu as ‘live on’) became the trendsetter in many ways.

One positive trend it set was employing women as frontline reporters – not only in cities like Karachi and Lahore, but also in Peshawar and other smaller places. From being restricted to ‘soft beats’ like social and cultural events, women began reporting on politics and conflict.

Asma Shirazi, now an iconic TV anchor, was among the change-makers. She inspired many with her candid reports and personal charisma. That was probably the first time a young woman in a headscarf was seen reporting from parliament or covering the war in Iraq. It was Asma Shirazi’s bravery that helped break the myth that a woman wears a headscarf cannot be an active journalist.



So Geo helped many young women come forward and join the media, with their mode of dress treated as a matter of personal choice.

But Geo has a negative flip side, too, in that it has led the way in introducing a sensational approach to news content in Pakistan. While it brought to the surface many issues relating to violence against women, it has not always present them in a gender-sensitive manner. Attempts to highlight acts of gender-based violence sometimes became counterproductive, with the use of songs, ultra-dramatic narration and/or the identification of women survivors undoing the benefits of breaking the silence on such crimes. Ironically, many of these reports were produced and presented by women reporters, some of them as gender-blind as their male counterparts. With Geo being the front-runner in the ratings race, other channels tended to copy its style and, in the process, churned out mildly or seriously gender-insensitive content.

Geo has come a long way from its original stance and is now trying to correct itself by learning from its own mistakes.

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## Reporting from the frontlines

Swat, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province is a more conservative, tradition-bound part of Pakistan than the country's larger cities. Here, a female reporter like Shazia Irum Gul is a rare sight.

However, Gul, who is an executive producer with Internews, thinks being a woman gives her an advantage over male reporters in certain ways. By virtue of her gender she is able to enter homes, communicate with women and draw out their perspectives on events and issues, which are usually not reflected in news stories.

Women's voices are rarely heard in conservative regions like Swat because male reporters only have access to men; the women are hidden away, not permitted to interact with strangers. According to Gul, her endeavour always is to highlight the human angle in a news story and, in particular, to highlight the experiences, concerns and opinions of the women of the area.

Since Swat has been a hotbed of conflict for a long time, especially when the Taliban were in control of the region, Gul has personally experienced problems connected to reporting from a conflict-ridden area. In her experience, male colleagues were not supportive of female reporters working in the field. For example, only male journalists were invited to a press conference held after the military regained control of Swat, and Gul had to run from pillar to post before she was 'allowed' to attend it.

During question time, only male journalists' questions were answered and they evidently did not view that as unfair. Instead of respecting her as a colleague they taunted her, implying that she was there just for a taste of adventure and was sure to run away at the sound of even a firecracker. Later, she even received threats that she would have to pay a high price if she continued with her work.

When she visited the press club in Mohmand Agency in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) after applying for membership, she was told not to come again because the lives of other members of the club had been threatened on account of her presence.



According to Gul, despite such experiences, she was not discouraged or afraid. Referring to her report on the floods in Swat in 2010, she said that while many male colleagues refused to go to the flood affected areas, she did and was able to file a report from the ground.

The fact that reporters get no backing from media houses or the government in terms of security while working in dangerous territory is another problem highlighted by Gul. This is a serious issue since journalists working in frontier areas like Swat are often on the hit list of militants.

According to her, reporters working in conflict zones need to be sensitive and ensure that their reports would not expose any individuals involved in the stories to danger. For example, when she wrote about a German organisation working on the rehabilitation of children who had been recruited by militants, she refrained from mentioning details from her interviews with the children recruits in an effort to protect them from harm.

Another reporter<sup>1</sup> working in a remote and conflict-prone area said it is really important for reporters to go into the field, meet people and do research in order to highlight issues of social value. In a country like Pakistan, reporters whose work takes them to conflict areas need to be aware of the particular circumstances of each place and think of ways to minimise danger, she said. For example, “travelling by car in isolated areas would make your movements obvious – so it’s best to travel by bus. Also, it’s important to try and complete your assignment during the day as the darkness of night poses its own dangers.” She also stressed the fact that a supportive management that provides mechanisms that can minimise the dangers faced by reporters is also essential.

Zainab Khan is an 18-year-old student who began reporting for the daily newspaper, *Haqiq*, two years ago. At present she is anchoring a Pushto language program, *Qadam Pa Qadam*, on PBC Radio, Peshawar. She reports mainly from Mohmand Agency, Charsadda and Peshawar in the FATA.

According to Khan, she initially faced many problems. The village khan and sardar (chiefs) ordered her to stop working as a reporter because a woman from their area should not be working at all. However, she persevered and kept trying to make them understand that she was simply trying to raise awareness of issues that affected people in the area, especially women. In an effort to gain their confidence, she let them listen to her programmes before they were aired. She finally managed to win them over and finds it easier to function now.

Some of Khan’s reports have actually changed things on the ground. For example, her story about a woman who died because there was no gynaecologist in the area to treat her led to the appointment of a doctor by the government.

She continues to report on a range of issues, including education and health. She admits she still many challenges, with even her family not very supportive of her career. However, she wants to continue in the field because she believes there is a great need for female reporters in the FATA to highlight the experiences and concerns of the local women.

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<sup>1</sup> Name withheld as per interviewees request



### Life in a challenging media environment

The largest proportion of respondents, 32.84 percent rated their overall experience at work as ‘supportive, a good work atmosphere’, followed by 28.46 percent who rated it as ‘challenging but the positives outweigh the negatives’.

Interestingly, more than a third of women (35.44 percent) described their working environment as a ‘supportive, a good work atmosphere’. Whereas more men (31.57 percent) described theirs as ‘challenging but the positives outweigh the negatives’, a sentiment shared by 26.58 percent of women. The situation was more difficult for others with 8.03 percent of all respondents describing theirs as a ‘difficult/hostile work atmosphere’. A small percentage of men and women (3.65 percent) said their work was ‘frustrating, I feel unappreciated/undervalued’. Only one respondent, a male, said he was considering another profession.

Some of these feelings were echoed in interviews with women in the media interviewed for the research. But in spite of this, it is clear women in media are persevering.

Sheena Patail, a radio journalist at Apna Karachi FM 107, has been associated with the media industry for 11 years. Being a radio journalist is a passion with her but it is not an easy job: it requires her to be technically savvy so that she can operate the complex system that relays news, views and music to listeners. She not only hosts programs but is involved in the selection of content, including choice of guests. Ultimately, she feels particularly lucky to be working with FM 107 where she has several women colleagues, including producers, and engineers.

“My work is not as respected as it should be. Nor is it appreciated by the general public. Many hours of hard work lie behind the daily two-hour programme that I anchor,” she said. In the course of her career she has encountered many challenges, both inside the office and outside it, but she keeps going.

In terms of opportunities for recruitment and advancement, 35.38 percent of women rated their experience as ‘good’, almost the same as men (32.08 percent). More men rated their chances as ‘excellent’ (15.09 percent) or ‘very good’ (32.08 percent). Women were less optimistic, rating with only 9.23 percent rating their chances as ‘excellent’ and 21.54 percent ‘good’.

When asked if men and women received equal wages in their media organisation, more than half the men (58.49 percent) thought they did. Less women (49.23 percent) thought women received equal wages for equal work and 40 percent of women felt they didn’t.

When it comes to monthly professional income a pay gap divide clearly emerged in the results. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23.36 percent) earned between US\$80-250 a month, followed by equal proportions (both 19.71 percent) in the pay brackets of less than US\$80 and US\$251-400. So too, the proportion of women earning less than US\$80 (27 percent) was significantly larger than that of men (9 percent).



What is your monthly professional income?	Total	Female	Male	Other	Female	Male	Other	Total
Less than US \$80	27	22	5	0	27.85%	8.77%	0.00%	19.71%
US \$80 - \$250	32	14	18	0	17.72%	31.58%	0.00%	23.36%
US \$251 - \$400	27	19	8	0	24.05%	14.04%	0.00%	19.71%
US \$401 - \$600	17	11	6	0	13.92%	10.53%	0.00%	12.41%
US \$601 - \$800	12	5	7	0	6.33%	12.28%	0.00%	8.76%
More than \$800	22	8	13	1	10.13%	22.81%	100%	16.06%
Grand Total	137	79	57	1	100%	100%	100%	100%

Women’s over-representation in the lowest income bracket and under-representation in the highest income bracket suggests either that the principle of “equal pay for equal work” is not followed in media organisations. It could also mean that women remain concentrated in the lower levels of media work, with few making it into the higher echelons.

