



# **JOURNALISM AND SAFETY**

**DIGITAL THREATS, PROFESSIONAL FRAGILITIES,  
AND SAFETY CULTURES**

Edited by

Kristin Skare Orgeret, Oscar Westlund, and Roy Krøvel



# Journalism and Safety

This book presents selected international research on journalism and safety with a focus on digital threats against journalists and their professional practices. It offers an overview of ongoing developments in the field of journalism and safety from diverse regions around the world.

From various theoretical, conceptual, and empirical perspectives, the chapters address the escalating global concern of pervasive phenomena such as cyber-surveillance, orchestrated attacks, trolling, and online harassment and underscore the precariousness of journalists' work in various geographical locations. A section of this book examines the safety conditions of female journalists, focusing on their responses to gendered online attacks and hate speech, whereas another section analyses and discusses institutional and cultural responses to journalists' safety. The chapters draw on data from diverse geo-cultural regions globally, and collectively this volume provides a comprehensive overview of recent research on digital threats to journalists' safety and responses to some of the challenges. Additionally, it presents valuable concepts for further scholarly reflection on these issues.

The second of two volumes, this book will be a key resource for scholars, practitioners, and researchers of journalism, media and cultural studies, communication studies, and sociology. The chapters in the book were originally published in *Digital Journalism*, *Journalism Studies*, and *Journalism Practice*.

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Digital Threats, Professional Fragilities, and Safety Cultures

*Edited by*

**Kristin Skare Orgeret, Oscar Westlund, and  
Roy Krøvel**

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# Contents

<i>Citation Information</i>	vii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	x
Introduction: Digital Threats, Professional Fragilities, and Safety Cultures <i>Kristin Skare Orgeret, Oscar Westlund and Roy Krøvel</i>	1
1 Under Attack in the Cyber Battlefield: A Scoping Review of Journalists’ Experiences of Cyberharassment <i>Francesca Sammut, Malcolm Bezzina and Josianne Scerri</i>	14
2 “We Have to act Like our Devices are Already Infected”: Investigative Journalists and Internet Surveillance <i>Philip Di Salvo</i>	43
3 Trolling Journalists and the Risks of Digital Publicity <i>Silvio Waisbord</i>	61
4 Becoming a Target: Journalists’ Perspectives on Anti-Press Discourse and Experiences with Hate Speech <i>Čedomir Markov and Ana Đorđević</i>	78
5 Tired, Hungry, and on Deadline: Affect and Emotion in the Practice of Conflict Journalism <i>Richard Stupart</i>	96
6 “I Really Wanted Them to Have My Back, but They Didn’t”—Structural Barriers to Addressing Gendered Online Violence against Journalists <i>Annina Claesson</i>	112
7 “Journalists Are Prepared for Critical Situations ... but We Are Not Prepared for This”: Empirical and Structural Dimensions of Gendered Online Harassment <i>Susana Sampaio-Dias, Maria João Silveirinha, Bibiana Garcez, Filipa Subtil, João Miranda and Carla Cerqueira</i>	132

8	Time's up. Or is it? Journalists' Perceptions of Sexual Violence and Newsroom Changes after #MeTooIndia <i>Chindu Sreedharan, Einar Thorsen and Ananya Gouthi</i>	150
9	Worsening Safety Conditions for Women Journalists in Turkey's Alternative News Media <i>Özlem Erkmen, Bora Ataman and Barış Çoban</i>	168
10	Invisible in This Visual World? Work and Working Conditions of Female Photographers in the Global South <i>Saumava Mitra, Brenda L. Witherspoon and Sara Creta</i>	187
11	"Not Their Fault, but Their Problem": Organizational Responses to the Online Harassment of Journalists <i>Avery E. Holton, Valérie Béclair-Gagnon, Diana Bossio and Logan Molyneux</i>	205
12	Coping with Occupational Stress in Journalism: Professional Identities and Advocacy as Resources <i>Sallie Hughes, Laura Iesue, Hilda Fernández de Ortega Bárcenas, Judith Cruz Sandoval and José Carlos Lozano</i>	221
13	Precarious Professionalism: Journalism and the Fragility of Professional Practice in the Global South <i>Julian Matthews and Kelechi Onyemaobi</i>	242
14	Between Attack and Resilience: The Ongoing Institutionalization of Independent Digital Journalism in Brazil <i>Sarah Anne Ganter and Fernando Oliveira Paulino</i>	258
15	Understanding Nascent Newsroom Security and Safety Cultures: The Emergence of the "Security Champion" <i>Jennifer R. Henrichsen</i>	278
	<i>Index</i>	299

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*"I Really Wanted Them to Have My Back, but They Didn't"—Structural Barriers to Addressing Gendered Online Violence against Journalists*

Annina Claesson

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*Journalists are Prepared for Critical Situations . . . but We are Not Prepared for This": Empirical and Structural Dimensions of Gendered Online Harassment*

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**Chapter 8**

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*Worsening Safety Conditions for Women Journalists in Turkey's Alternative News Media*

Özlem Erkmen, Bora Ataman and Barış Çoban

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*Invisible in This Visual World? Work and Working Conditions of Female Photographers in the Global South*

Saumava Mitra, Brenda L. Witherspoon and Sara Creta

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**Chapter 11**

*"Not Their Fault, but Their Problem": Organizational Responses to the Online Harassment of Journalists*

Avery E. Holton, Valérie Bélair-Gagnon, Diana Bossio and Logan Molyneux

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**Chapter 12**

*Coping with Occupational Stress in Journalism: Professional Identities and Advocacy as Resources*

Sallie Hughes, Laura Iesue, Hilda Fernández de Ortega Bárcenas, Judith Cruz Sandoval and José Carlos Lozano

*Journalism Studies*, volume 22, issue 8 (2021), pp. 971–991

**Chapter 13**

*Precarious Professionalism: Journalism and the Fragility of Professional Practice in the Global South*

