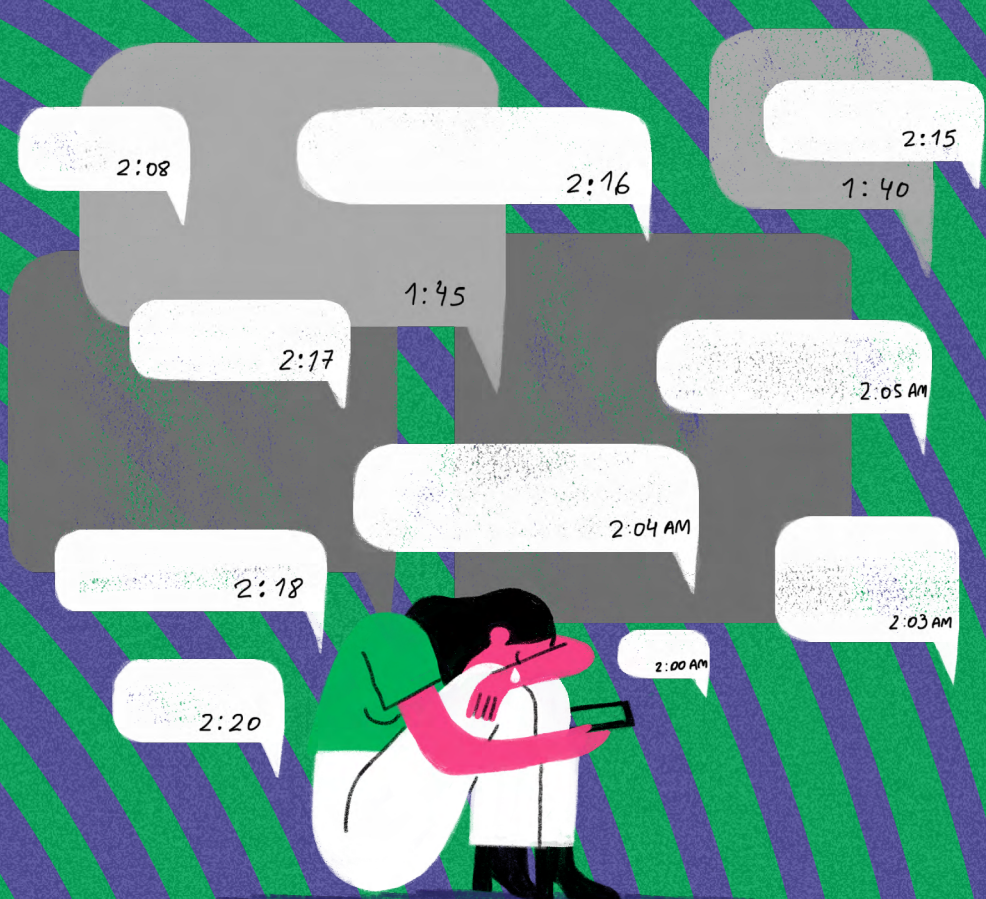


DIQITAL QENDER-BASED VIOLENCE against women journalists in PARAGUAY



Digital gender-based violence against women journalists in Paraguay

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TEDIC is a NGO founded in 2012, with the mission of defending and promoting human rights in the digital age. Among its main areas of interest are freedom of expression, privacy, access to knowledge and gender on the Internet.



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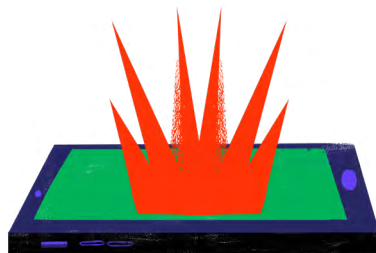
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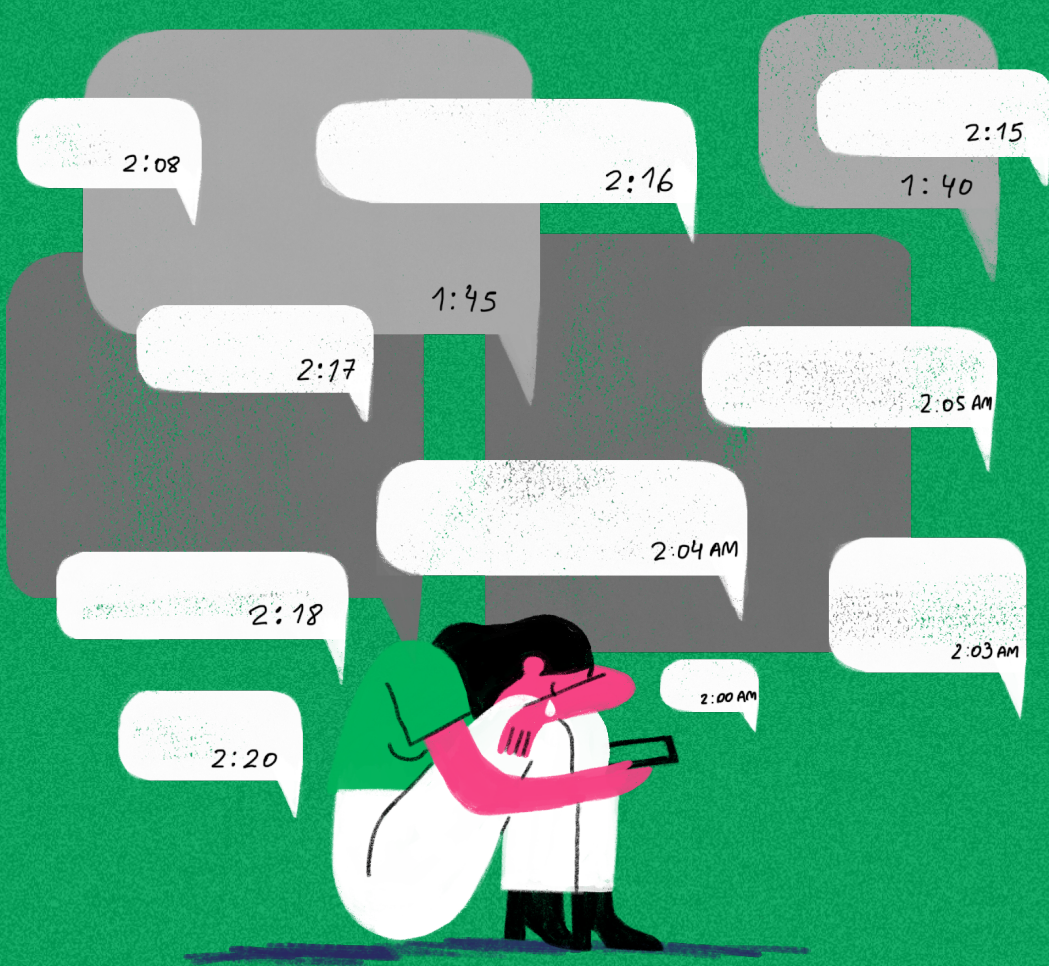
To the over 130 journalists and communicators who have faced and resisted gender violence online and have shared their stories with us. We thank each of them for their time, interest and desire to contribute to this research and to continue standing up to and experiencing digital spaces.

The opinions and facts presented in this material are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the TEDIC Association.

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Abstract

This research presents an in-depth study of the state of digital violence against women journalists in Paraguay - performing a historical analysis, and examining the various aspects currently involved today. Among the issues examined are the various forms of digital violence, the actors involved, the online replication of violence and how women journalists have responded or otherwise been impacted.

A theoretical framework was constructed utilizing the outcomes of interviews and focus groups with over 100 women journalists in Paraguay. Here, a thorough analysis then reveals the scope and consequence of digital violence experienced by communication professionals within the country.

The analysis reveals that digital violence is an increasingly alarming reality, with journalists facing various forms of online aggression, which includes harassment, threats, defamation and exposure of personal information. Triggering and contextual factors that contribute to this violence were also identified, such as the practice of critical journalism, the coverage of sensitive topics and the gender of the journalists.

In conclusion, this research highlights the need to implement protection and support measures for women journalists in the digital environment, as well as to raise awareness and educate society about the harmful effects of digital or violence against communication professionals in Paraguay. It also highlights the importance of having an observatory on digital violence for women journalists in Paraguay to have an improved approach for this phenomenon which negatively impacts the exercise of the profession, the right to freedom of expression and privacy, and the mental and emotional health of the women journalists.

These findings also highlight the significant responsibility held by online platforms in the fight against the proliferation of digital violence - and the key role they play in the promotion of a safe journalistic environment.

Keywords: *Gender, women journalists, digital violence, Justice, feminism.*

1. Digital gender-based violence: a phenomenon that threatens women in Journalism

1.1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been significant progress towards gender equality around the world, and Latin America is one of the regions that has been at the focus of such progress. Since the emergence of the movement to raise awareness about femicides and the “machismo” or sexist male violence, known with the hashtag #NiUnaMenos, to the calls for wage justice on International Women’s Day, and the historic approval of legislation ensuring greater autonomy in sexual and reproductive rights, the region has experienced what some academics describe as the ‘fourth wave of feminism’ (Chamberlain, 2020; Posada, 2018; Miyares, 2018). A common element of the most recent protests is their massive, popular nature and the wide gathering in the streets of different cities across the continent. In addition to the long-standing work of feminist groups, the rising access of the public to Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) has allowed the wide dissemination of their claims and demands. Ironically, the Internet has become a space of violence for women and sexual diversities, particularly those who are more visible, such as women journalists¹ (Posetti, J. et al 2021, 2020; UN, 2018, 2017; Peña Ochoa, 2017; Ferrier, 2017).

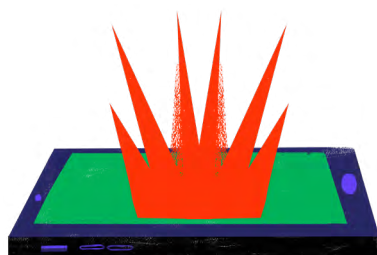
Digital gender-based violence is defined as a continuum of the sexist male violence that women already experience in in-person settings (García and Sequera, 2021; APC, 2015). The situation in Latin America has been well documented. A report on gender-based violence through online media in the region was submitted to the United Nation’s Special Rapporteur on violence against women and collected different cases of journalists and women human rights defenders who were victims of harassment in networks and electronic espionage (Peña Ochoa, 2017). Cuellar and Sandra Chaher (2017) conducted research in seven countries, with a specific focus on journalists in on X (formerly known as Twitter). Their findings revealed that women faced a higher level of attacks related to both their image and intellectual abilities. Although their male peers also report online violence for their coverage, women report more discriminatory or sexual comments. In addition, possible coordinated attacks were identified.

1 The term “journalists” in this report should be understood from a functional perspective: journalists are individuals who observe, describe, document, and analyze events, statements, policies, and any proposals that may affect society, with the purpose of systematizing this information and gathering facts, analyses, and opinions to inform sectors of society or the society as a whole. Such a definition includes those working in information media and support staff, as well as those working in community media, “citizen journalists,” and other individuals who may be using new media as a tool to reach the public, as well as opinion leaders who become targets due to the exercise of their right to freedom of expression. See, United Nations. General Assembly. Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, Frank La Rue. A/HRC/20/17. June 4, 2012. Paragraph 4. Available for consultation at: http://ap.ohchr.org/documents/dpage_s.aspx?m=85; United Nations. Human Rights Committee. General Comment No. 34. CCPR/C/GC/34. September 12, 2011. Paragraph 44; United Nations. General Assembly. Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary, or arbitrary executions, Christof Heyns. A/HRC/20/22. April 10.

In Paraguay, cases of digital violence against women have also been reported in recent years. An important example is the case of Belén Whittingslow, who in 2013 denounced Christian Kriscovich, a professor at the Catholic University and representative of the same university to the Magistrates Council, for online sexual harassment. According to the NGO Tedic, although her initial complaint was dismissed by judicial authorities, she is currently facing two lawsuits directly linked to her initial report. Whittingslow remains a refugee in Uruguay due to lack of legal guarantees (TEDIC, 2022). For the NGO, her case constitutes digital gender-based violence and is an example of the lack of access to justice in Paraguay that is repeated in other similar situations. This case is currently before the commission of the Inter-American Human Rights System (IAHRS). In an exploratory study by researchers Diana García and Maricarmen Sequera (2021), testimonies of other women about their experience on the Internet have been collected. A total of 43 interviewees said they had suffered some kind of offense or aggression in the digital environment, and 86% answered that they do know other people who experienced online harassment or abuse.