Of the 16 percent of respondents earning more than US\$800, 22.81 percent were male and only 10.13 percent female.

Traditionally, media women in Pakistan have been paid lower wages than their male counterparts, and this practice continues to date, albeit with some notable exceptions. However, recent national legislation, the Protection against Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act passed on March 9, 2010, as well as Pakistan’s ratification of ILO Conventions, especially C100 and C111,<sup>v</sup> makes the continuance of gendered wage differentials and discrimination towards women employees untenable.<sup>vi</sup>

Commenting on the profile of women in the media, journalist and Karachi Union of Journalist official Seema Shafi said: “Only a handful of women come from affluent backgrounds who do well in terms of promotions and increments. The majority of women workers face injustices such as low pay, slow or no promotions, bad working conditions and harassment. However, even ‘connected’ women don’t hold any positions with decision-making powers in media organizations.”

As part of the research, a number of women were also interviewed in regional media. Women have been part of the regional language media in Pakistan (for example, media in languages other than English and Urdu), from newspapers and magazines to radio and television, even though they were few in number. Comments from some women suggest that they face more or less the same issues and problems as their counterparts in the Urdu media.

According to Fizza Khakwani of the *Daily Jhook*, a Saraiki language newspaper published from Multan in the southern part of Punjab Province, reporting is her passion. However, when she started her career, in 2009, the environment was not supportive. She was told that as she was the only woman working in the newspaper, she should work from home and submit her reports by email. She only visited the office for official meetings. This was not surprising because people living in the Saraiki-speaking belt are very conservative. She was, however, encouraged by her editor to continue working.



Female journalists in Pakistan are generally not encouraged to take up the posts of editor, editor in chief and news in-charge. Similarly, they feel discriminated against in selections for training opportunities and international trips. Along with the obvious challenges like these, media organisations in Pakistan, like other mainstream professions, rarely provide basic facilities for employees, such as separate washrooms for men and women, rest rooms and childcare facilities. These are often considered ‘bonus benefits’ and not a priority, even for female staff.

Attiya Aamir is a senior program manager at PBC, Karachi. PBC, or Radio Pakistan (it was renamed in 1972 but continues to be known by this name), says it provides equal opportunities to female and male staff for trainings, promotions and overseas visits. Only one room is available on the premises for women to use for prayers and meals.

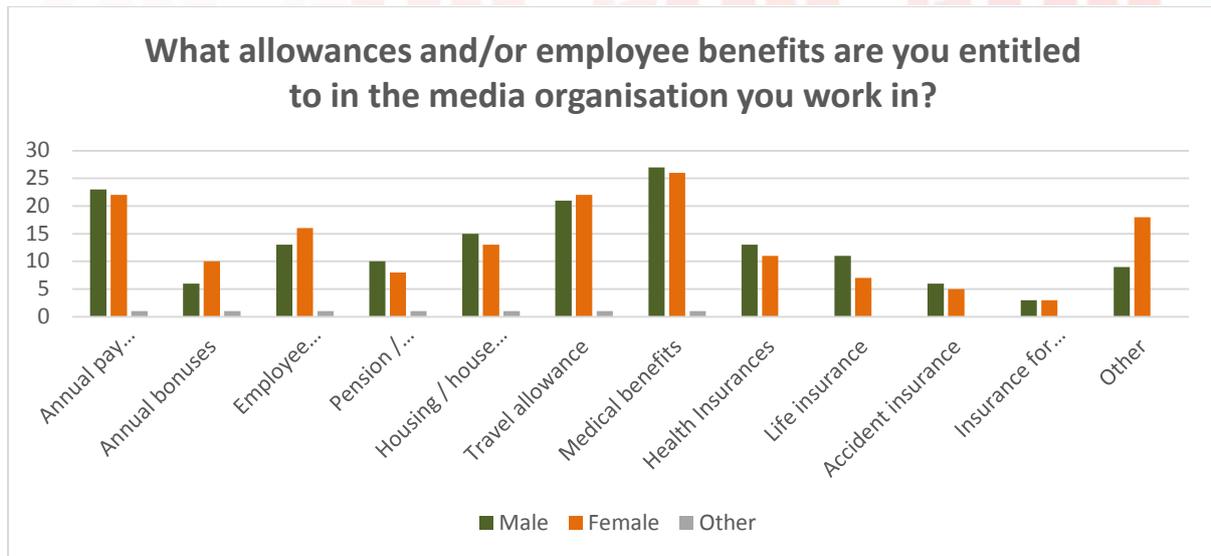
“Colleagues are helpful when anyone faces an issue, collectively approaching the management and making sure the problem is solved,” she said. The organisation has a union which is active in raising and solving the problems of female employees. There are two groups in the union, of which one has women’s wing and is vocal on issues concerning female members.

PBC has made childcare facilities available for employees with children. Sensitive to media content related to women, the management issues instructions about the use of language and other aspects of programming. According to Aamir, she had “never” faced problems from male colleagues in her 12-year career, adding on a lighter note that the fact that her husband was in the army may have kept them at bay!

When Fehmida Bhutt joined Khyber TV on in October 2005, she was the channel’s first female reporter, anchor and producer. Now there are three women in the news department. In her role at Khyber TV (in the Pushto language) she wears multiple hats. She is the editor, anchor, producer, sub-editor and panel operator at the Islamabad bureau office of the channel. But when she goes into the field for work, she is not provided with a camera or transport facilities. Since her work is seldom appreciated, she often feels discouraged.

Although she is given an annual increment, her salary is very low and she finds it difficult to make ends meet. As a woman she is never given a chance to report from places such as the Supreme Court, the Foreign Office or Parliament. Her organisation has no policy on gender equality maternity leave or sexual harassment. Under the circumstances, women who suffer harassment find no support within the organisation and usually have to no option but to quit their jobs, she said.

Allowances and benefits most often paid to both women and men included annual pay increases, employee provident funds, housing/house rent allowances, travel allowances and medical benefits – although even the highest of these (annual pay increases) only went to a third of all respondents (33.58 percent).



Other benefits such as health insurance, annual bonuses, pension/superannuation and life insurance were paid out to less than 18 percent of respondents. Only 12.41 percent of people received annual bonuses. There was no obvious distinction in the benefits paid to men and women. The response with the largest gender gap was life insurance with 19 percent men and 8 percent female – a poor figure considering the high rate of journalist attacks in Pakistan.

Some respondents (13.14 percent) said they had been denied a benefit they were entitled to. Some of the responses they gave were and woman made up 72.22 percent of those affected. When asked why they had been denied, the following responses were given:

- *As we are contractual employees the management we are not entitled under wage award which is wrong.* - Female
- *Despite claiming as equal opportunity employer they don't give equal medical facility to males and females. In our organisation, a male worker can have medical cover for his immediate family like his Spouse, kids and parents. While a female worker can give medical cover to only her kids and widow mother which is violation of their claim.* - Female
- *We (the whole reporting team of our organization) are not given an annual pay increase for about 5 years.* – Male

In terms of facilities within media organisation, some organisations are better than others. Most respondents (68.61 percent) said they had separate toilets for women and men and more than half (55.47 percent) had security at their workplace. Transport after late shifts was available to just 40.87 and prayer rooms were available to just over a third (36.49 percent). Disturbingly, again considering safety issues in Pakistan, less than a third (28.46 percent) had access to safety equipment. A mere 2.9 percent of respondents said they had access to childcare facilities at work.



In terms of paid leave, around half of all respondents had access to annual leave, sick leave or casual leave. Maternity leave was only available to 24.08 percent (men and women gave responses to this question). Paternity leave was available to less than 3 percent of respondents. Once again, of the 9.48 percent who said they had been denied paid leave that they were entitled to, women made up the majority (69.23 percent).