Julian Matthews and Kelechi Onyemaobi

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**Chapter 14**

*Between Attack and Resilience: The Ongoing Institutionalization of Independent Digital Journalism in Brazil*

Sarah Anne Ganter and Fernando Oliveira Paulino

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**Chapter 15**

*Understanding Nascent Newsroom Security and Safety Cultures: The Emergence of the “Security Champion”*

Jennifer R. Henrichsen

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# Introduction: Digital Threats, Professional Fragilities, and Safety Cultures

Kristin Skare Orgeret, Oscar Westlund and Roy Krøvel

In the digital age, journalists and media institutions find themselves at a crossroads of immense opportunity and significant risk. While the expansion of digital platforms and tools has enhanced the visibility and reach of journalistic work, it has simultaneously exposed journalists to a range of hazards. In this area of digitization, journalism has been fundamentally transformed by the pervasive presence of online platforms intensifying professional fragilities. Professional fragilities for journalists encompass a range of vulnerabilities and challenges that significantly impact their ability to effectively and safely carry out their duties. Threats and violence against journalists constitute some of the most significant contemporary threats to global press freedom, in the words of the Director-General of UNESCO, Audrey Azouley, “crimes against journalists have an enormous impact on society as a whole, because they prevent people from making informed decisions” (UNESCO, 2023). While the digital platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for information dissemination and audience engagement, they also expose journalists to various forms of harassment and violence. Gendered online violence against journalists has emerged as a particular critical issue, disproportionately affecting women.

This book aims to shed light on current challenges to journalism and safety and the structural barriers that hinder effective responses to such violence and explores the complex interplay between individual experiences and organizational practices. Drawing on extensive empirical research and firsthand accounts from journalists, the book explores the various forms of online harassment, ranging from acute verbal abuse to chronic and escalatory threats. It examines the profound personal and professional impacts of these hostile environments, highlighting the mental health toll, the inclination towards professional disengagement, and the disturbing trend of self-censorship among affected journalists. Central to this discussion is the recognition of the inadequacies in organizational responses. Despite the severity of the issue, many news organizations lack comprehensive strategies and action plans to support their staff, often relegating the problem to the individual rather than addressing it as a systemic concern.

Moving further, this volume considers the broader implications of these threats on journalistic practice and organizational responses. The analyses include the varying security cultures within newsrooms and the systemic barriers that impede effective support for journalists facing online violence. By bringing together insights from multiple studies and geographical contexts, the totality of chapters offers a comprehensive overview of the contemporary challenges in journalism, emphasizing the need for robust support systems and

protective measures to safeguard the profession in the digital era. In doing so, this book argues for the urgent need for systemic solutions, advocating for a paradigm shift in how news organizations perceive and respond to online harassment.

By providing a thorough analysis of the empirical and structural dimensions of digital threats, this volume seeks to build a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by journalists and news publishers in the digital era. It aims to catalyze change within news organizations, urging them to implement robust, systemic approaches that ensure the safety and well-being of their staff. Through this lens, it illuminates the current state of online harassment while paving the way for a more supportive and resilient journalistic community.

This book presents fifteen chapters of selected international research on journalism and safety with a particular focus on digital threats against journalists and their professional practices. From various theoretical, conceptual, and empirical perspectives, the chapters tackle the growing global issue of widespread phenomena like cyber-surveillance, coordinated assaults, trolling, and online harassment and highlight the vulnerability of journalists' work in different parts of the world. Moreover, the chapters offer valuable ideas for deeper scholarly contemplation of these matters. The volume is divided into three parts. The first section focuses directly on research addressing digital threats against journalists. The second section incorporates gendered perspectives into the discussion. The third section explores how institutions and cultures respond to the challenges of journalists' safety. It covers how institutional measures can mitigate risks and emphasizes the importance of creating reliable safety cultures to protect journalists and ensure their well-being.

## **Part One: Digital Threats**

Amid an age marked by digitization, platformization, and artificial intelligence, journalists and institutions of journalism have lots of opportunities but are also confronted with a multitude of challenges and existential threats. On the one hand, journalists can benefit from making themselves and their news outputs as visible as possible, enabling engagement with the news, and contributing to potential reader revenues and subscriber loyalty. On the other hand, the visibility of journalists' online and social media platforms means they risk being exposed to risks and problems. From Internet surveillance to online harassment and incivility, journalists find themselves navigating an increasingly hostile media landscape. Journalists across the world have been harassed by diverse individuals as well as by coordinated groups with political and/or financial interests.

The exposure of surveillance operations through the "Snowden case" and "Pegasus Project" have underscored the precariousness of journalists' safety in the digital realm. Clearly institutions of journalism work to reduce risks of digital surveillance, by using technologies and software with robust encryption standards such as Signal for messaging, Secure Drop for files, and Tor Browser for internet usage. Some journalists are also choosing to protect sources by keeping contact information off at any digital devices altogether. Importantly, journalists' anticipation of surveillance can result in them adapting their behaviors and thus having an impact on journalistic news work. In their Canadian interview study, Crete-Nishihata and colleagues (2020) concluded that information security cultures vary with different beats. Investigative journalists are more concerned with state actors surveilling them and

imposing legal threats, whereas other journalists are more concerned with surveillance and harassment from individuals or companies.

The global phenomenon of trolling has further complicated the consequences of news interactivity and digital publicity, putting journalists at severe risk of cyber-attacks, harassment, and hate speech. Consequently, being a journalist certainly is not an ordinary job even when setting aside working hours and other general working conditions. Contemporary journalists must be prepared for a digital environment marked by what Quandt (2018) refers to as dark participation and where they at any point of time may be the target of systematic efforts of humiliation, harassment, and threats, by both humans and bots enrolled by specific groups. Platforms are exploited for dark participation, and journalists are subjects to such activities.

Journalists and institutions of journalism have increasingly appropriated information security technologies and practices. To date the literature into this area is substantially more limited than, for example, how journalists are using digital and social media for branding, engagement, and so forth. Researchers have found multiple barriers for appropriating information security, such as more general structural and cultural barriers, as well as the perceived absence of usable technologies (Henrichsen, 2020). For this edited volume and this theme, we have selected five important articles in the field from recent years, each of which we will introduce the key contributions in the following.