The data available in Paraguay shows that public opinion leaders and those with positions on politics are the ones who suffer most from digital violence. This was the case of a female investigative journalist of the newspaper ABC Color, whose mobile devices were intercepted to access her phone records. The surveillance was carried out by the military leadership after an investigation made by the journalist on corruption in the Armed Forces (ABC Color, 2016). Since then, more reports of this nature have surfaced in the journalistic field. A report by Ifex-ALC published alongside with the Paraguayan Union of Journalists (2020) on violence against journalists highlights cyberbullying among the most frequent complaints. In a more recent case that gained visibility, television and radio journalist Mercedes Barriocanal (TEDIC, 2023), an ally in the fight for gender equality, was the victim of doxing by an activist associated with the anti-rights movement in Paraguay. The aggressor, Juan Vera, published her cell phone number on social networks and instant messaging platforms asking users to send messages condemning the journalist's opinion on an education policy (ABC Color, 2022). Following the disclosure of her personal data without consent, Barriocanal received a flood of threatening and hateful messages on her mobile phone. The family stated that they are considering legal action (Radio Nanduti, 2022). In May 2023, the Paraguayan justice system ruled in favor of the journalist and the perpetrator was found guilty of breach of privacy (ABC Color, 2023).

Although there are numerous reports and an increasing body of literature that document these realities, there remains a significant journey ahead to delve deeper into and comprehend the intricacies of digital violence against women journalists. This is especially crucial in today's context, where practicing journalism online is indispensable. There is immense pressure to maintain an active and professional presence on social networking platforms, coupled with a growing inclination to foster a more equal relationship with audiences. Examining the unique aspects of online violence, including its origins, reasons, channels, and its impact on the lives of women journalists (specifically in this study, women journalists in Paraguay), is imperative. This research is not just about creating protocols, initiatives, and policies to effectively address this issue but also about safeguarding journalism from assaults that hinder the unrestricted practice of the profession and diminish the quality of democratic discourse.



1.2. The international and national normative framework against gender violence

Gender-based violence is addressed in international treaties and regulations to which Paraguay is a signatory. This research applies two specific instruments, although they were developed prior to the Internet's widespread use, they remain relevant in shaping discussions concerning women's experiences in digital spaces. First, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 and made law in Paraguay in 1986. This treaty recognizes actions that undermine or obstruct the acknowledgment or enjoyment of women's rights based on their gender. It urges States Parties to implement necessary measures to eliminate discrimination and promote gender equality through legal frameworks, public policies, and other applicable means.

Several years later, in 2017, the General Recommendation number 35 addressing gender-based violence against women, which revises the CEDAW Committee's General Recommendation number 19, recognized the emergence of new manifestations of violence against women and girls on the Internet. Consequently, it affirmed the relevance of the Convention in the digital realm. Moreover, it urged the adoption of "effective measures to encourage the media to eradicate discrimination against women".

The second instrument relevant to this study is the 1994 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, commonly referred to as the "Convention of Belém do Pará." This treaty reaffirms women's entitlement to a life devoid of violence and characterizes violence against women as any behavior that, due to their gender, results in "death or physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering" within both public and private spheres (OAS, 1994). Notably, in recent years, rapporteurships have identified online gender-based violence as an emerging issue that can be addressed.

The Special Rapporteur on Violence against women, its causes and consequences, had already expressed concern about digital violence against women in 2016 and the need to tackle it:

"Although the use of communication and information technologies have contributed to the empowerment of women and girls, their use has also led to online violence...There is a need to examine this recent phenomenon, and the applicability of national laws, and to make recommendations to states and non-governmental actors to tackle online violence against women and girls, while respecting freedom of expression (...)" (Šimonović, D., 2016)

Some time later, the Secretary General before the Assembly reported that women journalists covering certain topics such as politics, sports, gender and/or feminism are particularly vulnerable to experiencing online violence (UN, 2017). Although male journalists also suffer abuse, it was emphasized that women journalists receive more intensified attacks. The Rapporteur on Violence commented on the particular qualities of gender-based violence instigated through ICTs, such as its persistence, its scope and the possibility that perpetrators are not easily identifiable: "Technology has transformed many forms of gender-based violence into something that can be perpetrated across distance, without physical contact and beyond borders through the use of anonymous profiles to amplify the harm to victims" (UN, 2018). It identified different types of violence such as doxing or publication of private information, threatening and dissemination of non-consensual images, and online sexual harassment, among others. She also emphasized the consequences on women's lives, starting with self-censorship, reduced online presence, psychological harm and even the physical harm that can result. For the Rapporteur, the effects are not limited to the personal. The very essence of democracy is in jeopardy:

“Online abuses against women journalists and women in the media are a direct attack on women’s visibility and their full participation in public life. (...) Online violence against women also undermines democratic exercise and good governance and thus creates a democratic deficit” (UN, 2018)

Paraguay recently passed legislation that addresses gender-based violence committed through electronic media, although in a limited way. Law No. 5777/16 on the comprehensive protection of women against all forms of violence, in its article 6 of the forms of violence, refers as telematic violence to any action through which “messages, photographs, audios, videos or others that affect the dignity or intimacy of women are disseminated or published through current information and communication technologies”. The Law includes the Ministry of Information and Communication Technologies among the institutions responsible for the prevention, attention and punishment of violence. Specifically, this authority is entrusted with the task of developing “protocols for the detection and prevention of new forms of violence against women” in the use of ICTs (Law No. 5777/16). The limited scope of national legislation on digital gender violence is illustrative of the novel nature of the problem. Although since its enactment it has become more common and visible, there is still a need to record, document and socialize what it is and how it affects women in the country, especially those whose work is affected by the Internet.

1.3. Towards a definition of online violence against women journalists

The definition of digital gender-based violence is still under study and continues to evolve, but it is currently defined as the continuum of patriarchal violence that takes place offline. As Abdul Aziz (2017) puts it, “online violence mirrors and contrasts with the reality of offline violence against women, with the same causes and similar effects.” The Rapporteur against gender-based violence, cited by Cuellar and Chaher (2020), referred to this type of violence as to any act that is generated, supported or scaled in part or entirely thanks to ICTs (mobile telephony, Internet, social networks, email) and that aims to attack women just because they are women, or that affects women disproportionately. In the context of this study, it is pertinent to consider the definition put forth by an extensive research project conducted by UNESCO in collaboration with the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) concerning worldwide trends in digital violence against women journalists. According to the authors, this phenomenon experienced by women journalists is characterized by a blend of distinct types of aggression:

“(...) online harassment and abuse, often brutal and prolific, including targeted attacks that often involve threats of physical or sexual violence; digital privacy and security breaches that can disclose personal identifying information and aggravate the offline security threats faced by women journalists and their sources; and coordinated disinformation campaigns that draw on misogyny and other forms of hate speech” (Posetti, J. et al., 2020).

The extent of this issue within this particular group has been established through a series of studies in recent years. In 2018, a survey conducted by the International Women’s Media Foundation (IWMMF) and Trollbusters found that two out of every three journalists (sample size of 600) reported experiencing online harassment or threats. Cuellar and Chaher (2020) found that in the attacks against journalists, 10% mention the intellectual capacity when it comes to women, 20% contain sexist comments, and 30% refer to their physical appearance. In a representative survey of journalists in the United States, it was identified that digital violence disproportionately affects women, even more so if they are young (Lewis et al., 2020). 74% of a total of 714 journalists from 125 countries responded that they have suffered online violence, the coverage of gender issues as one of the main triggers of violence (Posetti, J. et al., 2020).

1.4. Forms of digital gender-based violence

While digital violence shares the same characteristics as offline gender-based violence, the former has particular features. Complaints and reports from women show specific forms of digital violence, such as the non-consensual dissemination of intimate images to humiliate and harm the victim, doxing, which is the disclosure of personal information that perpetrators collect after abusively digging into her profiles, and trolling or harassment with the creation of tags, dissemination of messages and publication of images, videos, messages that aim to annoy her (UN, 2018). Altering photos and videos and disseminating them on dating apps or pornography websites and creating fake profiles and other types of impersonation have also been recorded as a form of violence (Abdul Aziz, 2017). The NGO TEDIC identifies 21 types of digital gender-based violence that, in addition to those mentioned here, include mobbing, or workplace harassment exercised towards a person or group and that can occur in digital spaces; the use of GPS to monitor the victim's location; identity theft or the creation of fake profiles with the aim of damaging a person's reputation; and sending and receiving unsolicited sexual content (TEDIC, 2022).

In a research on media responses to digital harassment of news workers, Holton, Bélair-Gagnon, Bossio, and Molyneux (2021) propose to consider the intensity and frequency of attacks. From their 31 interviews with U.S. media workers, they identified three forms of digital harassment. First, acute harassment, which is less personalized, characterized by verbal attacks and related to coverage issues. Unlike men, who perceived this type of aggression as a predictable part of the job, women journalists saw it as a gateway to more damaging forms of harassment. The second form is chronic harassment, which can be distinguished by its long-term nature and because the source of the violence is a particular user or a group of users. Finally, there is escalatory harassment, which is personalized and threatening. Following this differentiation, the researchers were able to assess that the women journalists interviewed suffered more chronic harassment and escalatory harassment than their male counterparts.

Based on the results of a global survey of 900 journalists, 15 country case studies and 173 interviews, Posetti, Shabbir and Aboulez (2021) elaborated a detailed overview of the most frequent forms of digital gender-based violence. Some of these are: attacks on digital safety and privacy, including hacking and surveillance; orchestrated attacks with state actors; manipulated search results on Google and YouTube, after flooding these sites with disinformation designed to discredit the targets and undermine their journalistic content; harassment with fraudulent petitions that arrive at journalists' homes after having been targeted by the perpetrators (Posetti, J. et al., 2021).

In the survey by Posetti et al. (2020), 25% of the women journalists who responded suffered threats of physical violence and 18% threats of sexual violence. 13% said they had received threats of violence against their relatives. Almost half were victims of unwanted private messages with hateful content, 18% of surveillance, 14% of hacking and 8% of doxing. The researchers conclude trends in the forms of violence experienced by journalists in the digital environment, such as those who suffer other types of discrimination, such as racism, homophobia or religious intolerance, have an additional risk of suffering more attacks and greater impact on their lives. After a big data analysis of more than 400 thousand tweets and 57 thousand Facebook posts containing aggressions directed at Filipina journalist Maria Ressa, co-founder of the Rappler media company and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, the authors conclude that she is attacked not only for being a journalist, "she is attacked for being a woman. For the color and texture of her skin. For her U.S. citizenship. And for her sexuality" (Posetti, J. et al, 2021).

The researchers also find that just as offline violence moves to the Internet, digital violence moves to the real world: “there is more evidence that online violence against women journalists happens offline with significant impact. This includes physical attacks, abuse and harassment that festers online, and legal harassment that is facilitated and reinforced by digital violence” (Posetti, J. et al, 2021). This is the case of Maria Ressa, who since Rodrigo Duterte came to power in 2016 has been the subject of government investigations, an arrest in 2019, and a conviction in 2020 for the crime of “cyber defamation” - all alongside the increasing viciousness of the harassment she is a victim of online (Garside, 2020). According to Posetti et al (2021), the online violence directed at Ressa “has created an environment that encourages her persecution, prosecution and conviction. It also subjects her to real physical threat”.

A report on digital harassment of journalists by Reporters Without Borders (2018) also highlights the case of journalist Laura Kuenssberg, the BBC’s first female political editor, who was assigned a bodyguard to cover the 2017 Labour Party congress following the scale of online verbal threats she received for her coverage. In UNESCO and ICFJ’s global survey of journalists (2020), 20% of women journalists linked online violence to attacks they suffered in face-to-face settings. These findings and other emblematic cases reinforce what the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights already denounced in 2018: “failure to address and suppress online threats can be fatal, as evidenced by the attacks and killings of women journalists preceded by online hate campaigns and threats.”

Posetti et al (2021) add that disinformation serves as a multifaceted threat. It is used as a form of attack and also to generate more attacks against victims, and coordinated disinformation campaigns are often used to silence critical press coverage. There is evidence that these campaigns are sometimes orchestrated by government agents.

1.5. The sources of virtual violence against women journalists

Digital gender-based violence perpetrators vary according to the profile of the survivors. In general, as with other forms of violence, women know their perpetrators, who may be their partners or ex-partners (Abdul Aziz, 2017). But for those who have greater public exposure and who address issues that challenge the powers, as is the case with women journalists, the sources of violence are distinct. Several examples proposed by Peña Ochoa (2017) pertain to female reporters who are victims of attempted surveillance by state agencies. This was what Carmen Aristegui, one of Mexico’s most renowned investigative journalists, has experienced. According to the Canadian Citizen Lab, her electronic devices and those of her underage son were targeted by the Pegasus malware (Scott-Railton, et al, 2017). This software - capable of reading messages, accessing passwords, monitoring calls and locations - was developed by the Israeli company NSO and is only available for government use. Aristegui’s investigations uncovered several acts of corruption by President Peña Nieto.