Just under third of respondents (30.25 percent) who answered the questions on leave and re-entry for women after childbirth in their organisation described it as ‘good’. Around a quarter (26.89 percent) described it as ‘acceptable’ and just 15.12 percent described it as ‘excellent’. More men (37.73 percent) thought it was ‘good’ compared to 23.07 percent of women.

According to Faqir Muhammad, controller of news and current affairs PBC, Islamabad, the PBC follows government policy on maternity leave. This leave is a three-month leave with full payment of salary. He said there is also no gender discrimination at PBC in terms of pay and promotions and all staff have access to annual pay increases, Employee Provident Fund, pension, house rent allowance, travel allowance, and medical benefits. However, the corporation does not provide any kind of insurance: health, life, accident or for covering conflict. Female staff have access to separate facilities such as restrooms and washrooms. The organisation has a proper security system in place. Medical care is also provided in case of any emergency.

A senior anchor and member of the core committee on gender sensitivity, Geo TV, Karachi, Uzma Al-Karim, says Geo offers maternity leave for 84 days (slightly less than three months), during which the employee receives her full salary as well as all facilities and allowances. Additional leave is also granted, subject to approval by the management. There is no policy on paternity leave.

Geo also offers free pick-and-drop services to women workers, every two hours and is also available for male employees. However, there are no childcare facilities. According to Geo’s human resources department, the company provides certain benefits and allowances to all employees, irrespective of gender: travel allowance, medical benefits, health insurance, life insurance, accident insurance and special insurance for covering conflict. Unlike many other media organisations, where women do not have access to basic facilities like separate toilets or designated rest rooms, Geo provides all the



required facilities, including separate prayer areas.

Dawn editor, Zaffar Abbas, said the company has a 90-days maternity leave policy with full salary, and availing such leave does not adversely affect the woman employee's job. Full medical insurance cover is provided to all employees. However, there is at present no paternity leave policy.

According to Abbas, moves have been made in the recent past to provide childcare facilities, but not many women workers were keen to use such facilities. However, the newspaper has a "child-friendly" atmosphere, and both women and men employees are allowed to bring their kids to the office as long as they can ensure that the work atmosphere is not disturbed. "Two of our assistant editors (one woman and one man) often bring their kids to the morning meetings, and it works fine for us. In the past we had even offered to create a nursery for children, but only one parent showed any interest. The offer is still open."

Dawn has yet to conduct salary audits and reviews of promotions to evaluate how women are faring in comparison to men in terms of pay and opportunities for career advancement. Annual pay increases are part of all employees' salary packages, as are annual bonuses. Separately, and depending on the company's financial position, additional performance-based increments are also considered, but not on annual basis. Dawn's full-time employees are entitled to pension, provident fund, as well as gratuity. Those on renewable annual contracts are also eligible to provident fund and gratuity. House rent is embedded in the salary as part of the Wage Board Award. Full medical cover is also available for both permanent and contractual employees, and the company is looking into the possibility of introducing insurance cover for staff working in conflict zones.

Salma Soomro is a reporter for *Daily Ibrat*, (a Sindhi Language daily published from Hyderabad, Karachi and Sukkur), and sub-editor of Marvi (weekly women's page for *Daily Ibrat*). According Soomro, basic facilities such as transport are missing in Hyderabad. For example, some women journalists do not wish to ride on a motorbike with a male photographer because it is not culturally acceptable. Women also find it difficult to stay on at the office late at night, even if news is still coming in because of the absence of transport to take them home safely in the early hours of the morning. She is the only woman reporter in the paper, though six women work in other departments. The only woman in the upper tiers of the newspaper management is the owner's wife.

She says that women journalists who work for newspapers on a full time basis are often denied a formal appointment letter. She herself has been working for three years without an appointment letter. Her salary is Rs.5000 (USD 49) a month but payments are late and often only half the monthly amount is paid at a time. But Soomro thinks journalists in Karachi are treated better than those in Hyderabad. She is not aware of any written policy on maternity leave or sexual harassment but, when women face with such harassment, they usually complain to the news editor.

While the State-owned PBC and larger media houses, the smaller/private media organisations attempt to sustain a 'profitable' business, they often do not put a lot of effort and money into building the capacity of their employees. Training and professional development programmes are few and even they are often avoided by the over-worked employees themselves.

Nearly half the respondents (47.06 percent) working in media organisations said they had been offered some form of training or professional development. However, this comprised more than half the men (50.94 percent), but only 43.07 percent of women.



While they might not always receive training at work, the overwhelming majority of respondents said they had participated in trainings at some stage in their career - a staggering 87.59 percent. This reflected closely in men and women, though marginally more women had received training than men. More than half those who received training (67.5 percent) undertook their training with NGOs, followed by 37.5 percent with their employers. More women undertook their training with NGOs and the IFJ, compared with men. But more men undertook their training with their employer and with unions, compared to women respondents.

When asked about the proportion of women in the trainings they had attended, the largest proportion of respondents (32.11 percent) said that women made up 10-25 percent of participants. Another 21.89 percent (each group) said women comprised less than 10 percent or between 25-50 percent. Just over half of respondents said they had not been provided with safety training (54.01 percent). Women comprised of 62.16 percent of these respondents. Similarly, as with other trainings, of those that received training, most respondents have received safety training (52 percent) through NGOs, followed by their employer (36 percent).

When asked about gender equity training, 70.80 percent of all respondents said it 'could improve the working environment for men and women' and 60.58 percent agreed 'it would help people better understand the issue'. More than a third (36.49 percent) said it 'is something I would participate in'. This comprised 41.77 percent of women, but only 29.82 percent of men.

Gender equity training: (select all that apply)	Is not needed because women already have equal rights	Is not something I have ever thought about	Would help people better understand the issue	Is something that I would participate in	Could improve the working environment for men and women
Male	13	2	33	17	39
Female	6	7	50	33	58
Other	0	1	0	0	0
Total	19	10	83	50	97

Interestingly, 13.87 percent of respondents said gender equity training 'is not needed because women already have equal rights'. Another 7.30 percent confessed it was 'not something I have ever thought about'.

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## Bombs, blasts and bloodbaths in Peshawar

By Nadia Sabohi

On the horrible morning of Sunday, 22 November 2013, the Christian community of Peshawar, in North Western Pakistan, was targeted by two consecutive suicide bomb blasts at the All Saints Church in the Kohati area of the city.



Arriving at the scene within ten minutes of the incident, I found the walls and floor of the church covered with human blood. Human body parts were scattered across the premises – men, women, the elderly and children were among the victims. I was lined up by my TV channel to broadcast live and the beeps began. I spoke to the wounded, the families of victims, officials and community representatives. The live transmission continued for almost six hours. It was a difficult situation. The victims' families were upset as I stepped on the blood of their loved ones, but there was no bloodless space on the floor to walk on. Some challenged me angrily. The next morning I went back for follow-up stories, and the situation was almost the same.

This is an example of just one terrorist attack in Peshawar, the frontline city in the war against terror. Journalists based in this part of the country report on two or three bomb blasts every single day. Terror attacks have been going on for as long as 12 years, ever since the United States of America invaded Afghanistan and ousted the Taliban government. In the terrorised FATA region and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, news reporting is no game, even for male reporters. Often, when we rush to a blast scene, a second blast takes dozens or even hundreds of lives. Many journalists have died in this way.

For a female TV journalist, it is like being in a battlefield with enemies on all sides. Women may seem to be respected in our society, and in the field of journalism. However, when we sit and discuss a report with a male colleague, they often try to discourage us. This is the reason why many women are hesitant about entering this field and why some women leave. But nowadays the main problem is that we are worried about our safety – our very lives.

At the same time it is encouraging that in a male-dominated society like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where there is a cultural barrier that prevents women from working outside the home, more and more women are joining journalism.<sup>vii</sup>

The fierce competition between media organisations puts journalists at even higher risk. When a blast or any other emergency takes place, I have to break the news. This pressure makes me tense but, as a professional, I have to prove that our channel is the best at breaking news. If I break the news of a blast, the channel I work for will demand that I find more casualties and a higher death toll in order to compete with other media organisations. The producer and director at the head office do not always understand how critical the situation is on the spot. They do not understand the problems of a reporter.