To begin with we will discuss the chapter “Under Attack in the Cyber Battlefield: A Scoping Review of Journalists’ Experiences of Cyberharassment” by Francesca Sammut, Malcolm Bezzina, and Josianne Scerri. Their chapter offers a review focusing on two key areas: (1) developing an understanding of the prevalence and impact of cyberharassment among journalists, and (2) exploring journalists coping strategies. Following a systematic literature search, the authors reviewed 19 publications. They conclude from this research that journalists are harassed online across the globe. The authors discuss that much research has reported on online harassment of female journalists, whereas less is known about the extent to which male journalists and journalists with marginalized identities are harassed. The authors stress that online harassment has effects on several levels, from the emotions of journalists to more collective levels. The chapter offers some recommendations for taking actions against online harassment of journalists, on an individual, collective, organizational, and societal level.

Next, we have Philip Di Salvo, who studies the intersection of journalism and surveillance. In his chapter, “We Have to act Like our Devices are Already Infected’: Investigative Journalists and Internet Surveillance”, Di Salvo makes salient and problematizes how journalists have become targets of spyware technology and surveillance operations by different actors. Di Salvo stresses that investigative journalists are in a particularly challenged situation and that the threat of surveillance may result in a chilling effect. Drawing on a small but informative interviewee sample of six investigative journalists working in Italy, Germany, Hungary, Spain, Switzerland, and the UK, all affiliated with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), Di Salvo identifies a total of seven relevant themes: (1) source protection under stress (together with data storage and communication among peers and colleagues), (2) the ephemeral nature of Internet surveillance and the uncertainty about being a potential target, (3) the (private) expansion of Internet surveillance, (4) the international networks of Internet surveillance and the dangers of intelligence

sharing, (5) phishing and the dangers of “clicking on the wrong link”, (6) the need to adjust countersurveillance practices, depending on the perceived threat level, and (7) a pessimistic perspective on the effectiveness of information security strategies. Di Salvo concludes that the interviewees perceive much uncertainty around surveillance by state and private actors but nevertheless work under the assumption that they are surveilled and adapt their practices in terms of how they communicate with their sources and taking precautions for their storing of data. Journalists may well engage in self-censorship and silencing, especially if working with more sensitive investigations of the state.

To continue, we have a chapter by Silvio Waisbord titled “Trolling Journalists and the Risks of Digital Publicity”. Waisbord problematizes that trolling of journalists has become a global concern. Journalists and institutions of journalism have pushed for digital publicity for a long time, including social media. Essentially the public profile of journalists and their news materials have been cross-promoted online and on social media, making their journalists highly visible. This has made journalists exposed to diverse forms of attacks, hatred, and harassment. Waisbord discusses that such problems must be put into the context of the sometimes too positive and aspirational visions about audience activity and participation in a digital mediascape. Amid trolling of journalists, he further encourages to rethink the notion of the public, whom cannot be assumed to listen, focus on facts, engage in critical thinking, and act in a civil way but may instead use participatory functions in less constructive ways. Waisbord discussed that this aspirational view of the public as civic-oriented is a key blind spot in journalism studies, while we can recognize that relevant research has emerged in recent years, such as from his concept of mob censorship, referring to a “bottom-up, citizen vigilantism aimed at disciplining and silencing journalists” (Waisbord, 2020: 1031; c.f. 2023). Another relevant concept is dark participation (Quandt, 2018), which has been used for multiple studies into problematic ways of online participation. Altogether, Waisbord discusses two more key blindspots. One has to do with how the social identities of journalists can result in some being more impacted by digital publicity than others. The last blindspot concerns how the political context influences, with populist movements in some countries have advanced and weaponized problematic anti-press sentiments.

Next follows “Becoming a Target: Journalists’ Perspectives on Anti-Press Discourse and Experiences with Hate Speech” by Čedomir Markov and Ana Đorđević. The authors take as their point of departure that journalists nowadays work in a very hostile environment with anti-press sentiments. They offer an interview study with 20 journalists in Serbia, focusing on how they perceive and experience anti-press hate speech. Markov and Đorđević argue that hate speech against journalists can be seen as an ad hominem attack, an attack directed against the person, rather than against what they say, which is being activated by journalists’ practices. They identify and unpack two mechanisms associated with hate speech. The first is referred to as the *machinery of hate speech* and refers to when actors such as biased news outlets, troll armies, and ruling party officials engage in systematic attacks on journalists. The second mechanism is called the *lone-wolf-haters* mechanism and involves partisan audiences expressing hate to journalists more generally and across the board. Markov and Đorđević unpack the journalists’ experience of being exposed to hate speech, such as both emotional and physical health problems. Moreover, the journalists cope with hateful speech through a set of coping strategies. These include social support from family, friends, and fellow journalists, as well as institutional support from the

employer or institutions such as the police. It also includes psychological coping strategies for self-protection through resignation and emotional repression and professional coping strategies such as ignoring the content by way of not engaging it or by deleting it.

Richard Stupart has authored the final book chapter for this section, titled “Tired, Hungry, and on Deadline: Affect and Emotion in the Practice of Conflict Journalism”. Stupart zooms in on the significance of the emotional turn in journalism studies and studies a mixed methods study using interviews and ethnographic observations for a case of how journalists were coping emotionally during a reporting assignment in South Sudan. Stupart focuses on how emotions and affect can impact concrete news practices. He argues that emotion and affect, exemplified with exhaustion, should be seen as integral to and entangled with practices of journalism marked by safety and professionalism. The chapter identifies and discusses three key approaches for journalists in dealing with exhaustion: (1) externalizing deliberation, (2) deferring to professional habits, and (3) managing their emotional responses.