Political actors are one of the most common sources of violence for women journalists. This is what is clear from Posetti et al’s (2021) analysis of global trends: “politicians and party officials or donors are involved as the main instigators and amplifiers of digital violence against women journalists”. 37% of respondents listed the political class as the second largest source of online violence (Posetti, J. et al, 2020). In Cuellar and Chaher’s (2020) research, networks close to the reporters’ governments were identified as operating in attacks that are visibly coordinated, and in all cases they were assaulted for challenging power groups with their comments. Silvio Waisword (2020) considers that this type of digital harassment should be viewed as an attempt to censor the press in a digital society. He uses the concept of crowd censorship to differentiate troll harassment from censorship that may be exercised by the state, or the market through media capture, or parastatal actors. The author argues that mob censorship is an expression of ordinary citizens seek-

ing to discipline journalism with online aggression. They are stimulated by populist leaders who whip up hatred of the press. Even if politicians are not directly involved in the attacks, their rhetoric is partly responsible for them, as seen with the leaderships of Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and currently, Nayib Bukele of El Salvador.

Unidentified or anonymous individuals are the most frequent perpetrators of digital violence according to 57% of surveyed journalists, while 15% recognize their sources and contacts as their online aggressors (Posetti, J. et al, 2020). The latter is indicative of the risk of violence moving from the Internet to face-to-face environments, as has been reported and documented (UN, 2018; RSF, 2018; Posetti, J. et al, 2020).

1.6. Gender and platforms: main causes of violence

Throughout history, acts of violence have often accompanied the work of the press. According to Waisword (2020), these episodes were never triggered by democratic ideals or as part of inevitable ideological struggles, but “were expressions of hatred mobilized against the media and reporters” by elite propaganda agents, such as politicians, religious leaders and intellectuals. Today, these attacks are facilitated because it is easier to communicate with journalists through social media platforms, but also because of the rise of extremist groups, particularly the extreme right, and misogynist, nationalist and populist leaderships that target women journalists (Waisword, 2020; Posetti, J. et al, 2021).

They report various reasons or triggers for online aggressions, with the main trigger for 47% of surveyed journalists being coverage of gender issues that focus on abortion, reproductive rights, male violence, feminism and transsexuality. This is followed by coverage of politics and elections with 44% and human rights and social policy with 31% (Posetti, J. et al, 2020).

Gender expectations imposed on women by society explain these factors. Abdul Aziz (2017) states that patriarchy and cultural, religious and moral rules place them in a more vulnerable position to attacks, as women’s “transgressions of culture are often seen as more reprehensible and society deals with such transgressions more severely than for men.” According to gender socialization theories, women are expected to be more accommodating and limited to covering only certain topics, which influences how the public reacts to their professional work (Lewis, S. et al, 2020).

Social media is the main channel for violence against women journalists. Of five platforms evaluated in the ICFJ and UNESCO global survey (Posetti, J. et al, 2021), Facebook was rated by 12% of respondents as “very unsafe”, almost double compared to Twitter (7%). It was also the social network with the most reported incidents of violence (39%), followed by Twitter (26%). It is important to note that Facebook is the social network with the largest number of users in the world, with around 2 billion registered users (BBC, 2022). In many countries it is the most used, as in the Philippines, home country of journalist Maria Ressa. The largest amount of online aggression she receives also comes from this social network, although the topics and methods of attack are similar to Twitter (Posetti, J. et al, 2021). In the global survey, Facebook also appears as the platform most used by women journalists to carry out their work (77%), and Twitter as the second (74%). WhatsApp is the third most used messaging platform by 57% of respondents, and rated as “very insecure” by 4%. In Maria Ressa’s particular case, the most aggressive forms of abuse come from Facebook’s messaging system - Facebook Messenger - according to her testimony. At best, the response of the platforms to this phenomenon is insufficient (Posetti, J. et al, 2020, 2021). Within the global trends, there is also a notable emergence of sectarian media and media figures sympathetic to particular ideologies, which serve as conduits and magnifiers of digital harassment against women journalists.

1.7. Media and journalists' responses to online violence

The responses of female reporters who face situations of online violence are varied. However, gender expectations also play a role in encouraging them to report as well as the effective contention of their media outlets when they report harassment. The IWFM and Trollbusters (2018) survey documented that over one-third of women journalists refrained from reporting violence out of fear of being stigmatized, and 29% mentioned they were aware of others who reported and faced adverse reactions from their superiors. In Holton et al.'s (2021) interviews regarding how organizations handle online harassment, most respondents indicated a greater reliance on personal actions or on the support of friends, family, and coworkers rather than on their news organizations. These findings resonate with the results of the ICFJ and UNESCO (2020) global survey, where only 25% of respondents reported online violence to their employers. 10% of women journalists who did report said they received no response, 9% were told to ignore online harassment or to be stronger, and 2% said they were challenged with allegations that they did something to provoke the harassment. These attitudes reinforce women's fear of being labeled as agitators if they report violence, a situation that is aggravated by the absence of tools or protocols in their workspaces. The result is that journalists do not seek help and report less of the attacks they receive on the Internet (Holton, A. et al., 2021).

The most common response of journalists, self-censorship, reasserts that digital violence has the impact of silencing their work. In a survey of U.S. journalists conducted by Lewis, Zamith and Coddington (2020), the most common actions in response to attacks were to change the publication that triggered the violence or to stay away from social media for a period of time. They identified gender differences in the responses, with women changing their online behavior more than men who also received virtual assaults. Responses from journalists in other countries reinforce this data. In a global survey of female reporters, it was found that 30% engaged in self-censorship when confronted with online aggressions, 20% ceased online interactions, 18% implemented measures to restrict and prevent public participation in their comments, and 13% heightened their physical security measures (Posetti, J. et al 2020).

1.8. The paralyzing effect of online violence on journalism

The consequences and the media organizations' limited responses to online violence reveal how effective it is in silencing journalists, reducing their visibility and marginalizing them from public debate. The UN Rapporteur on Violence against Women (2018) cited in her report the social isolation and the loss of freedom to travel of women journalists as a result of online harassment, as well as the psychological, physical and even economic damage they experience. Among the most reported psychological effects were self-blame for the violence for the violence, distancing themselves from people, negative or unwanted memories, and agitation (Ferrier, 2017). 26% of female reporters responding in the global survey listed mental health distress as the most common effect of online assaults, 12% sought psychological help for treatment, and 11% were absent from work. A concerning 4% left their job and 2% changed their job altogether (Posetti, J. et al, 2020). This data reinforces the warnings of Stahel and Cohen (2019) cited by Lewis et al. (2020), that systematic virtual violence may further disadvantage women journalists compared to their male peers. While they seek greater safety by reducing their online presence or changing careers, the negative result is narrowing the diverse space of ideas and voices when precisely the opposite is sought in the fight for gender equality.

The effect of digital violence on journalism is not minor, even more so in times where media outlets face various financial sustainability obstacles and are challenged by competition from other content generators. In the latest report by the Reuters Institute of the University of Oxford on the global state of news consumption, it was reported that in almost half of the countries evaluated, trust in news has declined (Newman et al., 2022). The data confirms a trend that has been going on for years and poses a challenge for news organizations.

In light of this challenge, the media organizations have adopted new relationship habits between journalists and audiences under the premise that the former should interact more proactively with the latter to improve audience engagement (Lewis et al., 2014). But virtual violence complicates models that propose a more participatory and horizontal journalism. In the survey of U.S. journalists, researchers found that digital harassment has a numbing effect that undermines the interactions of male and female reporters online. For young women journalists, this experience leads to the disturbing admission that digital harassment is an everyday part of the profession (Lewis et al., 2020). The expansion that arises from the constant pressure to build and maintain a personal brand on platforms, including the need to maintain an active presence, the commitment to generate online conversations, and the constant attention to network users, leads to increased public exposure. This rise in visibility can trigger an increase in digital harassment, which, rather than mitigating, can intensify the gender inequality that persists in the field of journalism.



2. Methodological Approach

2.1. Research objectives

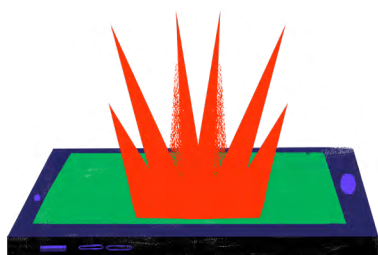
The primary aim of this research is to initiate foundational studies for categorizing online violence targeting journalists in Paraguay.

The specific objectives include:

- a. Identify national legal resources available to apply in cases of technology-related violence against women.
- b. To provide contextual information from data that will allow for further studies and the design of public policies to combat online violence against this specific group.
- c. To provide qualitative information on perceptions, knowledge and attitudes towards situations or experiences of telematic violence.

The questions that guided the study were:

- What is the level of awareness of telematic violence towards women journalists in Paraguay?
- What are the types of intimidation, violence and abusive experiences identified?
- What is the gap with offline experiences?
- What effects or damages are recognized by victims of telematic violence?
- How and in what way do victims deal with/report cyber-violence?
- Is violence against journalists more prevalent than violence against other people?
- What is the degree of knowledge of Law 5777 on Integral Protection of Women against all forms of violence?



2.2. Survey, in-depth interviews and focus groups

In order to gather quantitative and qualitative information on knowledge, attitudes and experiences of online violence against women journalists in Paraguay, a digital survey was conducted among at least 100 women journalists nationwide, 5 semi-structured interviews and 5 focus groups with journalists, according to the case profile and theoretical sample relevant to the object of the study. The categories of analysis designed for this study will allow in the future to carry out a triangulation, complementing the findings with quantitative and qualitative studies.

The qualitative methodological design was based on the study on online gender-based violence in Paraguay led by Diana García and Maricarmen Sequera in 2021, also inspired by the research conducted by Ruth Lewis, Michael Rowe and Clare Wiper, where they used mixed methods to collect testimonies of women who were victims of digital gender-based violence.

To create records of indicators for sexist or misogynistic aggressions, referred to as “gender attacks,” which align with the definitions provided in academic literature as outlined by Chen et al. (2018), Edström (2016), and Posetti et al. (2021). It also follows the guidelines of the 12 indicators of the annual surveys of the Voces del Sur² project, which classifies aggressors into state, parastatal, non-state and groups outside the law.

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews provide a means to depict processes and grasp the causal connections linked to social phenomena. This is achieved by drawing upon the narratives and insights shared by individuals and groups during these conversations. The conversational setting facilitates the exploration of topics, uncovering the meanings and significance attributed within group discussions regarding various experiences, phenomena, and events. These qualitative techniques, through their approach and dynamics, allowed the interviewed women to freely elaborate on narratives, responding to questions and scenarios that served as a framework for examining what remained consistent and what was disruptive in the inquiries posed.

Interviews were arranged through key informants who are part of TEDIC’s network of contacts, as well as associations, journalists’ unions and organized groups of female communicators with activities in the selected communities. These sources collected information and provided lists with the profile of potential participants.

The process of labelling and interpreting the content involved transcribing the narratives from the focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews. Subsequently, the content was tagged, categorized, and inferred using a results matrix. Once the qualitative information was classified, a comprehensive analysis was conducted to identify commonalities and differences within the accounts.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted taking into account the profile of women journalists with greater public exposure such as editors, journalistic analysts and television presenters. The 5 semi-structured interviews were conducted between November and December 2022. All participants are public figures of extensive careers, who in addition to practicing journalism, use digital platforms actively and publicly to disseminate their political positions and express their opinions.

2 <https://vocesdelsurunidas.org/>

ID of the semi-structured interviews	Code
MRA	1MRA
NDA	2NDA
ERA	3ERA
LBA	4ERA
SMA	5SMC

For the selection and recruitment of the participants to the focus groups, a non-probabilistic sampling was applied. The criteria for the formation of the groups were: women (cis, trans) journalists and communicators who exercise the profession in some media, government institution in the area of communication and independent with Internet access, communication device (phone, computer, tablet), with a profile in social media and with frequent online interaction.

During November and December 2022, five focus groups were conducted in urban areas of different cities in Paraguay, with the participation of women residents. In total, 64 people participated, distributed as follows: 14 people in Asunción (the Capital), 8 people in Gran Asunción (Central), 14 people in Ciudad del Este (Alto Paraná), 18 people in Villarrica and Coronel Oviedo (Guairá - Caaguazú) and 10 people in Encarnación (Itapúa).

Group	Location	Description	Selection criteria	Code
1	Asunción	Women journalists working in the media, freelance and institutional communication in Paraguay.	Journalists using the Internet to exercise their profession.	GA1
2	Gran Asunción			GGA2
3	Ciudad del Este			GCDE3
4	Villarrica and Coronel Oviedo			GVyCO4
5	Encarnación			GE5

The qualitative methodological design was based on the study on gender-based violence against journalists in Brazil conducted by ABRAJI . This methodology collects records of incidents and public attacks directed at cis and transgender women, as well as media outlets that promote feminist ideals. These incidents may consist of aggressions with sexist, homophobic, transphobic or misogynist grounds, and are classified as “gender attacks”. It is important to note that both men and women (cis or trans) and non-binary people can be victims of these attacks. What defines a gender-based attack is that the aggressor uses sexuality or gender identity as a basis for attacking the targeted person.