I always try to tell the real story but, as a human being, a mother, sister and wife, I am often overcome by my emotions. In Pakistan, media organisations prefer women journalists to cover these types of stories because they assume we can bring in a human touch. When I report on the families of blast victims, I try to make their stories real and show the problems they face after the sudden death of a loved family member.

Women journalists in my province have to face the reality that many people here do not accept our work identities and the fact that we need to work in offices and move about outdoors. In their opinion, women are not supposed to go outside. During my 17 years of experience as a journalist, I have come across many male colleagues who have been narrow-minded about working with women. They tend to be over-critical: "Oh, you did well but you did not mention this issue in your beeper" or "Oh, your story was not balanced."

But I manage to dig out many breaking news stories and function professionally. For example, I visited Peshawar Central Jail to do stories about Dr Shakil Afridi, the Pakistani physician who helped



the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to locate Osama bin Laden. Because I am a woman, the authorities often do not take me seriously and offer me a cup of tea – but I am confident about being a professional woman and doing my work professionally. It bothers me that nowadays our organisations try to cash in on female journalists, using them to cover certain issues, taking advantage of the fact that some leaders and officials like having women journalists interview them.

I believe that education and training are very important for reporters. Media organisations need to arrange more and more training programmes. In the current situation, the security risks and social pressures are the main problems for me as a female journalist. There is no doubt that men as well as women face many of these challenges in the field of journalism. However, these problems do not hold professionals back. As I leave for work each day I am not even sure that I will get back home safely but, as a professional, no hurdle is too high.

*Nadia Sabohi is an investigative reporter for Geo TV news in Pakistan, and their correspondent in Peshawar and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa*

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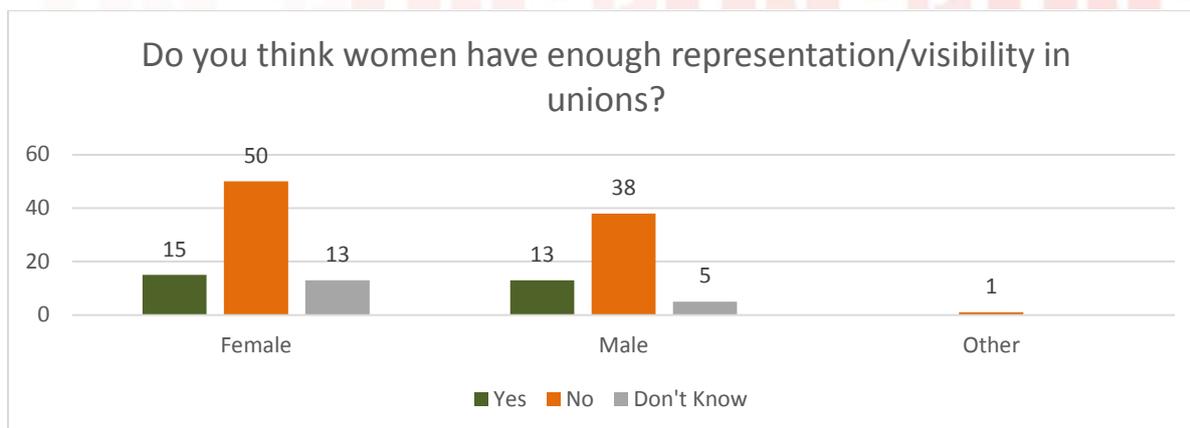
### **Encouraging women’s representation in unions and clubs**

Journalists’ unions are quite active in Pakistan but gender balance is usually lacking in these organisations. Women’s membership in unions, whether in-house or external , lags behind that of men. Similarly, the few who are members are rarely seen in leadership roles.

As the survey revealed, only 38.65 percent of respondents who answered this question said they were members of a workers union within their organisation and women made up 41.30 percent of those respondents. More than half of all respondents (55.47 percent) said they were members of a national union or media/journalism association outside their media organisation. Less than half of all women respondents (45.56 percent) were member of a national union, compared to 70.18 percent of men.

Of the 36 women union members surveyed, 22.22 percent were officials or office bearers in a national union, 11.11 percent were represented an office union only and 25 percent were officials or office beaters in both a national union and a workers union. More male union members (27.5 percent) were office bearers in a national union, 5 percent were officials in office unions and 17.5 percent were officials in both.

When it comes to representation and presenting women’s voices, more than half all respondents (64.96 percent) did not think women had enough representation/visibility in unions. This was largely an even gender breakdown between men and women.



While more and more media women are joining trade unions, both national and local, more of them need to contest elections to become union office bearers and, thereby, give women greater visibility and voice in the organisations.<sup>viii</sup>

In terms of getting better representation for women, almost three quarters of all respondents (73.72 percent) supported quotas or proportional representation for women in union leadership. This comprised 77.21 percent of women and 68.42 percent of men.

The Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) was established in 1950 and is the only organization representing journalists through the country. It caters the journalists from print and electronic media and includes television channels, newspapers, periodicals, magazine and radio.

PFUJ has as many as 12,000 members but sadly only 310 female members. There are four members in the 36-member executive committee. There are no women currently employed by the union.

The PFUJ says it has determined to increase the number of women members as well as increase their representation in the union officials, raising this from 10 percent to 30 percent at the next election in 2015. The PFUJ says it has a “women’s wing” in the union and a “gender committee” to resolve the issues of women members – one of its key objectives being to increase women’s membership. The union says it has a gender policy.

Women’s participation in unions is constrained by social factors, especially in the more remote Tribal Areas. The Tribal Union of Journalists was formed 25 years ago. According to ex-Press Secretary, Rasool Dawar, women’s presence in its union is a challenge largely because of a lack of women in the profession. “The TUJ has an all-male membership of 300 journalists. Tribal society is very conservative, and a woman reporter holding microphone is a rare sight. There might be women working in media houses on the desk who fear for lives and they don't want anybody see them so that they have no problems when they come home to their village”. In fact, the constitution of the FATA Tribal Union of journalists’ oath has been written in masculine form. There has yet been no demand for an amendment as there is not a single woman member.

Other metropolitan unions are making changes for the betterment of their women members. When the Karachi Union of Journalists (KUJ) came into being in August 1948, it only dealt with the print media, but in 2010 the electronic and online media were also included. The KUJ has also evolved in other directions: as the number of women journalists increased, the KUJ not only tried to convince more women to register as members – currently KUJ has only 200 women members out of 1700 -



but increased the number of women on its elected body with one woman in a senior decision-making role, a senior joint secretary.

However, getting women journalists on board is not easy, as Wajid Isfahani General Secretary of KIJ revealed: “It is so difficult to convince women to join the Union. It took me months to convince some of my female colleagues to come out of their comfort zone and stand up for their rights. But in most cases I failed to convince them.” The main reason for their reluctance was because their families didn’t want them to join, because they were afraid that as union workers they would have to face extraordinary – mainly dangerous – situations like protests, sit-ins and demonstrations.

Seema Shafi is one of the three women elected as member executive council for KIJ in 2013 and member of the Union’s Women Committee. She said: “I never thought about contesting KIJ elections. Then I realized that if women didn’t take the initiative to join the union and try to find solutions to their own problems, then we should not complain. I joined the KIJ to work for women. I believe if we have women in the elected body, we will be able to bring the change we want.”

Benish Abbas and Fakiha Haider, also active members of KIJ, while appreciating the inclusion of women members in the elected body, feel more needs to be done, for example by forming a union at the organisational level to tackle issues faced by women and providing remedies on the spot.

Abbas feels problems faced by women in the workplace are largely ignored because colleagues – mostly men – cannot relate and often accuse women of exaggeration. Remedies, if proposed, are usually inadequate. Haider thinks journalists, especially women, should be given an initiation at the beginning of their careers so that they are aware of their rights.

“The importance of more female members joining the union was not lost on us when we were selecting our panel for the general body election in 2013. And we realized early that we needed more women on the panel to cater to the increasing number of female journalists,” said Isfahani. “And for the first time in KIJ’s history, we had three women contesting the elections from our side including the senior joint secretary and two members of the executive council - all three won the elections.”