## **Part Two: Professional Fragilities – Gendered Perspectives**

The second part of this book delves into professional fragilities linked to the escalating concern of online violence and harassment faced by journalists, with a particular focus on the experiences of female journalists. Recent research has shown how women report that if they aim to engage with their audience online, which is often a job requirement for them, they frequently face sexist comments. These interactions criticize, attack, marginalize, stereotype, or threaten them based on their gender or sexuality. Such experiences of harassment were consistent across the countries studied (Chen et al., 2018). These findings were supported and substantiated in an extensive global study on online violence against women journalists called *The Chilling*, where Julie Posetti, Nabeelah Shabbir, and a large team of colleagues documented alarming trends of prolific and/or sustained online violence around the world (Posetti & Shabbir, 2022). Through interviews with more than 850 women journalists and 15 country-specific case studies, the research project clearly showed that the occurrence and impact of gender-based online violence are exacerbated at the intersection of misogyny and other forms of discrimination, including racism, religious bigotry, antisemitism, homophobia, and transphobia. The necessity for responses to online violence to be enhanced in technological sophistication and collaborative coordination was emphasized. Additionally, numerous recommendations for action were tailored to a diverse array of actors ranging from states, big tech, the news industry itself, legal actors, and civil society.

Despite this growing scholarly interest in the area of gender-based online violence against journalists in recent times, there is still a dearth of understanding about the limited support provided by media organizations to their affected members of staff. Through five selected contributions with extensive interviews and qualitative analyses, this part of the book reveals how structural barriers within media organizations hinder efforts to address gender-based violence and harassment. These barriers include unequal access to support resources, workplace norms that stigmatize reporting violence, and insecure working conditions that limit journalists’ control over their work. The adverse conditions for press

freedom further intensify these challenges, highlighting the need for systemic changes to support journalists effectively.

The section also examines the impact of social movements like #MeToo on the journalistic landscape, assessing how such movements have influenced perceptions and practices within newsrooms. Despite the potential for positive change, the findings suggest a gap between the awareness of issues and the implementation of effective measures to protect journalists, particularly women. Additionally, the contributions highlight the specific experiences of women journalists and photographers in different regions, emphasizing the intersectional nature of their struggles. The research points to a pervasive environment of hostility and inadequate safety measures, underscoring the additional emotional labor and resilience required to navigate these challenges. Overall, this section provides a critical examination of the contemporary threats to journalistic integrity and safety, advocating for more robust support systems and protective measures to ensure a safer and more equitable working environment for all journalists.

The first contribution to the section, Annina Claesson's chapter "'I Really Wanted Them to Have My Back, but They Didn't' – Structural Barriers to Addressing Gendered Online Violence against Journalists", explores how journalists' work environment limits their ability to address gendered online violence. Through interviews with 27 experts and media workers in the UK and India, Claesson discovers three main dynamics through which these structural barriers manifest: unequal access to support resources, workplace norms that stigmatize reporting online violence as a sign of "weakness", and precarious working conditions that leave journalists with limited control over their work. Adverse press freedom conditions seem to intensify the effects of these dynamics. By connecting these findings to broader inequality regimes in today's working world, Claesson argues that online violence both reinforces and is reinforced by the inequality regimes within media organizations. Just as organizations often struggle to effectively address other forms of workplace harassment, structural barriers complicate newsroom responses to online violence.

The following chapter "'Journalists are Prepared for Critical Situations . . . But We Are Not Prepared for This': Empirical and Structural Dimensions of Gendered Online Harassment" takes us to Portugal and examines online harassment targeting women journalists, delving into self-reported incidents, their effects, and trust in safety mechanisms. The authors are Susana Sampaio-Dias, Maria João Silveirinha, Bibiana Garcez, Filipa Subtil, João Miranda, and Carla Cerqueira. Drawing on interviews with 25 women journalists, the authors utilize a feminist and critical realist framework to investigate the causal structures and generative mechanisms that explain the female journalists' vulnerability to online abuse. The authors pinpoint three overarching themes: heightened visibility within an environment of increased hostility towards journalism and inadequate safety measures; intersectional gender inequality and the cultural norms that perpetuate it; and individual responses to harassment. They argue that these themes underscore the ways in which the actions of women journalists are shaped by both existing structures and cultural beliefs, constraining and facilitating their responses. Moreover, the chapter discusses how the female journalists often attribute harassment to their professional roles rather than their gender, and they acknowledge the sexualized and gender-specific nature of the insults, viewing this as an additional form of offense not encountered by their male colleagues. Women journalists also perceive harassment as a perpetuation of inequality and pervasive sexism, deeming

existing protective measures inadequate and inefficient. Consequently, they shoulder an additional burden of emotional labor to address online bullying, acknowledging self-censorship and the necessity to cultivate resilience strategies.

The next chapter “Time’s up. Or is it? Journalists’ Perceptions of Sexual Violence and Newsroom Changes after #MeTooIndia” is by Chindu Sreedharan, Einar Thorsen, and Ananya Gouthi. The chapter discusses Indian journalists’ perception of sexual violence and newsroom changes after #MeTooIndia. The #MeToo movement, which swept through India’s news and entertainment industry in October 2018, was heralded by many as a pivotal moment for Indian journalism. Driven primarily by social media activism, the #MeToo movement generated significant public discourse and outcry, resulting in the exposure and resignation of numerous journalists. This chapter examines the perception of #MeTooIndia in both regional and national newsrooms. Drawing on Manuel Castells’ ideas of networked social movement, Sreedharan, Thorsen, and Gouthi consider the origins of #MeTooIndia, including its mediation on private and social networks. Through 257 interviews with journalists across India, the authors examine the underlying cause of the campaign, the widespread prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual violence in workplaces, before they go forward focusing on the perceived impact, or potential impact, that journalists attributed to it. Whereas many of the interviewed journalists viewed the movement as “good”, they did not believe that it significantly influenced their environment or their work. The chapter’s findings show that regional journalists were more pessimistic about #MeTooIndia, with men expressing more skepticism than women.