The survey was conducted online (LimeSurvey platform), and a non-probabilistic sampling was applied to contacts of women journalists and communicators nationwide, through key informants who are part of TEDIC’s network of contacts, as well as associations, journalists’ unions and organized groups of women communicators. More than 200 journalists were identified for the survey and invited to participate. A total of 197 participations were registered on the platform, of which 107 were complete responses to the survey, but 90 had to be nullified and discarded due to lack of information, not meeting the profile or not completing the online survey.

2.3. Results of the quantitative study

One of the main challenges in the sampling is the lack of information on the number of journalists who practice journalism.

There is not a violence observatory that exists which explicitly includes digital violence and violence caused by the use of technology in the categories of monitoring attacks on journalists. Another limitation found is that the victims of situations of violence generally do not know how to identify digital violence, name it and file a complaint or expose it publicly. Therefore, there are very few cases of digital violence against journalists, even in publications and media coverage. In addition, according to a study by the Government of Spain (2019), women victims of gender-based violence take an average of eight years and eight months to express their situation and the violence they suffer, either by sharing with close connections such as family and friends or help centers for support and counseling, or by filing a complaint against the aggressor.

Hence, the quantitative tool is limited in terms of complementing the qualitative approach. In addition, it was difficult to explore the understanding of this phenomenon, as it was assumed that everyone who completed the survey already understood the term online violence. Therefore, it was not possible to inquire into responses related to digital safety, the needs for support protocols related to online violence, nor to identify the perpetrators of online violence, among other aspects.

Even so, this tool was designed to record variables and indicators and obtain as much information as possible related to the work of journalists, through 60 quantitative variables in 5 sections. The survey was conducted between December 2022 and March 2023 and registered 107 participants who completed it in full, matching the journalistic and communication profile in the country.

2.3.1. Main findings

The first sections of the survey focus on identifying people's age, place of work, journalistic practice and communication, Internet connection and the most used platforms for work. The following results are drawn from that: of the 107 participants, 107 were cis female and 1 was non-binary. The nationalities were centered between Paraguayan (105), Argentinean (1) and Uruguayan (1). The age ranges of the responses were between 31-40 with 32%, followed by 18-30 with 22%, 41-50 with 16% and 51-60 with 5%, with no older people.

Regarding the exercise of journalism, it was focused on the following categories: editorial (10%), research (9%), presenter (9%), coverage (21%), other (41%) and not completed or not shown (10%). Regarding the other category, the following were identified: institutional communication, copywriter, social media communication, advertising agency and communication and journalism consultancy.

Of the total number of respondents, 39.09% are part of a journalistic media, while 37.56% do not work in any media, 3.55% have no response and 19.80% are not completed or null. In relation to the place of work, those who are part of a printed media corresponds to 13%, television channel outlet account for 11%, Radio has 9%, digital media 16%, independent 7% and not completed corresponds to 44%.

The media where the respondents work were as follows: Radio Caritas, Última Hora Newspaper, Ideas productions, Radio Concierto, ABC COLOR / ABC Newspaper / ABC printed, digital and TV, Satelital TV, Comunicatube, Canal C9N Paraguay, Ciudad Nueva, Jaheka, Agencia IP, Articuladas, El Independiente, Unicanal / Emancipa Magazine, Hína, El Urbano, Día a Día Press, El Surti, RNP 920 AM, El Portal News, Channel 9 TV CERRO CORÁ / Albavisión Group, AJ Group, La Nación / Nación Media, High Class, TVS / TVS Televisora del Sur, Capiatá News, La Jornada Newspaper, El Otro País, PARAGUAY TV, Radio Corpus, Editorial El País, SATELITAL RADIO TV, FM Rio, RTV Parana, Py Magazine, Radio Nacional del Paraguay, Volcánicas Magazine, Senado TV, Consultora, Ciencia del Sur, Jacobo design workshop, ComexLatam, En Positivo Paraguay, Ade Comunicaciones, High Class Magazine, Telefuturo, Más TV / Radio Encarnación, EXTRA Newspaper / Radio Monumental, El Insecto, República Radio/TV, Unicanal S. A, Pausa Magazine and Kausa Central Creativa.

Regarding the forms of connection to the Internet, the respondents answered: only by cell phone 13%, only computer 9% and both 78%. The frequency of connection is daily, by all respondents. The vast majority connect to the Internet from home (59.39%), in second place is at work (51.78%) and the rest connect in cafes, restaurants and others. Most of the respondents have contracts with Internet service providers and to a lesser extent only connect with data packages or prepaid cell phone credit purchases.

In the section on social networks, respondents had the option of selecting several answers to questions related to their preferences in social networks and communication channels. The social network most used by journalists for information is X (formerly Twitter) with 58%, followed by Instagram with 42% and to a lesser extent are the pages of the media and information, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube and others. Also, the set of social networks most used to communicate is also led by X (formerly Twitter) with 45% followed by Instagram with 42 affirmative responses 41%. To a lesser extent are Facebook with 27.41%, LinkedIn with 26% and e-mails, YouTube and TikTok with 26%. Among the most used messaging channels to communicate from the profession of journalist and communicator is WhatsApp with 73%, followed by Telegram with 14%, Signal with 2% and Slack with 1% and not completed or not shown 26%.

In relation to the section on freedom of expression and the right to privacy, the survey focused on gathering the most information on how often they post on social networks, whether they post their own content or not, whether they freely exercise their freedom of expression, whether there is censorship or self-censorship, and whether they have digital security habits to protect themselves on the Internet. Respondents expressed that in general they do not receive much information from third parties to their personal social network accounts and also that the information they share on their network accounts is generally not their own content.

Also, respondents tend to respond to comments that differ from their opinions on social media. The majority only respond if they believe it is possible to reflect with the other person and secondly only respond once but do not extend the debate if they see that there is no possibility of reflecting with that person (20%). On whether the frequency of posting for public debate with these divergent groups changed in the last 3 years, 80 of the respondents said that they reduced the frequency a lot, while 22 did not debate before and still do not debate; only 2 respondents said that they increased the frequency of their debates a lot.

With regard to digital protection and safety for the practice of journalism, it is interesting that 43% have secure passwords, 35% use two-factor authentication and 6% do not or do not know how to do so. In addition, 49% of the interviewees protect their computers with passwords. As for passwords on their cell phones, only 62% use them; in addition, those who completed this item expressed that they use fingerprint or facial recognition, PIN, patterns and alphanumeric. 34% use a password manager on their computers. Finally, 37% use only point-to-point encryption applications for their communications.

Finally, the section dealing with digital violence, which includes the following results:

The number of people who answered the questions related to digital violence was limited, as the online form only displayed these questions to those who confirmed having experienced this type of violence. Therefore, the following data will not be presented as percentages. The question they answered was about whether they “receive or have received digital violence in networks or messaging in the last 5 years”. 83 of the respondents answered affirmatively, while 34 answered negatively and 8 do not know. Regarding the question “is the digital violence you receive because of your gender status”, 63 answered yes, 11 answered no, 9 answered “don’t know”. Regarding the frequency of receiving digital violence, the respondents who said yes, responded as follows: daily: 1 person, weekly: 3 people, monthly: 3 people, every six months: 1 person, occasionally: 26 people, never: 0 people, do not know: 1 person.

Regarding the reasons they believe that they received digital violence: 31 stated that it was because of their physical appearance, 13 because of their gender identity or sexual orientation, 2 because of their race or ethnicity, 15 because of their age, 17 because of their political affiliation, 12 because of their social class, 54 because of their feminist activism, 38 because of their profession, 3 because of their nationality, 14 in the category of others (political vision, leftist ideology, other activism beyond feminism). On the question “whether the level of violence received in these sectors has changed compared to 2 or 3 years ago”, 41 confirm that they are assaulted less than before, 22 confirm that they are assaulted more than before, 13 that they are assaulted with the same intensity and 7 in the “Other” category.

Following this line of questioning, 253 cases of violence were identified, divided into the following forms of digital violence on social networks: digital, 18 were considered digital attacks by one or several profiles prompted by journalistic coverage related to gender, 42 stigmatizing speeches, 53 aggressions and insults, 8 threats, 8 cases of dissemination of non-consensual intimate image, 4 doxing, 4 identity theft, 28 defamation and damage to reputation, 1 of extortion, 18 of mobbing, 20 of surveillance, 9 of unauthorized access or

hacking of accounts, 2 use of spyware, 4 of interception and crossing of calls, 8 of distortion of images or videos or other false content, 20 of making false content, manipulation or out of context and its dissemination to discredit and damage, 10 blocking and deletion of profiles by social networking platforms, 4 other types of violence and 2 completed they do not know.

Regarding how the respondents received aggressions, 71 of them completed that only when they made a post on social media, 7 that they received aggressions independent of their posts, while 5 indicated that they have been subjected to harassment campaigns on social networks and other media.

On the other hand, the source from where digital violence is mostly received placed X (formerly Twitter) in first place, followed by Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, emails and SMS. 24.87% of the respondents have managed to identify their aggressors, compared to 14.72% who have not managed to do so.

A closer look at the type of aggressor reveals that among the total of 239 registered aggressors, unidentified or anonymous individuals stand out, followed by trolls, anti-rights groups, identified private actors or agents, colleagues in the media and, to a lesser extent, State authorities.

Option	Count
State authorities (A18E1)	3
Public employees (A18E2)	9
Members of the Armed Forces (A18E3)	0
Members of the Military and Civil Police (A18E4)	1
Companies (A18E5)	5
Protestors (A18E6)	6
Identified private actors (A18E7)	25
Businessmen (A18E8)	7
Media (Company) (A18E9)	9
Union leaders (A18E10)	3
Religious leaders (A18E11)	13
Organized social groups or social movements (A18E12)	6
Anti-rights groups or conversationalists (A18E13)	31
Organized crime groups, drug traffickers, guerrillas, paramilitaries and militias (A18E14)	2
Trolls and troll-centers (A18E15)	39
Justice groups (A18E16)	1
Unidentified persons (Anonymous) (A18E17)	44
The journalistic source (A18E18)	6
Intermediary platforms (social networks, search engines and internet providers) (A18E19)	5
Coworkers in the journalistic environment (A18E20)	20
Others	4
TOTAL	239

(In this question, participants were invited to select all relevant answers.)

Regarding the reactions they have when they encounter digital violence, 51 of the respondents blocked those who attacked them on social networks, 31 reflected on their public exposure on social networks, 26 denounced the profiles on social networks, 21 stopped reading violent notifications, and this was followed by the impulse to suspend or delete their own profile. To a lesser extent are those who temporarily suspended their networks or stopped posting (self-censorship).

Option	Count
The impulse (not materialized) to close or suspend your profile on that account to prevent further attacks (SQ9E1)	18
The impulse (not materialized) to report the aggression in the same social network where I was attacked (SQ9E2)	18
Reflections on public exposure on a social network (SQ9E3)	31
I reported the aggression in the same social network in which I was assaulted (SQ9E4)	26
I temporarily suspended my profile on that network to avoid further attacks (SQ9E5)	5
I permanently suspended my profile on that network to avoid further attacks (SQ9E6)	2
I started blocking those who attacked me (SQ9E7)	51
I stopped reading violent notifications (SQ9E8)	21
Not applicable (SQ9E9)	5
Other	11

Regarding the type of editorial or topic of coverage where digital violence is received, 54 respondents answered that it was in the area of opinion, followed by politics, others (current affairs, education, business, gender and human rights), local issues and finally sports.

Option	Count
Politics (SQ10E)	42
Sports (SQ10E2)	7
Opinion (SQ10E3)	54
Local (SQ10E4)	10
Culture and entertainment (SQ10E5)	9
Fashion (SQ10E6)	4
Other	14

Regarding the response of social networks to complaints and reports of digital violence, the majority of respondents said that they were not satisfied with the outcome.

On the policies of traditional media and social media regarding violence against women journalists, 76 responded that digital violence in the media should be prohibited, followed by 44 who responded that it should be moderated in some way and 2 that there should be no intervention.

On public debate in the media and press, 54 responded that the media and those who host, favor and stimulate confrontation and violence; 51 responded that the media and those who host do not actively moderate the debate, which often leads to violent situations; and finally another 10 responded that safe spaces for debate are guaranteed, trying to prevent violent situations.