Abbas thinks the number of women needs to be increased so that women make up more than 40% of the elected panel. Isfahani agrees that the presence of women has helped bring in more female members to attend union events and participate in activities that were considered ‘taboo’ earlier. He thinks that if there is “more participation of women journalists in the policy-making process in the media as well as the union it would help us to be able to resolve issues faced by women journalists like getting paid maternity leave; equal pay and promotion; safety in workplace.”

The Rawalpindi/Islamabad Union of Journalists (RIUJ), established in 1952, offers membership to journalists from both print and electronic media. Women’s presence and role in the RIUJ improved in the wake of some policy changes regarding women’s inclusion journalists’ unions in Pakistan. In the run-up to a Women Journalists’ Convention, it was proposed that four seats be allocated for female journalists in the elected bodies of unions. The constitution of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists was revised accordingly in May 2002.

The RIUJ today has 2600 members and nearly a quarter of them (approximately 500) are women. The union’s 18-member elected body includes three women (19 percent of the total).RIUJ general secretary Bilal Dar said they want to double the number of women on the elected body.



Unions are one thing, but press clubs also have gender issues to face. According to *Ali Hassan*, a veteran journalist from Hyderabad, Sindh: “Women are generally not active in press club elections although they do come at our request to cast their votes. However, they play no role at decision-making levels.”

Sheher Bano agrees: “The press club is considered a male-dominated space. In fact, the atmosphere in press clubs is such that women are not comfortable there; they do not feel respected as colleagues by male journalists. Often, male journalists are drunk and harass the women. Whenever female journalists want to file nomination papers, they are either rejected or told to contest as independent candidates. How can women contest as independent candidates without any support and resources? ...Those women [journalists] who raise their voices against such victimisation and discrimination are labelled as women of loose character... It is only during elections that male journalists show some support for female journalists in order to get their votes.”

Imrana Komal, belongs to the Multan Press Club, but says women do not stand as candidates even though they do cast their votes during elections. In her view, women journalists’ involvement in press club elections would be actively appreciated by the entire journalistic community.

Komal said that although women journalists continue to face several problems as press club members, her decision to stand for election was strongly encouraged and she was duly elected. Later, however, it turned out that the support of male members of the club only extended to the elections. She and a female colleague found that male members of the club’s executive body (of which both were members) appeared uncomfortable with their participation in meetings, repeatedly saying that they were unable to express themselves openly in front of women.

Province	Number of Press Clubs	Number of Regd. Women	Number of Regd. Men	Men-Women Ratio
Sindh	23	219	2628	12:1
Punjab	37	375	7954	21:1
Baluchistan	30	12	559	47:1
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	25	35	768	22:1
Gilgit- Baltistan	6	2	82	41:1

According to *Aneela Shaheen*, a member of the Peshawar Press Club, all 24 districts of the province have press clubs. Of the 372 members of the Peshawar club, 20-25 are women. Members elect a five-member cabinet and a ten-member governing body to run the club on a day-to-day basis. No female member is an elected office bearer.

Shaheen says that female journalists had only recently started to participate in the press club elections. After she was elected Joint Secretary of the club in 2009 she proposed the introduction of a quota system for female members of the Peshawar Press Club in its Executive Body. The proposal was not approved by the all-male executive body. Shaheen’s effort to set up a committee within the press club to monitor press reports to detect gender insensitivity was also stillborn, with editors apparently rejecting the suggestions outright.

Understanding the problems facing women in professional associations and unions, KUJ formed a Women’s Committee in May 2014, incorporating senior female journalists from all media organizations. Though members can bring their complaints to the committee, few have approached



it. The committee has proposed the representation of women journalists in elections and to get elected as office bearers.

Haider said, “It’s a great that KUJ has a women committee think but at the moment I believe it is overwhelmed ... it has to start from scratch. But this was because of the low number of women in the field in the past. The recent media boom has brought more women into the field.”

Benish Abbas said while KUJ is working hard to form a strategy to tackle harassment and all kinds of gender discrimination in the workplace, “it will take time.” The KUJ women’s committee is working on a gender policy after consulting female workers from the grass-root level and with different media organisations. KUJ is also planning to launch a campaign against violence against women and how it should be reported in the media.

Discussing some of the barriers to women’s participation in unions, as well as the media, RIUJ’s Bilal Dar asserted that many women have no time for union activities. “Trade unionism is a very tough job, so many women avoid joining unions,” he said. Since media owners tend to discourage workers’ involvement in unions, many journalists, including women, do not join them or participate in their activities for fear of losing their jobs.

The RIUJ has a gender equity committee, set up to promote equal rights. They also have a gender equity policy in place. Although they have not yet adopted a policy on sexual harassment at the workplace, Dar said they did have a committee to ‘look into’ incidents of sexual harassment and related issues. He agreed that it was important for the union to evaluate wages, ensure equal salaries and conduct gender and media based research studies and training programmes.

Fakiha Haider thinks that while it is important to train women journalists, it is not enough. Male journalists should also be trained in this as they hold all senior positions, because unless their attitude changes, the scenario will not change.

Respondents were asked what it would take to change the situation in Pakistan’s unions and journalism clubs. Nearly a third (31.38 percent) of all respondents said unions and clubs ‘should work with media employers on joint strategies on gender equity’. Nearly one fifth (18.98 percent) said unions and clubs ‘could improve their work on gender equity’ and another 17.52 percent said ‘a national gender equity policy’ was needed.

Unions and journalism organizations in my country: (Please choose only one of the following)	Total	Female	Male	Other
Already promote diversity and equity	6	0	6	0
Could improve their work on gender equity	26	14	12	0
No fixed view	20	11	9	0
Should adopt a national gender equity policy	24	12	12	0
Should lobby government for stronger gender equity legislation	18	13	4	1
Should work with media employers on joint strategies on gender equity	43	29	14	0
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>1</b>



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**Women presiding over some unions**

*The News* Employees Union (in-house Union of *The News*' employees), established in 1995 and has a total of 183 members, of whom just 13 are women. The union has a 12-member governing body and a seven-member managing committee. In 2014, for the first time in its 23-year history, it got a female president and two other women are in decision-making positions: a vice president and a managing committee member.

According to Sheher Bano, editor supplements, *The News*, Karachi, and president of the News Employees Union, Karachi, women journalists face many problems in the workplace. They need to be aware of their rights and also have the confidence to stand up for themselves. "After my election as union president, I have made it mandatory for all union office bearers to contact women, start enlisting them and highlighting their concerns," she said. "I have also set up a women's committee which will look into issues such as equal pay, work appraisals, promotions, medical insurance, maternity leave, separate washrooms, transport, working hours, safety on the job, workplace harassment, and gender discrimination in assignments (beats).

She said the committee will try to bring more women into decision-making positions, increase women's participation in union activities, identify their problems and possible resolutions, revise the existing policies of the organisation to make them more women-friendly, work on creating a gender policy, raise awareness about sexual harassment at the workplace and take up cases of harassment, if any. The committee will also contact the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), Unions of Journalists (UJs) and Press Clubs to convince them to encourage more women to join unions.

Although the union does not yet have any specific strategies to increase the number of women in decision-making roles in the union, Bano said, as an initial move, they are ensuring that women are well-represented in negotiating processes with managements. But first, she said "it is necessary to increase awareness among women employees and convince them that their representation in the trade union will bring about a change."

Sarah Batool, a member of the News Employees Union, thinks the appointment of a woman union president is refreshing and a confidence-builder. "It gives new people like me confidence that women can move forward in this field and achieve important positions on merit."

Another member Madiha Asif said: "We have seen a big shift in the way the union is dealing with women-related issues because of the presence of three women in decision-making positions in the body. But a lot of work still needs to be done." According to her, the media has of late become a serious target for many different political and religious elements, leading to injury and even death of media personnel. Under such extraordinary circumstances and with such grave issues to deal with, women's issues tend to get ignored, she said.

In Batool's opinion, "There is not enough female presence and participation in decision-making roles and structures or policies that promote gender equality in the workplace are also missing. There have been no initiatives to promote gender equity and sensitivity in the media and something needs to be done about this."