Özlem Erkmen, Bora Ataman, and Barış Çoban’s study, which is presented in the chapter “Worsening Safety Conditions for Women Journalists in Turkey’s Alternative News Media”, investigates the lived experiences and gender-based safety problems of these women journalists. The chapter takes a postcolonial feminist approach to analyze the lived experiences and gender-based safety problems of women journalists working for alternative media in Turkey. Through 15 interviews the study evaluates the impact of Islamism, populism, nationalism, and authoritarianism on the women journalists’ professional and private lives. The thematic analysis of the collected data indicates that the predominant safety threats faced by women journalists originate from security forces in the field and arbitrary judicial sanctions within the court system. Interviewees attribute these assaults to an authoritarian government that perceives critical journalism as a principal adversary and actively supervises these actions. Additionally, women journalists endure unsustainable working conditions in alternative news media. While alternative media theories often posit that such institutions would be gender-equal and pro-labor, the widespread disregard for women’s labor and gender rights challenges this normative perspective. Nevertheless, the interviewed women journalists remain motivated to pursue journalism, viewing it as a significant tool for empowerment for themselves and other marginalized identities. Furthermore, solidarity among women, supported by the feminist movement, serves as the primary source of their resilience.

The last chapter in this section has been co-authored by Saumava Mitra, Brenda L. Witherspoon, and Sara Creta and is entitled “Invisible in This Visual World? Work and Working Conditions of Female Photographers in the Global South”. The chapter takes recent research, which has illuminated the male-dominated ethos that characterizes the field of photography as its point of departure, and introduces additional studies examining the

disparities encountered by local and foreign photographers in the Global South. These photographers navigate a transnational photography field where collaboration occurs between actors from the Global North and South, yet economic and symbolic power largely remains with agents and institutions based in the Global North. The researchers build upon and expand these investigations by examining the professional experiences of 20 female-identifying photographers from 18 countries across four distinct geo-cultural regions in the Global South. The chapter examines these women photographers' experiences of marginalization, highlighting three overarching themes: precarity, isolation, and invisibility/partial visibility. It underscores how gender-based exclusions inherent in the national fields of photography intersect with geo-cultural exclusions, influencing what is recognized as cosmopolitan capital within the doxa of local-foreign photographic practice.

### **Part Three: Institutions and Cultures of Safety**

This section of the book explores the contemporary challenges and threats faced by journalists, with a particular focus on the institutional and cultural responses to these issues.

Institutions and their ingrained safety cultures play a central role in mitigating risks and safeguarding professionals (Guldenmund, 2000, Alsalem et al., 2018, Bautista-Bernal et al., 2024). The healthcare industry, for instance, has developed well-established safety protocols and training programs, which include thorough incident reporting systems and efforts to build a blame-free culture to encourage reporting and rectification of safety concerns (Alsalem et al., 2018, Churruca et al., 2021). Similarly, the aviation sector depends heavily on rigorous training, strict adherence to safety protocols, and sophisticated safety management systems (Hollnagel, 2015). Even in sectors like banking and finance, where physical danger is less apparent, an emphasis on cybersecurity, data protection, and compliance frameworks illustrates a commitment to safety and security that protects assets and maintains public trust (Van Greuning & Brajovic-Bratanovic, 2020).

The common thread across many industries is the recognition that a strong safety culture, supported by robust institutional frameworks, is of great importance for mitigating risks, protecting professionals, and safeguarding operational quality. Across various sectors, there is a strong focus on preemptively reducing risks through clear procedures, designated responsibilities, and continuous training and awareness efforts. When accidents or incidents happen, the response must be swift and systematic, with thorough investigations that are vital for pinpointing the underlying causes. Taking corrective actions based on these findings help prevent similar future events while the ongoing improvement and exchange of learned lessons are crucial for fostering a robust safety culture (Nieva & Sorra, 2003; Goh et al., 2010; Ioannou & Serafeim, 2015; Noort et al., 2016; Maier et al., 2024).

Institutions are established organizations or mechanisms that govern the behavior of individuals within a given community, serving critical social, legal, political, economic, or cultural purposes (Knight, 2001; Andina & Bojanić, 2020). Consequently, in journalism, institutions would be ideally positioned to play a crucial role in building lasting cultures of safety to protect journalists and ensure ethical reporting standards. Relevant institutions in journalism include regulatory bodies, which could enforce standards and ethics to maintain accountability and public trust; professional associations, which could advocate for journalists' rights and promote safety standards; educational institutions, which could

integrate safety training into journalism curricula to prepare students for real-world challenges; media companies, which could implement safety protocols and support journalists in hazardous environments; and legal institutions and NGOs, which could provide legal support and resources to ensure journalists can operate without undue risk. Building on lessons learnt in other sectors of society, institutions would collectively have the potential to create a robust framework to enhance the safety and integrity of journalism. However, building robust safety cultures in journalism is particularly challenging due to the industry's specific characteristics. The often variable and hazardous conditions of journalistic work complicate the implementation of standardized safety protocols, while economic pressures limit resources for safety initiatives. Widespread use of freelancing further hinders uniform enforcement of safety standards. Unlike sectors with stringent regulations, journalism lacks enforced safety rules, leading to varied practices. Additionally, rapid technological changes and cultural norms that encourage risk-taking further resist safety measures. Combined, these factors have made institutionalizing safety in journalism difficult.

Despite the importance of institutions and the potential to develop cultures of safety in journalism, the topic remains relatively underexplored. The articles in this section are significant efforts aiming to deepen our understanding of the relationship between safety, institutions, and safety cultures within journalism. The contributions pave the way for more comprehensive research and the development of informed practices that can significantly enhance safety conditions for journalists worldwide. The articles explore various aspects of the journalism industry, each addressing distinct challenges and proposing innovative solutions to boost safety and security. Together, they shed light on the intricate landscape of journalism, ranging from internal newsroom security protocols to the expansive institutional frameworks supporting independent digital journalism, highlighting challenges facing journalism today – such as the need for better security measures in newsrooms, more robust support for journalists in unstable conditions, and more effective organizational responses to online harassment.