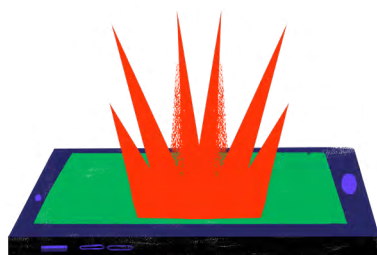
Regarding blocking intermediaries, 27 respondents answered that they received censorship, blocking or deletion of their profile in networks. This occurred mostly on Facebook with 17 affirmative responses, followed by Instagram with 7 and X (formerly Twitter) with 3.

In the section on regulations and responses from the judicial system: 84 respondents answered that they know and have heard about Law 5777/16 on comprehensive protection against all forms of violence, followed by 37 who answered that they did not. Of those who responded that they did know about the regulation, only 62 knew that it includes an article on telematic violence (Article 6, Subsection L).

75 respondents indicated that they did not view national regulations as an adequate response for safeguarding, preventing, ensuring justice, and providing redress for journalists who fall victim to violence. In contrast, 26 respondents expressed their agreement with these norms, while 24 respondents stated that they were uncertain. Similarly, 98 responded that they did not report issues of violence to the justice system against 9 that did. Of these 9, only one had a satisfactory result, 7 considered it insufficient and 1 null. When asked if they would recommend that people who practice journalism report digital violence to the justice system, 102 responded yes and 4 responded no.

As to whether there are protocols for the prevention and protection of the safety of journalists in their workplaces, 51 responded that there are none, followed by 17 who responded that there are. Of those who answered that there is a protocol, 14 responded that it includes a section on digital violence.

Of the 107 that participated in the survey, 58 indicated that they belong to a union or organized group of journalists. Of these 58, only 31 indicated that they quantify cases of violence and safety of journalists and that they include issues of digital violence. On the perception of insecurity in their workplace due to the digital violence they have suffered, 68 respondents answered that they do not feel insecure, compared to 19 who answered that they do. In the same line, 45 respondents answered that they have not reported the online violence they are receiving in their workplace and 18 that they have done so.



2.4. Findings of the qualitative study

This section of the study was carried out in November and December of 2022. Some of the limitations included the great challenge of exemplifying digital violence with physical violence in a limited time of 1 hour. Some participants in the focus groups from outside of the capital of the country -also known as “the interior of the country” shared experiences of workplace violence without a clear technological component and sometimes it was not possible to obtain examples from their testimonies. Likewise, some of them did not feel comfortable sharing situations of digital gender-based violence because the term “gender”³ caused them discomfort, which resulted in their withdrawal from the discussion. This situation led us to make adjustments to the instrument used, placing the term in the middle of the questions so that it would not be perceived as controversial and problematic.

The initial questions focused on the context of their profession and the political, social, economic and cultural situation in the country, which allowed us to better understand how their work relates to digital violence.

In Paraguay, being a journalist means confronting economic hardships and resource scarcity. The heavy reliance on advertising as the primary revenue source for media outlets poses challenges to their long-term viability and autonomy. Despite these economic disadvantages, journalism continues to be a respected profession in Paraguay. However, there is a credibility crisis in the media, both nationally and globally, due to dependence on economic and political interests. Furthermore, it is considered important to differentiate between the media company and individual journalists, as commercial interests can influence the independence and ethics of journalism (3ERA).

This point underscores a notable disparity in the conditions of journalism and job security between the capital and outside of the capital:

“Here in the interior, for example, if you want to work in radio, you must pay to have a space on the radio station. Instead of receiving a salary, journalists have to pay to have a place in the programming and get sponsors to cover those costs. This results in a severe form of job instability. We cannot speak of journalistic independence when journalists do not have guaranteed salaries or stable working conditions. In addition, there is a lack of support and protection from institutions and journalists’ unions. We often face threats and intimidation, and there are no clear mechanisms to denounce and seek justice. The lack of organization and union support weakens our position as journalists and leaves us exposed to risky situations” (5SMC).

“Living in Paraguay as a journalist is to live constantly at risk, especially along the border region where journalists have no protection whatsoever. In general, there is no protection for journalists in the country, but I feel that the risk is greater in this area because we are less visible being outside the capital. We face high-risk spaces on a daily basis and we interact with dangerous people” (5SMC).

Another interviewee highlights the opportunity to get to know different realities and people, as well as the possibility of “opening doors” in different places. However, she also points out that the salary is low and that one is exposed to criticism, public exposure and loss of personal life because of the dedication that journalism implies (4LBA).

3 In Paraguay, the discomfort with the term “gender” may be linked to a lack of understanding and awareness of equality and human rights issues. In many areas, especially outside of the capital, education on these issues is limited. This can lead to misunderstandings or biases around the word “gender,” which may cause people to refrain from sharing personal experiences related to digital gender-based violence. It is crucial to address these educational gaps to foster a more inclusive and safer environment for all.

The Internet and social media have had a significant impact on journalism. The rise of the Internet has changed the way in which people consume news, moving from a passive to an active approach, where information flows through different platforms. Social networks have transformed the dynamics of political and journalistic debate, but they have also generated controversy.

On the other hand, in the surveys and in the interviews, it was stated that X (formerly Twitter) is the main and most personal tool where information is shared, opinions are expressed and people get more informed. It is different in the groups and interviewees from outside of the capital, as Facebook appears as the main social network to publish their content. However, the vast majority of the groups and networks agree in highlighting Instagram for more personal and private use (2NDA).

In the focus groups, it also appears the inequality of access to the Internet and how this affects women. They mention that culturally the digital sphere has been seen as more masculine, and women have fewer opportunities and less time to develop digital skills. In addition, traditional gender roles in household chores and childcare are mentioned, which further limits the time available for women to learn more about the digital world and its tools (GCDE3).

2.4.1. Perception of digital violence in the practice of journalism.

All the women journalists who participated in the semi-structured interviews acknowledge the existence of online violence, especially against women in journalism. Attacks tend to be more personal, focused on physical appearance, age and gender identity.

During the focus groups, particularly in the outside of the capital, an interesting dynamic was observed in relation to the perception of digital violence in the workplace. Initially, many participants doubted whether they had experienced digital violence in their work environments. However, as they shared examples and experiences with each other, they began to recognize situations of violence where they had also been victims. Within two particular groups, it became essential to offer emotional support and assistance to certain participants who were profoundly impacted by the gradual revelation of this information. This experience highlights the importance of creating safe spaces where victims of digital violence can share and discover their own reality, and highlights the need to address this problem in a comprehensive way.

This meant that the process of perception and group diagnosis was slower in defining digital violence outside of the capital. However, it was possible to identify that digital violence is not only limited to physical actions, but can also occur through technological tools such as social networks. Sharing personal information without consent, publishing private conversations or receiving unwanted messages are examples of digital violence. In addition, they pointed out that there may be situations of digital violence that are unknown or barely recognized due to lack of awareness of the issue or lack of similar experiences in their environment (GCDE3 and GE4).

According to one of the interviewees, digital violence entails receiving messages that insult and undermine personal dignity. It also includes the use of surveillance technologies by the State, which invade people's privacy. The lack of adequate moderation by social networking companies is also considered a form of violence, as feminist and human rights content seems to be hidden or ranked lower in visible posts. In addition, violence on X (formerly Twitter) is a reality according to the interviewee, who mentions that women receive insults and aggressions constantly, even on their WhatsApp accounts. She also highlights that female politicians and journalists who take a stand on controversial issues are especially victims of online violence (2NDA).

Online violence differs from offline violence in that people feel more empowered and dare to express offensive or aggressive comments online, taking advantage of anonymity and the online environment (2NDA).

One of the interviewees acknowledges the existence of online violence and emphasizes that people can be more violent on social networks than in person. She has experienced situations of violence on social networks that have affected her mental health, but she has sought help and has learned to protect herself and confront these situations. She identifies personal attacks based on her age, gender, sexual orientation, or maternity status as aggressive and out of place (4LBA).

Participants mentioned that, in many cases, digital violence becomes systematic and repetitive over time. Although it can be difficult to recognize it from the first incident, they felt that even a single instance of online harassment can be considered violence. They stressed the importance of not minimizing these experiences and recognizing that any form of violence, both physical and digital, is unacceptable (GCDE3).

One of the interviewees stated that as a woman journalist she gets more violence and questioning compared to men who address the same topics, especially on political issues. Her ability to express her opinion is questioned and aspects of her gender identity are used to discredit her. On human rights issues, attacks focus on her motherhood and sexuality, and she is threatened in an attempt to silence her. She stresses that the difference between online and offline violence lies in the perceived impunity in the digital environment, where people feel more free to air aggression due to the lack of regulation and sanctions. In addition, she mentions that she has experienced violence in her workplace, specifically in the municipal office where a public and elected official questioned and harassed her in the press room (4LBA).

Digital violence has a clear gender dimension, as demonstrated in several examples shared in the focus groups. In one of the cases, a woman recounted how she had to block an atheist friend who responded excessively to every post she made about feminism. She went so far as to have the friend write to her husband, telling him that he should “control his wife”.

In another similar approach, a journalist mentioned how she was a victim of digital violence: her aggressors used her personal data to discredit her. In this case, they used her relationship with her partner to try to belittle her opinions. The question “what does your boyfriend think?” came up as a way to minimize her voice and divert attention to her partner’s perspective. This highlights how this form of violence is especially directed towards women, in contrast to how they would react to a man, where they would not seek their partner’s opinion in the same way (GA1).

Participants in one of the focus groups expressed that the perception of these situations depends on each person and their degree of discomfort. Some people may not feel harassed by comments or messages, especially if they come from someone they know, are respectful and are consensual. However, they stressed that minimization may be due to a lack of awareness about boundaries and respect in the digital environment. They also mentioned that there are other forms of digital violence that are not related to physical appearance or romantic interest, such as disrespect towards opinions or persistent invasion of privacy on social networks (GCDE3).

As can be seen the vast majority of participants agree that digital violence is very different between men and women.

“I find that the attack on women is much more personal. It generally concerns your life, your appearance, your profession, everything that has to do with your gender identity. I see that the attack on men is not the same: I see male and women journalists, and in general the attack on women is made personal with their body, with their age and with men it is more of a masculine debate of (in-audible) man to man as we would say, but they are never attacking them for their physique, for the color of their eyes, because they are fat or skinny, nothing. In that case, the debate is more heated, in quotation marks, even if there is swearing or vulgarity, the man focuses on the subject, woman’s opinions are dismissed based on personal vilification” (3ERA).

“During a broadcast in the rain, my partner and I were soaking wet, wearing the channel’s waterproof jackets. However, in the comments on the photo, people questioned why I was not dressed appropriately and my partner was not told anything” (GE4).

Although digital violence is gender-based, the participants emphasize that women also reproduce gender-based violence, although it mostly comes from men or strangers using fake profiles (GGA2 and GCDE3).

“In my case, I have noticed more women, I don’t know if they are real or are trolls or what, but I look at the photos of the profiles that usually respond to me and they have photos of women” (3ERA).

Some highlight that in social networks people tend to bring out their dark side and feel more empowered to express violent opinions due to the anonymity provided by the Internet. This digital violence is considered more elevated and cowardly than face-to-face confrontation (2ERA).

On the other hand, it was argued that one of the difficulties in recognizing any form of violence, including digital violence, is to recognize yourself as a victim. No one wants to see themselves in that position, which could make it difficult to identify violence. In addition, it was mentioned that the virtual nature of digital violence can lead to minimizing it, as it does not cause direct physical harm. However, they emphasized that digital violence can have a significant impact on people’s lives and should be taken seriously (GCDE3).

In conclusion, the work demands and pressure experienced by women journalists were addressed, including the possibility of requiring them to “like” or share content on social networks in a compulsory way by the public institution in which they work or the media company, although no mention was made of direct control over this practice (GCDE3 and GE5).

2.4.2. Types of digital violence experienced during work

The classification of types of digital violence is based on the list of 21 types of digital gender violence collected by TEDIC, Luchadoras, Hiperderecho and APC since 2018 and updated to date. Out of the 21 types of digital aggressions, 12 were recorded and are described below:

a. Threat to life and limb

Speech and content (verbal or written, images, etc.) with an aggressive and/or threatening tone. Direct threats of violence of any kind.

One of the journalists interviewed shared her experience of gender-based violence in digital media. Since her publications deal with injustice, inequality and violence against women and girls, she receives messages that attempt to silence and attack her. The interviewee mentioned that she has received death threats, especially after publishing about a femicide case. This threat was made through X (formerly Twitter). In view of this situation, the interviewee got scared and shared the threat with her friends, who encouraged her to report it. Along with the women from the commission of the Union of Journalists of Paraguay, they filed a formal complaint with the Public Prosecutor's Office. However, the process was stopped in X (formerly Twitter) due to the lack of evidence preservation, such as the aggressor's account in that network. The case was stuck without any further progress (2NDA).