The News Employees Union does not have any mechanism to deal with the issue of sexual harassment. However, according to Shehr Bano, the union has drawn up a wish-list to improve the experience of women working in the media:

- Women should be employed on an equal basis in all fields of media.
- Women’s issues with mobility and their dual roles as home-makers and professionals should not be allowed to hinder their growth.
- News coverage about women should not be biased and unjust as it is now.
- A pleasant and harassment-free working environment should be provided to women. Awareness should be raised about sexual harassment and training provided on how to avoid and deal with such problems.
- The present discrimination in the allocation of medical coverage to female employees, possibly because women are not seen as primary income-earners, should be removed.
- Success stories of female media workers who are good home-makers as well as good professionals should be covered in the media.
- Gender sensitivity should be promoted among males so that they understand the roles and responsibilities of women.
- Maternity leave should be increased to one year. Paternity leave should also be introduced so as to increase understanding and cooperation among couples.
- Proper seating arrangements for females, separate washrooms with waste bins, a retiring room, a prayer room, personal lockers and a daycare centre with transport facilities should be provided.
- Flexible timings should be provided for women.
- There should be a move to appoint more female bosses with decision-making powers.
- Appraisals, increments and promotions of both men and women should be based on professional experience, expertise and performance.

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### **Some media leading by example on sexual harassment**

The Protection against Sexual Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act was passed on 9 March 2010. This was the first time that sexual harassment – in public or private spaces or in workplaces – was defined in Pakistan through a legal instrument. However, Section 509 of the Pakistan Penal Code, 1860, did refer to “insulting the modesty” of a woman but there was no clear definition of “modesty”.

But the more important consideration is whether or not such growing awareness and legislation has led to improved gender policies and/or the actual implementation of these in the media?

In Pakistan, as in many other countries, sexual harassment is a taboo topic, and many women avoid talking about their experiences, let alone reporting to the concerned authorities. It is, therefore, difficult to gauge the number of cases of sexual harassment at the workplace (SHW). Those that come to light are usually the more serious ones, with and ‘minor’ instances often remaining unreported or ignored.

Nearly 50 percent of the female respondents and over a quarter of the men reported having witnessed sexual harassment. All of the respondents who said they had personally experienced workplace sexual harassment were female, making up 20.25 percent of all female respondents.



Those who had experienced sexual harassment reported that the perpetrators were mainly colleagues (37.5 percent) and superiors at work (68.75 percent).

Most (87.5 percent) said they did tell someone about it, with (62.5 percent) telling a superior at work, a colleague (56.25 percent) or a friend (25 percent). It is not known whether or not any action was taken against the perpetrators. Of those who didn't tell anyone about it, the two selected reasons were 'shame/embarrassment' and 'worried about negative repercussions'. Almost half (45 percent) of respondents said their organisations did not have any complaint cells to deal with incidents of sexual harassment and a further 21.37 percent said they didn't know if they did.

When asked to rank measures that can effectively combat sexual harassment, the most popular response was 'stronger laws' with 25.81 percent – this was aligned equally in gender responses also. This was followed by awareness-raising among women (21.93 percent) and awareness-raising among men (18.71 percent).

Wajid Isfahani of the KUJ says a lot still needs to be done as a large number of female journalists face harassment at the workplace quietly as they don't want to create a scene. Some said that they think bringing their issues to the KUJ will not help, but instead work against them. He said this feeling arises mainly because of the low number of women in senior decision-making roles in media organizations, and earlier the union as well. Ultimately it left the workers frustrated and scared.

Shagufta Yasmeen, a radio journalist and anchor person at FM 107(Urdu Language), Karachi, said: "Harassment is a problem and I have left many projects because of it but there is generally no system in place for lodging complaints. Even if a woman does complain she cannot usually expect a fair hearing and she runs the risk of being ostracised, with no one ready to offer her work."

Other responses from women interviewed were:

*"There is no policy with regard to gender equality, sexual harassment, etc., which should be an integral part of every organisation. Women who suffer harassment usually have to leave their jobs as they find no support within the organization."*

- Fehmida Butt, Khyber TV (Pushto language), Islamabad Bureau.

*"There have been incidents of sexual harassment in PBC and there are mechanisms in place for tackling it... irrespective of whether the complainant is permanent or contractual."*

- Attiya Aamir, Senior Program Manager, PBC

*"PBC follows the recently passed law against harassment of women at the workplace, which has been fully implemented, with proper committees to investigate any incident."*

- Faqir Muhammad, Controller News and Current Affairs, Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation

*Dawn* has an "internal policy on sexual harassment which covers the entire organisation", put in place by management almost a decade ago. Editor Zaffar Abbas says "complaints about such harassment are taken very seriously and a three-member committee investigates them."

Meanwhile the editor of *Daily Azkar*, Tazeen Akhter, said while it was "a moral obligation to have an anti-sexual harassment policy", it had not adopted a policy on sexual harassment. It says complaints of sexual harassment are handled according to available evidence, "not on personal likes and dislikes".



Geo TV has a core committee on gender sensitivity. Member and senior anchorwoman Uzma Al-Karim said: “Security for women employees, which includes freedom from sexual harassment of all types – even relatively casual practices such as the sharing of inappropriate jokes in the presence of women, is a concern.” She said Geo decided a decade ago to establish a separate mechanism to monitor all such activities.

A gender sensitivity committee has been active at Geo since 2004, looking at sexual harassment and other gender-related issues, such as separate washrooms, transport and security. Until the law prohibiting sexual harassment was passed in 2010, Geo was following the code of conduct evolved by the Alliance Against Sexual Harassment (AASHA).

According to Al-Karim, the gender sensitivity committee and a separate anti-SHW committee can take immediate action. Every station has a representative of these committees and employees are truly afraid of them because the CEO is very particular about its policies and action. Since there can be an element of misuse, a thorough investigation is carried out. She said there is no gender bias, since men can also lodge complaints, as can those belonging to the third gender. All forms of harassment are taken into consideration, from blatant to subtle, mental and psychological, physical and sexual.

Training on how to deal with SHW is an ongoing practice at Geo, with seniors as well as newcomers required to go through such training. A zero-tolerance-for-sexual-harassment policy has been in place since the inception of the organisation. Victims can file formal or informal complaints that are then investigated by an independent committee, which includes more than one female member and keeps both victim and witness protection in mind. In addition, regular in-house trainings on the prevention of SHW are conducted to explain and promote this policy.

The KUJ’s Seema Shafi said unions need to give training to their members, especially awareness about their rights. “They should be aware that they have a right not only to speak up against harassment but know who to turn to if the need arises.”

## Promoting Gender Equity

Gender equity is evidently the least of the concerns of most organisations, including media houses, in Pakistan. Thanks to the efforts of the civil society, there is now increased awareness on this issue but there is still a long way to go to ensure sensitisation about, acceptance and, above all, implementation of gender equity policies and to change mind-sets in the country.

A large proportion of survey respondents 47.89 percent, especially women (53.84 percent), said that the organisations they worked with did not have any in-house gender policies. Not surprisingly, 58.82 percent of respondents said such a policy would contribute to gender equity, and this view was evenly distributed between men and women. Only 7.56 percent said that such a policy would not contribute to gender equity.

In terms of the role of unions and journalism organisations, 31 percent of respondents said they ‘should work with media employers on joint strategies on gender equity’. This was the most popular response for both men and women. The second most popular response was ‘could improve their work on gender equity’ (18.9 percent). Men and women differed on their third most popular response. For women they said ‘should lobby government for stronger gender equity legislation’ (16.45 percent), whereas men said ‘should adopt a national gender equity policy’ (21 percent).



‘Equal opportunity or gender equity policy’ was seen as the most suitable strategy to improve gender equity in the respondents’ media organisation, with 23.94 percent of the responses. This was followed by ‘dignity at work policy’ with 20.77 percent of the responses. Both men and women agreed on this, with these been to the two answers with the highest responses for both groups.

What strategies or provisions do you think would improve gender equality in your media or workplace?	Female	Male	Total
ILO maternity/paternity leave conventions	16	14	30
Dignity at work policy	36	23	59
Pay audits	15	8	23
Health and safety audits	15	11	26
Flexible work options	16	15	31
Sexual harassment policy	29	18	47
Equal opportunity or gender equity policy	42	26	68
<b>Total</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>284</b>

‘Enforcement of guidelines on gender equity’ found favour with the largest number of both women and men (29.76 percent) as a measure that could promote gender equity in news content. Almost as many women (27.41 percent), but fewer men (26.96 percent), felt that having more women journalists and editors would help.