The first article in the section is “Not Their Fault, But Their Problem: Organizational Responses to the Online Harassment of Journalists” by Avery E. Holton, Valérie Bélair-Gagnon, Diana Bossio, and Logan Molyneux. This piece explores the organizational dynamics that influence the effectiveness of responses to online harassment faced by journalists, highlighting the divide between the need for support and the support provided. It emphasizes that organizational responses are often limited to individual-level interventions rather than systemic solutions and calls for comprehensive strategies to address harassment. This includes preventative measures and fostering a culture that values journalists' safety and well-being. According to the authors, news organizations should implement policies and training that can address the pervasive issue of online harassment.

Following this, “Coping with Occupational Stress in Journalism: Professional Identities and Advocacy as Resources” by Sallie Hughes, Laura Iesue, Hilda Fernández de Ortega Bárcenas, Judith Cruz Sandoval, and José Carlos Lozano examines the less-explored area of occupational stress and coping mechanisms among journalists. The authors use qualitative data from Mexican journalists to reveal how professional identities and local social dynamics shape their responses to stress, advocating for stronger support systems. The study emphasizes the role of professional norms and solidarity in coping with stress and highlights how local structures of state, civil society, and criminal elements influence and

shape journalists' coping strategies. Additionally, it calls for enhanced support systems, including employer support, trauma prevention training, and the involvement of local civil society organizations.

Next out is "Precarious Professionalism: Journalism and the Fragility of Professional Practice in the Global South" by Julian Matthews and Kelechi Onyemaobi. They introduce the concept of "precarious professionalism" prevalent in the Global South, contrasting it with the stable employment conditions assumed in Western contexts. The study of Nigerian journalists seeks to understand how inherent job instability affects both professional duties and personal lives. According to the authors, Nigerian journalists face significant challenges such as corruption, financial hardship, and harassment, which complicate their professional and personal experiences. Additionally, the article demonstrates how this precariousness is rooted within the organizational structures of Nigerian media, leading to limited access to essential technology and professional development opportunities.

Following on, "Between Attack and Resilience: The Ongoing Institutionalization of Independent Digital Journalism in Brazil" by Sarah Anne Ganter and Fernando Oliveira Paulino explores the resilience and survival strategies of independent digital journalism in Brazil amidst significant political and economic pressures. The authors highlight how relational networks and the concept of "positive dependence" support the continuous institutionalization and diversification of the Brazilian news ecosystem. The study reveals that these networks shape "models of resilience" that, while imperfect, facilitate the creation of new structures within the news ecosystem, enhancing the protection and sustainability of independent journalists. Additionally, ongoing institutionalization of independent digital journalism is seen to contribute to a more diverse and democratic media landscape in Brazil.

Lastly, Jennifer R. Henrichsen's "Understanding Nascent Newsroom Security and Safety Cultures: The Emergence of the 'Security Champion'" analyzes the reluctance of U.S. news organizations to adopt security measures despite a worsening safety environment. Henrichsen identifies the role of "security champions" who drive the adoption of security practices within newsrooms, emphasizing a tension between the slow adoption of tools like SecureDrop and the broader institutionalization of security practices. According to the author, security champions often emerge from various departments and play a crucial role in stimulating peer-to-peer learning and cross-pollination of security knowledge. Despite the adoption of SecureDrop, newsrooms frequently exhibit a decoupling as superficial changes are made without altering core practices.

## **Conclusion**

Threats and violence against journalists represent some of the most significant contemporary challenges to global press freedom. This volume has offered insights into the diverse and critical concerns of safety of journalism that contemporary journalists are facing. In extension to this, this book argues for the urgent need for systemic solutions, advocating for a paradigm shift in how news organizations perceive and respond to online harassment. By providing a thorough analysis of the empirical and structural dimensions of digital threats, this book aims to create a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by journalists today. It calls for news organizations to implement robust, systemic approaches to ensure the safety and well-being of their staff, paving the way for a more supportive and resilient journalistic community.

In its three parts, this volume presents diverse perspectives on digital threats, gendered dimensions of online harassment, and institutional and cultural responses to journalists' safety. It highlights the global issue of cyber-surveillance, trolling, and online harassment and underscores the vulnerabilities in journalistic practices across different parts of the world. Furthermore, it offers valuable insights and recommendations for scholars, practitioners, and policymakers to contemplate and act upon these pressing issues. The exploration of journalism and safety in the digital age makes it evident that protecting journalists from digital threats requires a multifaceted approach. This includes technological advancements, supportive organizational cultures, and broader societal recognition of the vital role journalists play in upholding democracy and freedom of expression. Through collective efforts, creating a safer and more equitable environment for journalists, allowing them to continue their essential work without fear of harassment or violence is made possible. The hope is that the insights provided point towards the need for systemic changes and enhanced support mechanisms to safeguard journalists' well-being and professional standards.


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# Under Attack in the Cyber Battlefield: A Scoping Review of Journalists' Experiences of Cyberharassment

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## ABSTRACT

This scoping review synthesises evidence on journalists' experiences of online harassment. This review aims to (i) understand the prevalence and impact of cyberharassment among journalists, (ii) explore coping strategies adopted by this population, and (iii) map out differences influenced by sociodemographic characteristics. The search was performed until 31st August 2023 in 4 database hosts, accessing a total of 13 databases. A total of 19 records were deemed eligible for inclusion in this review. This review demonstrates that online harassment of journalists is pervasive on a global scale and that it is not confined to a particular geographical region, culture, or sociopolitical context. Apart from a myriad of emotional and psychological sequelae on an individual and collective level, cyberharassment of journalists threatens press freedom and deters the journalistic "watchdog" role through the promotion of self-censorship. There is significant knowledge about female journalists' lived experiences of cyberharassment, partly due to the amplified frequency and severity of the abuse that is received. Yet little is known about the impact of cyberharassment on male journalists, and journalists with marginalised identities. Recommendations for the mitigation of the effects of cyberharassment among journalists are imparted on an individual, collective, organisational and societal level.