She stresses that she has received protection measures from the State, including guards and patrols, but she also feels exhausted by the systematic violence she faces. Despite this, she considers it her responsibility to speak out on certain issues and to continue writing to try to make people understand. Despite her exhaustion, she remains committed to her fight for equality and respect for diversity.

In another semi-structured interview, a journalist shares her experience as an investigative journalist in Paraguay and talks about the violence she has faced as a woman in the field of journalism. She recounts a traumatic incident in which she was physically attacked in 1989, which affected her personal life and intimate relationships. She then expresses how digital violence has had an even greater impact, as the attacks not only affected her, but also her family. She mentioned that since then, she has been subjected to state **surveillance, communications surveillance and doxing**. In addition, she mentioned that she experienced violence from her journalistic sources, both in terms of blackmail and harassment (1MRA).

She also mentions that since the rise of the Internet in Paraguay in 1996, she has experienced online violence through different platforms such as discussion lists, radio, social networks and blogs. The attacks include insults, threats and demeaning comments about her physical appearance and personal life. She also adds situations of sexual violence, in which she has received threatening messages of rape and other acts of violence.

b. Hateful and demeaning speeches

Speech that reflects cultural models that incite violence, whether through comments, insults, or verbal aggression.

This phenomenon is closely linked to the ideological aspects and this connection has gained great significance nowadays:

“The use of terms such as “lefty or fucking lefty⁴” has taken the lowest level of insults, and slurs have become prevalent. Such slurs include comments about sexual orientation, with phrases such as “here comes the scissors⁵ or lesbian,” which creates uncertainty about how to classify these attacks. These behaviors can be related to both gender identity and ideological beliefs” (GA1).

“In addition, there is a Twitter account called “fake feminism” or “anti-feminist”, which aims to incite harassment. Every time a new case comes up, this account launches into attacking and spewing all kinds of comments. It is surprising. It seems that this account and others like it have subscribed to a list of feminist people, as they are vigilant and respond every time someone posts something on Twitter. Their responses seem to fall out of the sky, indicating a constant and premeditated attention to certain people and topics” (GA1).

One of the focus group participants shared that every time she addresses issues related to the fight for various sectors, such as land rights or human rights, they face a significant amount of bots that are dedicated to discrediting their journalistic research. Recently, a media company in which she participated published an article about rural women, written by her, which dealt with their struggle for land. In response, several tweets expressed contrary opinions, even wishing death to the farmers.

c. Extortion

Forcing a person to act upon the will of another person, by threats and intimidation.

In one of the focus groups, it was mentioned that it is difficult to publish articles related to corruption and that the threats and extortion they receive for carrying out their journalistic duties is a very delicate issue:

“In my case, mainly in medical circles because I cover health areas, I generally receive attacks and extortion for my publications through WhatsApp and not through social networks. There they blackmailed me by slandering me online, labeling me as a liar and publishing false information about me. Despite all this, I avoid reporting publicly or sharing on the networks due to the psychological consequences and the double exposure that this implies.” (GA1).

4 In the Paraguayan context, the term “lefty” has acquired negative connotations. These go beyond its literal meaning, which simply refers to a person who primarily uses their left hand. In Paraguay, this term has historically been used to disqualify or insult people with leftist political leanings. The stigmatization of the left in Paraguay has historical and political roots, and the term has become a derogatory label that seeks to discredit or belittle someone’s opinions or actions. It is important to keep this context in mind when using the term in discussions or debates.

5 The term scissoring is an expression that refers to a sexual position among lesbian women. However, it is crucial to understand that this term is commonly used in a derogatory way to discredit and stigmatize lesbian women in Paraguayan society. The literal English translation, “scissoring,” may not fully capture the negative load and the specific cultural context of the term in Paraguay. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that its use can be offensive and discriminatory.

d. Online defamation

Defamation and reputation damage by false and offensive online comments.

One of the interviewees talks about the aggressions she has experienced as a female journalist and how these are amplified compared to those that a woman who is not a journalist may face. She mentions that the aggressions can be seen in negative comments on her social media posts, but also in media that generate content based on her words, which amplifies and distorts her message. She mentions that she has found defamatory publications about her in unknown media, where her work is misrepresented and she is attacked, without knowing who is behind this (5SMC).

Another journalist recounts that the attacks escalated when she began investigating former President Cartes in 2008. Digital attacks became more frequent and anonymous, and she experienced online threats and defamation. The journalist describes how she was forced to live a double life, facing attacks both in her journalistic work and on social media. She also mentions the González Daher audio recordings, which were a critical point where she felt she hit rock bottom and found herself morally attacked. Online attacks and digital violence have had a significant impact on her life and her journalistic work. She also shared her experience of having suffered physical violence in the past, which affected her deeply. However, she stressed that she did not feel that her life was in danger at the time, unlike the digital violence she experienced, as she considered an attempt to severely harm herself and even commit suicide (1MRA).

e. Surveillance

The constant monitoring of a person's online activities, daily life, or information, whether public or private.

Certain interviewees harbored concerns about potential surveillance of their communications during sensitive periods. Furthermore, they have encountered instances of social media harassment, such as being followed by military accounts while organizing a social forum or reporting on matters related to corruption within high-ranking military circles (5SMC, 1MRA).

In one of the groups they emphasized that they have suffered surveillance by intelligence, military and police, which are more subtle, as they do it through suspiciously anonymous profiles, which follow the accounts of journalists to monitor their online behaviors (GA1).

However, they stressed that surveillance also comes from their own workplaces: the media and organizations. In some groups, the fear of expressing an opinion on their networks because their editors-in-chief were watching them was highlighted:

“In the end we must have a neutral position, like not positioning ourselves in anything and just work, work, fulfill your schedule, fulfill your duties and not take a position on any issue, be neutral” (GA1).

A case that was brought up involved the access of the management of an organization where a journalist accessed the WhatsApp groups of its employees. They infiltrated the private conversations of the workers and the journalist, using her own messages to blackmail her and force her resignation. Although the conversations contained controversial content, the fact that they accessed a private communication is the key point in this situation.

Other testimonies highlight the fear of opening WhatsApp web on the media outlet's computer, fearing that they would leak the workers' conversations:

"You could not open your WhatsApp web because they filtered all the messages, everything that we girls said in a closed, private group, right? And where we girls could vent and could support each other as girls who were being victims of harassment at work and also sexual harassment within the company." (GA1).

f. Doxing

Meaning investigating and disseminating information that allows identifying a person without his or her consent, often with the intention of gaining access or contact with the person to harass them or for other damaging purposes.

A participant in one of the focus groups shared a personal experience of being harassed. While working in sports journalism, she was posting on social media about her coverage and an unknown man who heard her on the program appeared at her workplace and began to follow her, asking if he could go out with her. This situation made her feel scared and vulnerable, especially considering she was young at the time (GDE3).

However, more subtle forms of online harassment were also highlighted, such as the case of a journalist who, while doing a product promotion at work, posted a selfie that inadvertently revealed information about her location. In this case, the stalker used that information to send her flowers to both her workplace and home, creating a sense of vulnerability and invasion of her privacy. These examples highlight how seemingly harmless actions, such as sending flowers, can amount to harassment when a woman has not given her consent to receive this type of attention and is uncomfortable with it.

g. Online harassment

Repeated and unsolicited acts against a person or organization that are perceived as intrusive or threatening.

For example, there were situations mentioned in which they receive messages outside working hours, even late at night, and although they are not explicit expressions of affection, these intrusions and violations of personal boundaries are a form of online harassment.

One of the cases that stands out in online harassment is about a case of reporting corruption outside of the capital of the country:

"I want to share an experience I had when I worked for a media company in 2013. During a National Police press conference, envelopes with money were distributed to journalists as a "gift" for their work. I felt outraged and decided to post photos of the envelopes on Facebook, which sparked local and international impact. Although I received support and internal investigations were carried out and the police officers were summoned, I did not receive the expected support from the union, and I was even made fun of or received comments such as "the only thing you want is fame and to cause controversy". However, I just wanted to express how outraged I was by this fact. The lack of organization and protection is a reality in our profession". (5SMD).

Most of the participants in the 5 focus groups shared personal experiences of digital harassment, where they received unwanted messages and invasive comments on social networks, including from acquaintances or former colleagues. For example: they said that they often receive "likes" on old photos or inappropriate comments on their posts, even when

their profiles contain information about their families and personal lives. They believe that their stalkers often research their profiles and posts on political issues before becoming aggressive.

Further examples of digital harassment were mentioned, for instance situations where people send inappropriate or harassing messages, offensive comments in publications and requests for personal meetings or non-professional encounters. The difficulty of dealing with these situations was highlighted, especially when they come from sources or people related to journalistic work. It was also mentioned the need to adopt additional precautions, such as being accompanied in interviews to avoid situations of harassment (GvyCO4).

In the GA1 group, it was shared that it is difficult to give an opinion on any topic in social networks, from your journalistic profile:

“Being a breastfeeding mother, I once shared in a tweet my opinion on the need for companies to be required by law to have lactation rooms. However, that post prompted a series of attacks, such as questioning why I didn’t take my son with me, why I didn’t stay home with him, or why I was out of the house without him. The reason behind my comments was that I needed to pump at my workplace. The responses I received were because of my gender role.”

h. Non-consensual dissemination of intimate images

The unauthorized sharing of any type of information, data or private details related to a person.

When talking about minimizing violence, one of the focus group participants brings to the table situations that are minimized and are also digital violence:

“I will use the question to comment on something that has always bothered me about WhatsApp groups, something that often happens with colleagues. Out of nowhere, they send photos of the buttocks or breasts of a woman they see in a television coverage. It makes me uncomfortable, and it’s a habit among colleagues. They are the famous “pro-family” and they are the worst ones.” (GCDE3).

i. Receiving unsolicited sexual content

The non-consensual reception of sexual content, such as explicit images, to individuals without their approval, causing intrusion, discomfort and vulnerability online.

Several focus groups shared testimonies about this type of violence, such as being sent unsolicited images through mobile devices by journalistic sources, who had previously obtained the phone numbers for professional purposes.

“Early in the morning I received messages and photos from my journalistic sources. Luckily my husband was used to this kind of thing and didn’t say anything to me” (GvyCO4).

j. Mobbing in the workplace

It involves workplace harassment towards an individual or a group of people. This behavior occurs outside as well as inside digital spaces.

In the focus groups, this type of violence was highlighted, particularly coming from the management and editorial direction of the media. It was often communicated through WhatsApp or in face-to-face meetings the instruction to avoid coverage of topics related to gender and feminism, due to the fact that the owner of the media outlet declared herself to be “pro-life” and a defender of family values. This situation generated censorship in journalistic work (GA1, GGA2).

“In my case, in the media outlet where I worked, there were people who were dismissed because of comments on social media, and we were all aware of why they were removed, so there was automatic self-censorship.” (GA1).

“My coworkers used to make memes of me on WhatsApp groups; at first it seems funny but later on they used it to harass me at work”. This situation is not necessarily directly related to the sexual dimension, but rather to the way they act in the workplace. (GA1, GCDE3, GvyCO4, G35).

k. Cyber bullying

Cyber bullying and repeated harassment through offensive and/or derogatory messages.

The vast majority of focus group participants and interviewees also mentioned similar cases, in which a co-worker makes constant jokes about them, which makes them feel uncomfortable, using memes with their photos, teasing them in WhatsApp work groups or the main office board; sending unsolicited photos etc. (4LBA, GA1, GCDE3, GvyCO4, G35).

l. Coordinated attacks

These actions are orchestrated collectively by multiple individuals targeting a specific person, often involving a shared post or a dedicated website on social networks. The objectives can vary, ranging from the exposure of personal information to incite harassment and cyberbullying, to seeking the removal of the victim’s profile, or even fabricating fake identities to disseminate false posts and news.

In one of the groups, it was expressed that this type of violence is mostly on X (formerly Twitter). They highlight the density of the social network with armies of trolls for each sector, including a new denialism trend, which opposes globalism, multilateralism and also public health policies such as the use of face masks. These trolls use fake profiles to promote certain issues, such as the Ministry of Education’s campaign against educational transformation. Despite the fake profiles, it is perceived that they are nurtured by real and documented people in the political field, using their arguments to their advantage. These attacks are orchestrated, with instances where a collective of online trolls elicits responses from genuine and knowledgeable individuals within the same field, aiming to discredit or oppose the stated viewpoints (GA1).

2.4.3. Type of aggressors

This section explores some of the types of aggressors identified by the interviewees and participants in the focus groups and who commonly cause them harm as they carry out their journalistic and communication work. The classification made by ABRAJI⁶ of Brazil was used, which identifies 20 types of aggressors. In this research, 7 were identified and they are the following:

a. Known individuals

Individuals who are known by the victims in their family, work or casual circles related to the practice of journalism, who use technology to monitor, threaten, control and discredit them.

b. Journalistic sources

The vast majority of the participants in the focus groups outside the capital, unlike the focus group in the capital, agreed that the biggest problem for them are their journalistic sources, especially the police and public officials in the municipalities. This situation was more common in the interior of the country than in the focus group in the capital city (GE3, GvyCO4, GGA2).