**Gender Balance in Media Content**

Fakhra Tehreem, a reporter with the daily newspaper, *Jang* (in Urdu), is also in charge of the paper’s women’s magazine section. She began her career in January 1988 as a sub-editor in the daily.

Talking about the self-censorship she exercises while writing about women’s issues such as gender-based violence, she said: “It is quite difficult as I have to be very careful in using language because there are people who object to a spade being called a spade. They want to brush such issues under the carpet so that they will not be discussed. There have been times when people have actually threatened me for simply reporting the facts.”

Although she is the only female working amidst 25 male reporters, she thinks the environment, as a whole, is improving with more and more female journalists joining the media, especially the electronic media. She believes there is a difference in the work cultures of the media in English and Urdu, at least as far as women are concerned.

“Women in the Urdu language media, especially newspapers, have to be very careful of their male colleagues even in matters of personal choice such as dress. So we refrain from wearing jeans, etc., and stick to conservative, traditional clothes such as the *shalwar kameez*.”

Tehreem feels that she has been helping to raise public awareness by focusing on women’s issues while also building her own professional capabilities. Now people know her by name and recognise her for her work. She also considers herself lucky that she has received support in her work from some colleagues.



More than half of the survey respondents (56.20 percent) estimated that the representation of women in the media as news sources and experts was less than ten percent.

This is in keeping with the findings of several media monitoring and content analysis exercises, including the Pakistan country report of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP), published in 2010. Men and women were in agreement at the low level of women appearing as sources in news. However, of the 32.11 percent who said it was between 10-30 percent, women made up 61.36 percent of the respondents.

When asked to rank the top four depictions of women in news content; the Pakistani respondents said: victims (17.91 percent), sexual objects (14.62 percent), as weak and timid (13.16 percent) and family figures (12.24 percent). Women ranked their top four as; victims (17.77 percent), sexual objects (16.50 percent), as weak and timid (14.60 percent) and negatively stereotyped (12.69 percent). Men ranked their top four as; victims (17.98 percent), experts/leaders (14.03 percent), sexual objects (11.84 percent) and as weak and timid (10.96 percent).

A comprehensive, nationwide consultative process on the formulation of a voluntary, gender-sensitive Code of Ethics (CoE) for the print media was initiated in 2002 by Uks. The draft code was developed with substantive inputs from the media, civil society organisations and rights activists. Eventually, it was finally adopted in 2003. In 2013, the code was comprehensively reviewed and expanded for the electronic as well as print media, with the participation of both male and female media persons, media associations and unions, CSOs, NGOs, women’s rights activists, and other stakeholders. The objective of this revised code is to ensure gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory treatment of women’s issues in the media. It will incorporate, among other things, guidelines and disciplinary measures to check the invasion of privacy and sensationalised reporting on cases of violence against women and girls (VAWG) and gender-based violence (GBV).

Ensuring the representation of women’s voices, especially from conflict areas has practical barriers such as lack of access.

“The non-availability of female reporters in the field means that the voices of women are left out of the news. News about a large number of female Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) went unreported. We requested our media house in Islamabad and Lahore to send female reporters to these camps for interviewing women IDPs,” says Rasool Dawar, Special Correspondent Geo TV KP and FATA. He adds that young women from tribal areas are studying journalism and mass communication but it is a moot question whether their fathers and brothers would “allow” them to join the field. “We might have more women reporters a decade from now, but when it happens, it will really help to highlight issues of local women since they can form a connection with women reporters without any language or security barriers,” says Dawar.

Zafar Abbas, Editor, *Dawn*, says that he is aware of the need for balanced representation of men and women – reflecting the composition of society – in media coverage. “I ensure gender sensitive reporting by making conscious efforts to encourage the editorial team to strive towards it and taking serious note of any violations,” he says. Although he and his team make consciously try to ensure the fair portrayal of women and men in the media through the elimination of stereotypes, Abbas admits that changing mindsets is a long drawn out process.

“During the daily morning editorial meeting, during which the paper’s news coverage is scrutinised and discussed, at least two assistant editors are encouraged to point out stories in which *Dawn’s*



code on gender issues is ignored or violated,” says Abbas, describing the process of in-house monitoring. After the meeting the editor informs the person in charge of the section in which such a news story or feature had appeared and action is recommended in keeping with the nature and seriousness of the omission or violation.

Geo Asool (Geo Principles) is an advisory body charged with analysing and improving editorial content at Geo TV. According to Idrees Bakhtiar, head of Geo Asool, the most effective tools to help change journalists’ mind-sets are in-house trainings, seminars, and screenings of documentaries, which together create a continuous process that can lead to a more gender-responsive media in Pakistan. Geo Asool has developed a code of ethics – separate from GEO’s gender policy – which needs to be implemented even though it may have many weaknesses.

“The presence of women in newsrooms and their strategic involvement in all tiers of the company were necessary. If a certain quota for women is maintained both the language used in the workplace and media content tend to improve. To ensure more women in media, all media houses should put in place self-regulation that takes into account possible quotas, recruitment rules and create women-friendly workplaces,” says Azhar Abbas, former managing director of Geo TV.

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## **When rape is rape**

When the Uks Research Centre<sup>ix</sup> was founded in 1997, the main focus was to monitor and analyse the print media since Pakistan had a vibrant press but television and radio were under the control of the state.

Although the press was vibrant, much of it was also devoid of any kind of gender-sensitivity. A painful reminder was the coverage of the gruesome murder in 1998 of a young, single woman living independently in Islamabad. After her headless body was found, almost all the newspapers published story after story about how ‘immoral’ she was, having had multiple affairs, living alone, consuming alcohol etc. One newspaper even reported that a used condom was found next to her dead body. A week later her head was found in a nearby place. The next day all the newspapers, except one, published photographs of her head perched atop a stretcher. One paper went in for a two-column, colour photograph.

Press coverage of this murder became an unforgettable case study. While Uks focused on gauging the impact of newspaper language and reporting on women’s development and status, it also started to take its analysis to the media, sometimes through a series of gender-sensitisation workshops, at other times through consultations, visits to editors, discussions with reporting and editing staff. The idea was to share with them the gender insensitivity that existed in the Pakistani print media, the use of derogatory and offensive language while reporting news relating to women, as well as the quantity and quality of the coverage accorded to women and matters related directly to women. During the course of such discussions the need for a Code of Conduct or Ethics became increasingly clear.

In 2002, Uks launched “Changing Images,’ the first ever report in Pakistan based on the outcomes of extensive media monitoring, content analysis, media training workshops and a South Asian Gender and Media conference.



Among the recommendations in that report was one calling for a code of ethics with a strong gender component and steps to ensure its implementation by representatives of the print media, especially senior editorial staff.’ The report also highlighted the gap between theory (eg: acceptance of a gender-sensitive code of ethics) and the practice of ethical and responsible journalism. It was clear that bridging the gap would be a complex and time-consuming task. Uks continued its work, trying to convince editors and news editors of the need to develop style sheets incorporating gender-sensitive language and establishing criteria for photographs and other visuals, as well as captions, if any.

Finally, in 2005, Uks presented the first-ever Gender-Sensitive Code-of-Ethics for the Print Media in Pakistan, and perhaps in South Asia. This initiative aimed to provide the media with a critical tool to ensure gender-responsive reporting and investigation. Since then, in addition to being widely disseminated (over 3000 copies) within Pakistan, the Code has been shared with media and civil society organisations across the globe.

A slight change in media practice was perceptible in the period that followed. For example, the Code highlights the need to avoid phrases like *“Kunwari maa ney apna gunahon ka bojh koray key dher per phanik diya”* (“An unwed mother dumps the bundle of her sins at a garbage site”). Some newspapers began to find different ways to describe the situation, for example: *“Nozaida bachay ki lash koray kay dher per mili”* (“body of a new born found at a garbage dump”). This was a small sign that the code was making a dent.