## 1. Introduction

Online harassment, also known as cyberharassment or cyberbullying, is a pernicious phenomenon that has become increasingly pervasive in modern global society (Blackwell et al. 2017; Schoenebeck, Lampe, and Triêu 2023; Yardi and Bruckman 2011). Whilst a standardised definition for online harassment does not seem to exist (Langos 2012; Olweus and Limber 2018), broad definitions for this phenomenon encapsulate a range of aggressive behaviours such as hateful, demeaning, or threatening speech, impersonation, fraudulence, exclusion, doxing, and non-consensual sharing of images (Chi et al. 2020; Cross 2014; Schoenebeck, Lampe, and Triêu 2023; Vogels 2021). It is posited that the core elements of traditional face-to-face bullying elements, i.e., repetition, power imbalance,

intention, and aggression, are transferrable and applicable to the cyber context (Corcoran, Mc Guckin, and Prentice 2015; Langos 2012).

In the past decade, the rapid rise and overuse of smartphones and e-communication have revolutionised social interactions, allowing cyberharassment to easily infiltrate day-to-day communicative processes (Rao, Bansal, and Chandran 2018). The evolution and popularisation of social networking sites have facilitated the propagation of hate speech, rendering cyberharassment a rampant and detrimental phenomenon due to the ubiquitous nature of social media (Aboujaoude et al. 2015; Giumetti and Kowalski 2022; Whittaker and Kowalski 2014). Digital spaces have in fact become one more platform wherein the hierarchies of sexuality, gender, race, class, and other socially fabricated differences are reproduced (Vickery and Everbach 2018). Thus, online harassment serves the purpose of disparaging individuals on the basis of their actual or attributed membership within social or professional groups (Keipi et al. 2019).

Despite the enactment of a code of conduct established by the European Commission in 2016 (Jourová 2016) and the enforcement of computational, algorithmic, and manual content moderation across social media platforms (Charitidis et al. 2020; Schoenebeck, Lampe, and Triệu 2023), cyberharassment persists. It is argued that online harassment has achieved a perturbing and globalised state of normalisation, without discrimination for any sociodemographic group (Berecz and Devinat 2016; Burch 2018; Eckert and Metzger-Riftkin 2020; Jubany 2015; Sorial 2015; Waltman 2018).

Although online harassment was historically associated with adolescents and young adults, its changing façade now permeates the lives of individuals across all age groups (Stevens, Nurse, and Arief 2021; Vogels 2021; Wang et al. 2019). Cyberharassment is particularly prominent among women (Francisco and Felmlee 2022; Jones, Trott, and Wright 2020; Megarry 2014; Nadim and Fladmoe 2021; Veletsianos et al. 2018; Vogels 2021), as well as social groups that promote public discourse and groups with pronounced social standing or wide audiences (Charitidis et al. 2020; Reporters Without Borders (RSF) 2018a; UNESCO 2022b; Valenzuela-García et al. 2023). By the nature of their profession as arbiters of public fora and purveyors of information, journalists are confronted with online harassment pragmatically by default. Akin with other informational and creative industries, journalism has followed suit in the shift towards digitalisation. New avenues for journalist-audience engagements and reciprocal journalism have prospered as a cause of digitalisation, particularly through social media platforms (Bakshy et al. 2012; Lewis, Holton, and Coddington 2014). Davis Kempton and Connolly Ahern (2021) demonstrated that newsrooms place a high emphasis on journalists' social media engagement and resultant social media metrics. They explain that journalists are being ranked based on such engagement-dependent metrics and stressed that these rankings have the potential to influence journalistic career trajectories (Davis Kempton and Connolly Ahern 2021). Consequently, journalists have become hyperaware of the need to engage with online audiences across social media platforms (Belair-Gagnon, Nelson, and Lewis 2019; Lewis, Holton, and Coddington 2014; 2020). However, the shift into cyberspace and the subsequent rise in audience engagements has hollowed out new possibilities for harassers to intimidate and persecute journalists (Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring 2016). Global reports and studies have demonstrated that, in recent years, journalists have experienced an overwhelming surge in online harassment by the very same audiences which they serve (Charitidis et al. 2020; European Union Agency for Fundamental

Rights (FRA) 2016; Heckman, Chung, and Santos 2022; Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring 2016; Obermaier, Hofbauer, and Reinemann 2018; Posetti and Shabbir 2022; Vogels 2021). Subsequently, digitisation has been considered as a double-edged sword in that it has allowed for reciprocal journalism yet also for habitual cyberharassment (Deavours et al. 2022; Zviyita and Mapudzi 2023).

Whilst the broad definition of cyberharassment still applies for journalists' encounters with online abuse, journalists' lived experiences of cyberharassment offer a more nuanced meaning for this definition. Journalists in China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, Finland, Saudi Arabia, Mexico, and Venezuela are challenged by online disinformation campaigns, and automated political propaganda controlled by troll gangs and bots (Aro 2016; Bradshaw and Howard 2017; 2019; Golovchenko et al. 2020; Leiferman and Khrushcheva 2019; Pavlíková, Šenkýřová, and Drmola 2021). Such campaigns drown journalistic work, jeopardise the integrity of public debates, and create content asymmetry (O'Carroll and Santos 2017; RSF 2018a). It is notable to heed that in Russia, trolling associated with misinformation to sway political opinion is largely state-sponsored (Saeed et al. 2022; Tian, Zhang, and Lau 2023; Zannettou et al. 2019; Zannettou et al. 2019; Zannettou et al. 2020). Investigative journalists who expose corruption and techno-censorship risk facing smear campaigns, doxing (such as the publication of a journalist's private phone number or home address online), and severe death threats that make them fear for their lives and give into self-censorship (Hall 2020; Luque Martínez 2015; Macaraig and Hameleers 2022; Nelson 2023; RSF 2018a; Waisbord 2020; 2022). Using Mexico as a vignette, death threats are sometimes accompanied by the physical receipt of bullet rounds or pictures of unknown individuals holding guns (O'Carroll and Santos 2017; RSF 2018a). Irrespective of culture, ethnicity, or socioeconomics, cyberharassment against female journalists is frequently sexualised (RSF 2018b), with the words "slut," "rape" and "whore" being the most common insulting words used (RSF 2018a). The tools of aggression used to intimidate female journalists often include misogynistic comments, explicit photos, doctored photos of journalists or their loved ones (often to produced sexualised images), and non-consensual pornography (RSF 2018a; 2018b).