A female journalist shared her own experiences of harassment and inappropriate flirting from her sources and politicians with whom she interacts in her journalistic work. She highlighted the lack of support and assurance from the media outlets in these situations, which puts women journalists in a vulnerable position. She stressed the importance of setting up safety protocols and of having a work environment that protects and supports women journalists against any form of violence. (4LBA).

They also mention that, as journalists, they often have to communicate with sources to gather information, and this can lead to some men from the public or private sector beginning to message them or respond to their stories on social media (GCDE3, GGA2, GE5).

c. Political actors

Furthermore, a female journalist shared her personal experience of having received death threats and highlighted the importance of the support of her peers and colleagues at that difficult time. Her testimony describes how her and her family were threatened because of her journalistic work. The threats were the result of her commitment to investigating sensitive and controversial issues related to organized crime. Her work to report and disclose relevant and often uncomfortable facts sparked the anger of those who preferred to keep certain realities hidden. The journalist vividly remembers the feeling of fear and insecurity that overwhelmed her when she was threatened. Each message, each call, was loaded with intimidation and a clear message that her life was in danger. The fact that her family was also mentioned in the threats only increased her anguish and concern. In the midst of this terrifying situation, the journalist highlights a key point: the unconditional support of her colleagues and co-workers. She mentions how, as an act of solidarity and courage, her colleagues came together to support and protect her. They were her support network, providing comfort and strength in times of vulnerability (GvyCO4).

6 <https://abraji.org.br/>

d. Anti-rights, religious groups

When women journalists cover and investigate women's issues and their intersectionality, they are systematically attacked by anti-rights and conservative religious groups:

"From my experience, I work reporting on the judiciary and the prosecutor's office, especially in cases of violence against women or abuse. I am struck by the intense interaction that these publications generate, with people trying to discredit what is shared. However, when it comes to issues such as corruption - we recently published audio recordings of the Rotela Group, in which this man ordered the murder of people from prison, and despite the gravity - it seems like nobody was interested in it." (GA1).

e. Military groups

During one of the focus group discussions, the participants highlighted the apprehension felt by women journalists when reporting on corruption matters in rural areas of the country. They recounted past instances of colleagues being under surveillance by these groups and expressed a genuine concern that their personal safety and lives are in jeopardy. (GvyCO4 y GCDE3).

f. News media. The editorial line

In one of the groups, it was pointed out that digital violence also originates in the workplace. The editorial line and senior management of the media outlets do not allow journalists to cover abortion, religious issues, gender, homosexuality, and other topics. They also monitor the behavior of their journalists online, their opinions and publications on social media and even monitor their private conversations on WhatsApp web on their work computers. (GA1).

g. Fake profile or anonymous stalker and trolls

An instance of digital violence involving fictitious or anonymous profiles was recounted, where one individual shared an experience of being harassed by a fake social media account. This raised concerns due to the challenge of identifying the person behind the deceptive profile. This situation has intensified recently and she is not sure if it is a personal issue or if it is related to a complaint or publication she made in her work. Additionally, she cited particular occurrences in which the fraudulent profile posted comments on her work-related publications, including those on an institution she is affiliated with. This deeply unsettled her, ultimately prompting self-censorship in her own posts. (GvyCO4).

The figure of the troll or anonymous harasser was addressed, pointing out that many of the aggressors involved were real and familiar people (GvyCO4).

"The first reaction to this type of aggressors is the feeling of fear, of helplessness, not knowing who is behind what they have written to you, this is already a red flag, from the very first moment it happens." (GA1).

2.4.4. Negative impacts of digital violence

The various negative impacts that digital violence has had on journalism are explored here, from increased self-censorship to the emotional and psychological effects.

a. Self-censorship

This refers to people limiting their self-expression online due to fear of facing gender-based violence, harassment and bullying. This leads to a restriction of participation in public discussions, reluctance to express opinions and eventual withdrawal from on-line platforms to protect themselves, which in turn negatively affects the diversity of voices and the exchange of ideas in the digital space.

One of the interviewees has taken precautionary measures in response to her experiences. She now carefully selects the platforms and environments in which she presents herself, primarily using Instagram to share content unrelated to her journalism work. In addition, she mentioned that she no longer gives opinions on her social networks such as X and Facebook, and focuses on her one and only fight against corruption, putting all her resources into that cause, although she acknowledges the risks associated with it (1MRA).

“Self-censorship emerges as a result of fear, which especially affects people like me, who have a family and small children. In my case, when addressing certain topics on social media, particularly political ones, there is a greater sense of reflection due to the threats I receive. The first thought goes towards those who depend on us, who cannot protect themselves. This situation is made even more complicated by the fact that we spend more time outside our homes than in them, and the responsibility of taking care of our children is not 100% in our own hands” (GA1).

Regarding unsolicited photos in private chats or WhatsApp groups, some participants in the focus groups agreed that it was better not to engage in the groups:

“In the past, I used to argue with everyone. But then, for my mental health and at 45 years old, I don’t want to fight with anyone anymore and I want to keep my mind healthy and keep my sugar levels under control. So, I don’t fight with them anymore. I just ignore it, I don’t open the picture, and if I open it unintentionally, I delete it immediately. I just complain about it with my coworkers, but I no longer fight about it.” (GCDE3).

On the other hand, self-censorship also extends into the private sphere, the exercise of sexting and sexual and reproductive rights on the Internet by women journalists with their partners is at risk: “An illustrative example is the case of a journalist, whose ex leaked an intimate video in 2006. This incident kept her out of the public eye for almost five years. However, when she returned to the field of journalism and political coverage, the first thing that was brought to her attention was that same video. Personally, I always advise my daughter to never allow herself to be filmed or photographed, even if it is her husband. Avoiding this is crucial, because once those files get to a phone, they can be uploaded to the Internet without any control and deleting them is impossible and it affects us in our work” (GGA2).

b. Dismissive digital violence

Referring to the minimization, dismissal or normalization of digital violence of victims' experiences or the justification of aggressive actions. This perpetuates a toxic online environment by failing to acknowledge and adequately address the severity of emotional harm, which in turn undermines safety and respect for women journalists.

One of the interviewees shared her experiences of digital violence on social media, especially on a television show she is linked to. She has suffered serious insults, but has decided not to take legal action and instead has chosen to ignore and silence the aggressors. She has not experienced violence that has escalated from the Internet to the physical sphere nor has she received threats or sexual harassment online. Regarding digital violence in her workplace, the interviewee mentions that she has faced vulgar and rude comments, but she has identified them and silenced them without blocking them. She has not faced daily harassment from co-workers. In general, the interviewee chooses the battles she wants to fight on social networks and recognizes that sometimes she opts for self-censorship to avoid generating more violence. She has not filed formal complaints before the State for the digital violence she has experienced (3ERA).

c. Loss of employment

Referring to losing one's paid employment, typically as a consequence of a complaint or report to a higher authority within the media organization, stemming from incidents of gender-based violence affecting either the individual in question or a third party. This can have significant financial, emotional and professional impacts on the journalist's life.

One of the journalists shared her personal experience in which she reported cases of sexual harassment, digital harassment and mobbing by the manager of the media outlet she worked for. However, instead of getting support, the media outlet filed a slander lawsuit against her and terminated her contract. The journalist interpreted this situation as an attempt at intimidation and harassment to discourage others from speaking out about these problems. In addition, it is worth mentioning that after the complaint against the former manager, another manager was reported for the same reasons, which led a colleague, an alleged victim of this harassment, to resign (GA1).

d. Emotional and psychological effects

Referring to the impact on the emotional balance and self-esteem of journalists.

During the focus groups and semi-structured interviews, many of the participants highlighted the impact of digital harassment on social networks and messaging apps. Although some try to minimize it by saying "it is not real" or "it does not exist" or "just close the app and nothing happens, it is just there", they actually experience anxiety, difficulty sleeping and eating disorders as a consequence of these situations (GGA2 and GE4).

In two testimonies there were examples where the journalists highlighted an attempt to seriously injure themselves or commit suicide in the face of attacks and surveillance on the Internet that they received while exercising their profession (GA1, 1MRA).

Regarding the effects of violence experienced by one of the interviewees, she mentions that she has had anxiety and emotional breakdowns, but she has developed tools to manage the situation and take better care of herself. However, she recognizes that self-censorship is a consequence of online violence, since she avoids publishing certain things because she considers that it is not a safe space. She also highlights the psychological impact and anxiety generated by thinking about how to respond and react to attacks. She has not experienced physical violence outside the digital sphere, although she does mention an uncomfortable encounter with someone who had previously attacked her on a radio station. At the time, she opted to keep a confrontational attitude, but decided not to confront him due to self-care reasons (4LBA).

“Sometimes we say no, it won’t affect me. But if the harassment is very frequent, it will reach you again and in the long run it will affect you. I had serious issues of insecurity, I stopped going out for a long time and I took refuge in writing, in literature, I pursued other careers.” (GA1).

e. Distrust in the judicial system

The victims file complaints with legal authorities but feel that their concerns are not adequately addressed or that they encounter obstacles in the pursuit of justice.

In the focus groups they emphasized that they do not perceive that there is justice. One of the participants said:

“In general, there is impunity. There is a lot of patriarchy in the justice system, in the media, everywhere. They are always protected by the fact that they are men, and sometimes even by their families; or that they have children. They rely on that and it always ends up in nothing. Women who report often become unemployed, they do not get more work, and that also holds you back because you know that if you take the wrong step, if you talk too much, you will be labeled and that will affect you. And this, again, only damages us” (GDCE3).

“Based on the fact that I was also attacked in the digital sphere, impunity is more evident there. When it comes to physical violence, even though it is persistent, let’s say that at least we have already come a long way, we have certain laws, there is a certain cultural conception and certain instances, but digital violence, on the other hand, is not. We still have this idea that what is not physical, is not tangible, does not exist and therefore this facilitates impunity” (GA1).

f. Lack of cooperation from content platforms

It is difficult to request information or the moderation of violent content from technology companies such as Google, Meta, X and TikTok in situations of violence and even physical threats.

A journalist related the difficulty of bringing a legal action on defamation since this issue is not aligned with U.S. regulations. This prevents her from requesting information on this type of criminal offense, which led her to resort only to blocking or silencing the aggressor’s profile. She expresses her lack of knowledge on how to protect herself from threats and defamation that affect her journalistic work in social networks. In this situation, she is limited to consider self-censorship as her only alternative, living in fear and anxiety that these aggressions may happen again:

“The only way out I find is self-censorship and living with the fear and anxiety that it will happen again and not knowing in what form this aggression will return” (GA1).

In another similar case on the X platform, the journalist said that she received death threats and filed a complaint with the Prosecutor’s Office for Computer Crimes. However, X refused to provide the requested information, arguing the difficulty of accessing jurisdiction in the United States. This refusal even included notifying the aggressor profile and she was unable to pursue the case.

2.4.5. Protection mechanisms for journalists and collective care

The different ways in which digital violence is addressed and dealt with in the workplace will be explored here, including preventive policies and measures, staff training, and the importance of fostering a healthy and safe work culture in the digital age.

a. Identifying and naming violence

In the focus group discussions, the participants agreed that digital violence must be named and acknowledged by everyone: “If we don’t say it, if we don’t name it, it continues to be as if it didn’t exist. If we don’t name it, there is nothing to do. If we remain silent, we are perpetuating the system and violence. So, we have to name things, we have to say “this is violence”, “this is not right”. Because if we don’t say it, we are also contributing to keep it happening” (GGA2).

Also, the vast majority of the focus group participants shared the importance of journalistic work and the right to freedom of expression, because they are the only ones who can address issues of physical and digital violence of vulnerable groups and provide alternative information that present new perspectives: “By attacking women journalists, we are deprived not only of information, but also of the voices we represent” (GA1).

The vast majority of interviewees and focus groups agree that aggression against women in this profession is aggravated by media exposure, which means that the attacks and intimidation they suffer are widely disseminated, generating a devastating impact. However, many also highlighted the solidarity among women journalists, who support each other in these situations.

“It is essential to confront the issue directly and ensure that no actions escape consequences. The primary focus should be on addressing situations effectively rather than engaging in unproductive online debates, where other colleagues might interfere in ways that undermine the news environment and accountability in information dissemination” (GE4).

b. Blocking comments and profiles in social networks

After posting articles on religious and human rights issues, one of the journalists has faced threats and negative comments on her social networks. Some people sent her threatening messages on Instagram, which led her to disable comments for those who did not follow her. Although these situations do not affect her emotionally, she is more concerned when digital violence is made public on platforms such as X or Facebook, as this can generate a wider negative impact (4LBA).

