

**The Vision Foundation in association with National Union of Journalists (India) conducted survey on “Threats to Safety of Journalists in India”**

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 *Highlights*

* Survey reveals that three out of five (approximately 61 %) Indian journalists faced threats and/or pressure at some point of time.
* Ensuring accuracy of news published (74%), followed by reporting exclusive news (13%) seems to be the top 2 priorities of the media organizations in which the respondents work.
* Biggest challenge faced by the journalism in the 21st century: 33% felt it was increasing attacks on freedom of press, followed by 21% respondents who felt that fake/paid news is the biggest challenge and 18% respondents also felt that social networking sites bypassing main media route.
* 70% of the respondents revealed that no safety protocol or training has been implemented in their respective media organizations. 44% respondents (out of those who faced threats) report such cases to their media organizations whereas only 12% report to the police/ other law enforcement agencies.

The years 2008-2018 were the most brutal years in terms of violence against journalists worldwide, and it is understood that threats to journalists’ safety seriously affect their right to freedom of expression. At least 4 Journalist were killed in 2019 in India, 5 in 2018 due to work related issues. This study is probably the first comprehensive & empirical survey designed to assess the impact of contextual factors on journalists’ safety. The questionnaire is inspired by globally adopted indicators developed by institutions like the United Nations & Freedom House. However, the uniqueness of this study is that it offers quantitative and qualitative insights into the issues of journalists’ safety, work-related ‘motive- confirmed’ deaths of journalists in India, impunity and other contemporary debates taking place in India.

Interviewees’ responses suggest that journalists face physical, psychological and emotional risks because of many factors like sharp division of ideology among citizens, high voltage political situations; impunity for crime against journalists; ethical dimensions of journalism etc.

Around 823 media persons were a part of the survey, out of which approximately 21 percent were female, 266 were associated with print news (215 newspapers & 51 magazines), 263 worked for Online Media, 98 were television journalists & Freelance. Online media is a new trend emerging in India due to increasing penetration of smart phones & low- cost data regimes.

Findings reveal that three- fifth (approximately 61 %) of the surveyed journalists faced threats and/or pressure at some point of time; on the other hand, 76% journalists say that either no safety protocol exists or that they were not trained for safety issues.

The best part of the findings is that truth and accuracy are two policies that are important to journalists. Ensuring accuracy of news published (74%), followed by reporting exclusive news (13%) and being the first one to publish news (11%) seem to be the top 3 priorities of the media organizations in which the respondents work.

When asked about the biggest challenge faced by the journalism sector in the 21st century, 33% felt it was increasing attacks on freedom of press, followed by 21% respondents who felt that fake/paid news is the biggest challenge. 18% respondents also felt that social networking sites and influencers bypassing traditional media is yet another challenge.

35% of the respondents who faced threats/harassment believe that the angle or the way a story was reported by them (left/right/centre) is the reason for being threatened or harassed, followed by their political ideology (19%) and the media organization they work in (9%).

39% said they never received any threat, whereas 29% of the respondents disclosed that they received threats once in a year, and 19% of the respondents received threats several times a month.

Around 46 % respondents (25 % official & 21 % personal account) out of those who were threatened, claimed that social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook were the medium, followed by 17% respondents who were threatened via private messaging apps like WhatsApp/Message.

70% of the respondents revealed that no safety protocol or training has been implemented in their respective media organizations. 44% respondents (out of those who reported the issue) report such cases to their media organizations whereas only 12% report to the police/ other law enforcement agencies. 21% of respondents who approached authorities claimed that when they approached legal authorities, an FIR was registered & another 7% of respondents claimed they were given police protection or some form of interim protection/help.

The majority of journalists feel ‘safety’ is a prerequisite of professional & independent journalism, but, at the same time, media persons must adhere to the principles of ethical journalism, impartiality, accuracy and truthfulness.

“The existing climate of impunity in India is a major concern & poses a threat to journalists’ freedom – especially for those adhering to the ethical principles of truthfulness and accuracy. The fact remains that journalists of all types, lineage or inclination are facing problems, irrespective of their ideology being left, centre or right wing. The environment is full of distrust particularly stakeholder across the other line including all type of ideology.” **National Union of Journalists (India) office bearer said in report.**

“The Indian Government & media group must immediately adopt The UN’s ‘Plan of Action on Safety of Journalists’ in letter & spirit, which has been endorsed by the UN’s Chief Executive Board in 2012. The plan aims to promote safe journalism by mobilizing different stakeholders, including UN agencies, governments, governmental bodies, NGOs, media organizations and workers, civil society members and academics.” Said Umesh Singh Journalists and key researcher of this study.

On the contrary, some journalists do admit that, in some cases, journalists’ political and ideological affiliations do affect their professionalism and become a reason for targeting, but this principle is applicable for all types of ideologies, hence, the time to introspect has come for many.

An interviewee revealed, “Instead of just putting all the blame on the government or media owners, we must introspect how journalists manipulate facts by virtue of their individual political and ideological inclinations.” Some feel it is high time online media got equal treatment as compared to other forms of journalism.

With Warm Regards,

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