But just when it appeared that the print media was beginning to be sensitised, the sudden growth of 24x7 television news channels, with their “breaking news syndrome,” changed the scenario. Many television channels, barring one or two, began to sensationalise crime stories, covering cases in an extremely judgmental and victim-blaming manner, often using derogatory language and, worse still, showing the faces of the woman, or even the girl child, involved, giving details of where she lived.

In 2013, in a bid to change the situation, Uks revised and redesigned the Gender Sensitive Code of Ethics to make it relevant to both the print and the electronic media<sup>x</sup>. The code, meant to be voluntarily adopted by the media, clearly defines the standards, attitudes and behaviour expected from presenters, anchors, researchers, producers, scriptwriters, camera persons, policy-making editorial staff and the senior management of media houses.

Sadly though, despite the fact that it was drafted with the complete participation and involvement of all the relevant stakeholders and has been disseminated among journalists since its launch, the media have been intermittently breaching many of the codified professional standards. Media monitoring by Uks reveals regular violations, including the use of personal details and visuals of victims/survivors, the use of insensitive language, etc. This is disappointing, especially since both media decision-makers and working journalists had pledged their commitment to promoting gender sensitivity in the media during the process of formulating the Code.

So rape continues to be called anything but rape – especially by the Urdu and regional language media. From ‘losing and destroying of honour’, to ‘acts of sin’, our media is not ready or willing to call it rape. The code is there, the media needs to adopt it, but then, gender is not the most important issue for media.

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**We are the difference**

By Arifa Noor

“Years ago, at a journalism workshop, an African American journalist told an audience that he carried the ‘burden of his race on his shoulder all the time.” His words still echo in my head because as a woman journalist, I too have realised that I carry the burden of my gender with me all the time, as I have gone from newspaper to newspaper and position to position.

But what I have learnt is that, although it makes one’s professional life challenging, it does not hinder one’s progress. From the matter-of-fact fears expressed by potential employers that I would get married and leave, to those colleagues who asked if I could cook and those who questioned my ability to do my job simply because of the way I looked, the stories I can tell are many and varied. But in the end, it is the work that counts and it can answer all questions and address multiple fears about anyone’s lasting power and competence. Nonetheless, a thick skin and a good sense of humour do help during the journey.

Ironically, while we are never allowed to forget our gender, in the Pakistani media it is, unfortunately, next to impossible to have a conversation about work and gender. For most of our male counterparts, it is difficult to welcome a woman colleague or boss. This is one reason why most women experience sexual harassment and have little recourse to protection. The few male colleagues who are more ‘gender sensitive,’ so convinced are they of their open mindedness that one still can’t point out any ingrained or unconscious sexism that crops up in daily life. It makes them uncomfortable and they view it simply a sign of paranoia on the part of the woman.

Till such conversations are seen as our right and the men’s obligation, we will not be able to work towards a better environment. But this is not the only issue that the media in Pakistan has trouble understanding. They also need to understand that a woman journalist is not in the industry to report on women’s rights or maternal issues alone. Neither is she there to become a pale shadow of her male colleagues.

The African American journalist’s words that still echo in my head include a second lesson: “We don’t want women in senior positions to think like men; we already have the men. We need her to think differently.”

That is always how I have approached my work – it’s my job to think differently: on war, on politics, on crime and everything else that is covered by the paper I edit. I am here to provide diversity, to celebrate difference. Women are not here to be limited to a topic or an issue. We are here and we are the difference.

*Arifa Noor is Resident Editor, Dawn, Islamabad*

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**Conclusions**

The conclusions presented here emerge from survey data as well as interviews and case studies.

The media in Pakistan is male-dominated, with fewer women than men. Once inducted in this field women are assigned ‘soft’ beats. Most women also prefer on-desk jobs rather than field work to



avoid late working hours, and on account of security and travel related problems, although there have been rare exceptions who are daring and insist upon 'hard' beats like conflict and crime.

Within the media, women are discriminated against in terms of being provided opportunities to excel; they come up against 'glass ceilings' and are slowed down by 'sticky floors.' This can be observed simply by the absence of women in editorial boards, at the executive levels and other decision-making tiers of media companies. Unequal wages for the same amount of work is also a reality. However, the findings of this survey indicate that the situation may be improving.

The survey reveals that a substantial number of respondents – both men and women – are satisfied with the working conditions and facilities available in their organisations. This is despite the fact that many media organisations still fail to provide separate workspaces and toilets for female employees. Maternity leave often ends up in job termination, as reported by a relatively smaller number of respondents.

Media unions and press clubs are very active in Pakistan and often raise their voices on a number of issues, including their own rights. The fact that gender balance is missing in these unions is reinforced by participants in the survey.

Ever since legislation on sexual harassment in the workplace in Pakistan was passed in 2010, many employers claim to have adapted and implemented the act in workplaces. Although the proportion of respondents who had either witnessed or experienced sexual harassment was relatively small in the survey, it became clear a problem exists. Most respondents were unaware of how to react to this offense, partly because they are unaware of the legal protection provided to them by the law, and partly because the necessary special complaint cells are missing in their workplaces.

In the absence of gender sensitive media owners and executives and in-house gender policies, promoting gender equity is a slow and tedious process in most organisations. Even women have internalised patriarchal mindsets to such an extent that they need to be gender sensitised as well. However, thanks to advocacy by civil society, conditions are improving within media workplaces.

Finally, despite long-standing advocacy and sensitisation efforts among media professionals, media content remains gender unjust, with few women-centred stories and women continuing to be negatively stereotyped as weak and timid victims, with little attention paid to the many female 'heroes' in everyday life. To become heroes in the eyes of the media, women have to excel in the so-called male domains such as politics and business. The language in mainstream media is often gender insensitive, especially in the Urdu media. Ethical violations are common in media coverage of crime news, with the name, image and other particulars of the victim often highlighted despite repeated reminders, as well as dissemination, of the Gender Sensitive Code of Ethics. The media, as a whole, is manifestly deficient in ensuring women's voice, visibility and agency in coverage and programming.



<sup>i</sup> The figures are based on the number of journalists that are members of the press clubs and unions journalists unions in the respective areas.

<sup>ii</sup> Who makes the News 2010, 'GMMP 2010 Reports', *Who Makes the News*, viewed 10 November, 2014, <<http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp/gmmp-reports/gmmp-2010-reports>>

<sup>iii</sup> UKS 2011, *What's News*, UKS: A Research & Publication Center on Women and Media, viewed 10 November, 2014, <<http://www.uksresearch.com/news.html#news34>>

<sup>iv</sup> UKS 2009, *From Classrooms to Newsrooms: Promoting media as a career option for women in Pakistan*, Internews, viewed 15 November, 2014, <<https://www.internews.org/sites/default/files/resources/FromClassroomstoNewsrooms-PK-Mar09.pdf>>

<sup>v</sup> ILO C100: The International Labour Organization's Convention 100 is called the Equal Remuneration Convention, and C111 is the Convention on Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation, to both of which Pakistan is a State Party

<sup>vi</sup> Abdullah, T 2013 *Who's Telling Our Story? A Situation Analysis of Women in Media in Pakistan*, UKS viewed 15 November, 2014, <[http://www.uksresearch.com/PublicationsPDFs/1\\_3\\_2IN1.pdf](http://www.uksresearch.com/PublicationsPDFs/1_3_2IN1.pdf)>

<sup>vii</sup> Unpublished Masters' thesis, Rafia Khan, Peshawar University, 2013.

<sup>viii</sup> Abdullah, T 2013 *Who's Telling Our Story? A Situation Analysis of Women in Media in Pakistan*, UKS viewed 15 November, 2014, <[http://www.uksresearch.com/PublicationsPDFs/1\\_3\\_2IN1.pdf](http://www.uksresearch.com/PublicationsPDFs/1_3_2IN1.pdf)>

<sup>ix</sup> Uks Research Centre is a research, resource and publication centre dedicated to the cause of gender equality and women's development. Uks (an Urdu word meaning 'reflection') aims to promote a neutral, balanced and unbiased approach to women and women's issues within and through the media.

<sup>x</sup> Uks 2013, *Gender-Sensitive Media: A Voluntary Code of Ethics*, Uks, viewed 20 November, 2014, <<http://uksresearch.readyhosting.com/PublicationsPDFs/Code%20of%20Ethics%20Final.pdf>>