“I have never liked to block people because I want to stay in the loop of what’s going on. However, a few days ago, the harassment did not stop, so I decided to explore the options Twitter provides, since that was the platform where I was being harassed the most. Some aggressors would move from Twitter to Instagram to continue the harassment, but in the latter place I did not respond to their teasing. Instead, on Twitter, I experienced a massive attack that kept flooding my notifications. It was then that I opted to explore reporting options instead of blocking. However, I found that Twitter did not acknowledge my complaints because they were supposedly not considered violence according to their criteria, which left me perplexed. Instead, I was offered the alternatives of muting or blocking. Since the harassment was getting to be too much, I had to rely on blocking for the first time to stop the persistent messages. This made me reflect on the lack of variety in reporting options and approaches to address different forms of violence on social media” (GA1).

c. Group settings in messaging apps

Another journalist suggests configuring messaging apps and moderating them:

“In that case, it is important to carefully select with whom it is worth debating and discussing, as there are people who are not willing to listen and change their posture. Spending time and energy on them is a waste of time and can lead to stress. In groups where the participation of certain people can be omitted, it is better to leave them. However, in institutional press groups where serious issues are discussed, it is ideal to have administrative restrictions to avoid inappropriate behavior. It is also relevant to participate in informative groups to keep up to date. However, in the case of confronting a colleague for their actions or inappropriate comments, it is better to do it in person rather than arguing on WhatsApp” (GE4).

d. Violence prevention protocols and applications of law 5777/16

One of the interviewees mentions that she is not aware of the existence of prevention and safety protocols for women journalists in the media she works for. Although she was offered legal assistance in cases of harassment, she is not familiar with institutional protocols. She is not a member of a union or group of journalists addressing safety issues. Regarding Law 5777/16 on comprehensive protection against violence, she considers it to be a fundamental tool, but there is a need to make greater use of it and to report more. Regarding stopping digital violence, she points out that challenging the situation without engaging in violence is important, but acknowledges that social networks are becoming a problematic environment and that more elaborate or legal tools are needed to address this problem.

“I believe it is essential to promote greater awareness of the importance of press freedom and the protection of journalists. It is necessary for state institutions and journalists’ unions to work together to establish protection mechanisms and guarantee dignified working conditions. It is also essential to encourage solidarity among journalists, strengthening union ties and providing peer support in situations of risk. Furthermore, society in general should be aware that violence and intimidation against journalists directly affect their right to receive information and, therefore, should demand that journalists’ rights be respected and protected” (5SMA).

e. Safe spaces for collective protection and support

It is also highlighted that solidarity and support among women journalists is a critical safeguard against digital violence. Although the liability of social networks and the need for stronger policies are mentioned, it is acknowledged that organization and unity among women journalists are key factors to counteract these attacks.

Among the responses from the focus groups, the following statement stands out: “We are alone here. Some people put things in place, but in reality there is no protocol or safe places. For example, one of the media outlets where I am, in the introductory session, they talked about the harassment protocol. But that has remained just that, a talk, and if you make a complaint, nobody follows it up. In the rest of the media there is nothing, there is no protocol, there is no place to file a complaint, there is nothing” (GCDE3).

One of the members of the focus group emphasized the need to make visible the violence received by her colleagues in other media: “Highlighting visibility is crucial for me. Identifying who can be exposed is vital, considering that not all of them can be exposed due to possible backlash. This provides an opportunity to look out for female colleagues. In addition, through networks and the solidarity of many women, a collective positioning can be conveyed. In this sense, the support of the organization becomes the main priority” (GA1).

Another interviewee shares her own tools to deal with this type of situations, she mainly solves and minimizes the situation on her own, however, it is not specifically mentioned if she has support spaces such as women’s groups, friends, colleagues or family members (3ERA).

“It is essential to have spaces like this where we can talk openly about the issue and build a greater understanding of it. We must make them understand that these situations that they consider normal are actually violence, and that measures must be adopted to fight them. This is not a matter of a person having to endure harassment in order to survive in the media. It is important to understand that any experience of bullying is not the fault of the victim, but of the aggressor” (GCDE3).

On the other hand, there is the lack of job security, which makes many journalists unable to get together and ask for help when they experience digital violence in the workplace: “In my two jobs, I am hired without a Christmas bonus or the stability to join a union. In addition, my work and mothering life prevents me from attending networking meetings, even if I wanted to. In my situation, what I really need are more comprehensive laws that provide me specific options and safeguards” (GA1).

f. Safety measures in the workplace

It was identified that there is a need for media outlets, organizations and employers to implement comprehensive and sensible protocols for the prevention of digital gender-based violence.

One interviewee highlighted that she is concerned about protecting her accounts and work materials through the use of strong passwords, two-step authentication, and additional security settings. She also mentioned that she has received some assistance from Google when she has had attempts to access her Gmail account (1MRA).

In relation to the protection and prevention of digital violence, it was mentioned that in some media, they do not have comprehensive protocols that cover legal, physical, emotional and digital aspects. Although they have received some support when they were attacked, they consider that more professionalism could be needed in terms of emotional support, such as the help of psychologists or therapists.

As for how to seek support, another journalist reported that initially she did not get support from the media outlets or her colleagues, even though she was being attacked on social media because of her work. She considers that it was a mistake that the media did not provide her support and assistance, especially taking into account her age and experience. In relation to a second case, when she was threatened by a municipal councilman and shared the incident on social media, only the union contacted her and the Network of Women Communicators supported her, while the media outlet where she works did not show any interest or support (4LBA). To date, she has not appealed to the courts or other institutions to seek solutions. In some cases, she relied on her friends and the solidarity of the Paraguayan Network of Women Communicators. However, she acknowledges that she made mistakes in not reporting or properly recording some threats, and in retrospect, she believes she could have acted differently. In spite of everything, she continues to deal with digital violence and continues to work in her journalistic career (4LBA).

With regard to the need for meeting spaces and women's groups, one of the focus group participants expressed her concern about the lack of such spaces:

“Within women’s networks, it is common to find a trivialization of harassment and violence. There is a tendency to downplay these experiences, saying phrases such as “that’s normal, you have to put up with it if you want to survive in this media outlet” and so on”.

It is worrying to hear some women express themselves in this way, but in reality it is a product of ignorance and lack of understanding of the nature of these types of violence.



3. Conclusion

The main objective of this research was to gather information on whether the participants had experienced or were experiencing digital violence in the context of their work and based on their gender. The discussion on violence, in particular digital violence on the Internet, was raised with the intention of challenging the common belief that gender-based violence only occurs in physical spaces. It is often assumed that the Internet is a safe environment where the same things do not happen as in the “real world”. However, the research reveals how structural and historical violence is transferred to the Internet, adopting more complex structures with the available technology.

In this sense, it was emphasized that the Internet is a space where numerous interactions and experiences are shared, but it is also a way in which pre-existing violence in physical spaces is continuously replicated. Sometimes, there is a tendency to minimize these situations of online violence because they occur in a virtual environment, far from one’s physical location, and are not being directly experienced. However, it is important to keep in mind that these actions have significant psychological consequences and even access to work issues. In addition, their impact is often minimized because no one wants to be victimized or be put in an inconvenient situation.

In the application of the quantitative and qualitative tools, the following challenges were observed: identifying this phenomenon in the personal and workplace contexts. There were differences in the processes of identifying digital violence between the capital and outside of the capital, and even in the types of aggressions. This is due to how women access the Internet, what computer tools they use to communicate and what their online rights are. This disparity is commonly referred to as the digital gender gap, and the quantitative study led us to this finding while simultaneously it constrained our ability to understand their perceptions of violence and the various forms of violence they encounter.

In the professional context of women, particularly those who work as journalists or communicators, there are additional challenges such as the types of violence related to their work and the types of aggressors: their journalistic sources, military, politicians, bots, anti-rights, conservative religious groups, etc. In this sense, the research shows that most of the aggressors outside of the capital are journalistic sources, unlike in the capital.

The term digital violence was explored in the qualitative part of the research, and the testimonies provided 12 types of digital violence which were gathered in the semi-structured and focus groups: harassment, doxing, sending unsolicited images, threats, extortion, cyber bullying, mobbing, coordinated attacks, non-consensual dissemination of intimate images, surveillance of communications, defamation, and hate speech and belittling speech.

It was also emphasized that the misconception of being a public or visible figure, receiving comments of any nature, even offensive or invasive ones, is a normal part of the job. Nevertheless, it was underscored that this normalization should not be accepted, and attention was drawn to the double standards and gender stereotypes that exist in how women are evaluated and critiqued in comparison to men within the media industry.

It was mentioned that, on social media, there are often people who attack and make negative comments about what is posted, even making comments about women's physical appearance, which is considered harassment.

It is also highlighted that self-censorship is one of the results of harassment on the Internet; it is one of the detrimental effects of this form of violence that affects the right to freedom of expression and opinion.

As can be seen in some of the testimonies, the women journalists and communicators who shared their cases for the research seek to raise awareness about the reality that many journalists face on a daily basis: the constant threat to their physical and emotional integrity due to their informative work. They expressed the importance of society acknowledging and valuing the work of journalists, as well as the need to guarantee their safety and protection.

This research reveals the urgent need to set up effective protocols against gender-based violence in the media. Urgent action is required to ensure the protection of women journalists and to promote a safe and fair working environment. This research calls for reflection on the importance of implementing concrete changes and fostering solidarity in the fight against gender-based violence in journalism.

Almost all of the participants conclude that it is crucial to include digital forms of violence under the categorization of violence as part of our mutual support and organization. This practice, akin to being associated with labels, equips them with a method to respond to and counteract violence stemming from trends opposed to human rights. In this context, categorization emerges as a potent instrument for addressing and challenging violence.

It also highlights the impact of social networks on journalism in Paraguay, highlighting the challenges and advantages faced by journalists in this context. It also highlights the importance of setting filters and being aware of the scope and impact of publications on social networks, because technology companies do not offer any other way to address the violence received by women journalists.

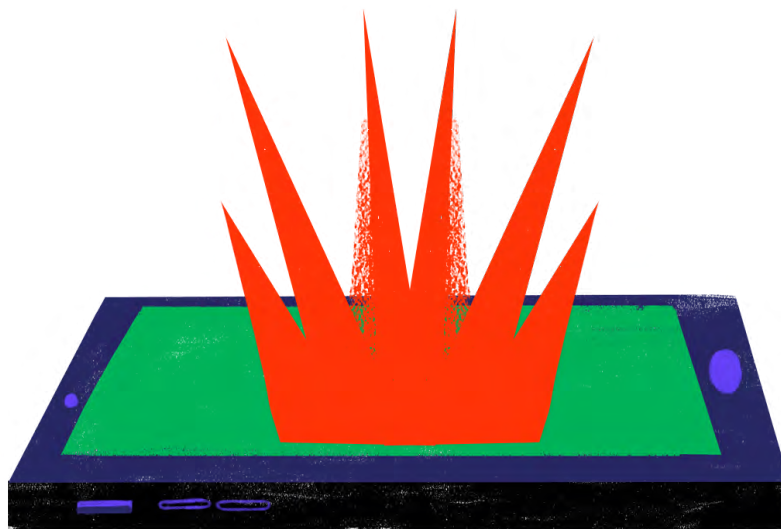
The testimonies of women journalists and communicators highlight the need for major changes in journalism, including greater institutional support and protection to ensure the safety and wellbeing of women in the profession.

It also highlights the importance of talking about digital violence against women journalists and the need for training and awareness in digital security for journalists. In the same vein, the research points out the responsibility of the media outlets to avoid and not to fuel this type of violence, and instead of seeking interactions and followers at any cost, to contribute to fight digital violence through education and by setting a good example.

Women journalists hence play a central role as a voice for the most vulnerable, reporting on issues of public interest and advocating for human rights. Structural and historical violence is a powerful testimony to their courage and commitment. Despite the enduring challenges they face, these women journalists have defied gender stereotypes, overcome cultural obstacles and challenged discrimination in their pursuit to be voices for the most vulnerable and advocate for freedom of expression. They dared to step out of their gender stereotypes as a response to violence, including digital violence.

Digital violence and gender-based censorship are contemporary manifestations of historical oppression that have disadvantaged women journalists. However, their determination to break the silence and address critical issues has paved the way for greater equality and diversity in the field of journalism. Acknowledging and addressing the deep roots of gender inequality in the profession is critical to ensuring that women journalists can practice their work without fear of violence or censorship.

The road to equity and justice involves challenging conservative norms and creating spaces where all the voices are valued and respected. In this sense, this research seeks to contribute to the great work of women in journalism and ensure that they are fully recognized and thus their perspectives enrich the public discourse for the benefit of society, even in its virtual dimension: because digital violence is real.



**DIGITAL VIOLENCE
is REAL**

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