As proliferators of social discourse and avid digital users, journalists' relative prominence and digital reachability make them easy targets for cyberharassment. Since 2014, UNESCO has highlighted the rapid spread of hate speech against journalists and has emphasised the impingement this leaves on journalistic freedom of expression (UNESCO 2014; 2022a). Similarly, since the 2015 launch of the Council of Europe's "Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and the Safety of Journalists," alerts concerned about journalists' both physical and online safety have accumulated at a rapid pace (Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists / Council of Europe 2022). By 2017, the Council of Europe had found that 40% of surveyed journalists across 47 member states of Europe (circa 376 journalists) had experienced forms of harassment that impacted them on a personal level, of which 53% constituted cyberharassment (Clark and Grech 2017a). In 2018, RSF, an international NGO with the stated aim of safeguarding the right to freedom of information, highlighted the bitter reality that hate speech following the publication of an article has become customary for most journalists (RSF 2018a). In their latest online report, UNESCO (2022b) claim that "journalists are under attack" because of the negative sequelae of surging online violence. Organisations and agencies which promote ethical journalism and acts as

watchdogs of human rights are particularly troubled by the imperilment of press freedom, one of the most fundamental pillars of democracy, through fear-fuelled self-censorship of journalists (Chernow and White 2014; Clark and Grech 2017b; Day 2021; RSF 2018a; UNESCO 2014; 2022b; 2022a).

The large-scale reports produced by non-governmental organisations and other agencies in relation to online harassment among journalists are unmatched by the academic literature. The burgeoning research interest in journalists' lived experiences of cyberharassment has seen studies being published from various high- and low-income countries across the globe, particularly in the last decade (Adams 2018; Antunovic 2019; Barrios and Miller 2020; Bhat 2023; Binns 2017; Carlson and Witt 2020; Chen et al. 2018; Davis Kempton and Connolly-Ahern 2022; Everbach 2018; Ferrier and Garud-Patkar 2018; Heckman, Chung, and Santos 2022; Kantola and Harju 2023; Kim and Shin 2022; Koirala 2020; Lee and Park 2023; Martin 2018; Miller 2023; Miller and Lewis 2022; Miranda et al. 2023; Ndlovu and Khupe 2023; Obermaier, Hofbauer, and Reinemann 2018; Pain and Chen 2018; Phung 2020; Riives, Murumaa-Mengel, and Ivask 2021; Stahel and Schoen 2019; Tandoc, Sagun, and Alvarez 2023). Despite these various academic publications, there is no synthesis of the evidence, except for one feminist scoping review that explores gendered online harassment (Simões, Alcantara, and Carona 2021). The scoping review by Simões, Alcantara, and Carona (2021) concludes that women journalists face extensive gendered cyberharassment that influences their occupational role by means of self-censorship, changed interactions with audiences, jeopardised impartiality, and even quitting the industry. It also emphasises the detrimental normalisation of this widespread abuse, citing that some individuals view cyberharassment of female journalists as a minor problem. This review does not comment on male journalists' experiences of cyberharassment and does not explore the ways in which journalists cope with online harassment. In the literature, male journalists' experiences of cyberharassment are significantly underreported (Riives, Murumaa-Mengel, and Ivask 2021), with studies adopting a feminist approach being disproportionately high (Adams 2018; Antunovic 2019; Carlson and Witt 2020; Chen et al. 2018; Davis Kempton and Connolly-Ahern 2022; Everbach 2018; Ferrier and Garud-Patkar 2018; Koirala 2020; Martin 2018; Miller and Lewis 2022; Phung 2020; Posetti and Shabbir 2022; Simões, Alcantara, and Carona 2021; Stahel and Schoen 2019; Tandoc, Sagun, and Alvarez 2023). Considering that men make up 45-70% of the journalistic global workforce (News Leaders Association 2019; Byerly 2011; General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union (GSC) 2021; Joy 2021; Watson 2023), it is salient to understand the magnitude of the problem among both genders to ensure equal capacity for prevention.

Additionally, it is imperative to understand the coping behaviours that are adopted by journalists under attack, if journalistic organisations and newsrooms are to implement systemic efforts to support their professionals, improve coping efficiency, and prevent online abuse. Moreover, the individual studies by themselves provide contextual findings scattered across the globe, however, their generalisability remains unknown. The current scoping review aims to fill this research lacuna by mapping out and collating the literature in respect of journalists' lived experiences of cyberharassment. There are three principal research questions guiding this review:

(RQ1) How common is cyberharassment among journalists?

(RQ2) How does cyberharassment impact journalists?

(RQ3) What strategies do journalists utilise to cope with cyberharassment?

This review specifically aims to (i) understand the prevalence of cyberharassment among journalists across the globe; (ii) understand the impact it has on this population; (iii) explore how this population copes with cyberharassment; and (iv) map out differences influenced by sociodemographic characteristics.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1. Study Design**

This paper adopts a scoping review methodology to operationalise the stated aims and synthesise evidence for the research topic. This method was adopted since it has the facility to map out the breadth of an existent knowledge base in a thorough and transparent manner, identify any lacunae within this research field, and use the conceived knowledge to inform future research, practice, and policy (Westphal et al. 2021). The scoping review methodology put forward by Westphal et al. (2021) was adopted, which involves five stages: specification of the research question(s); identification of relevant literature; selection of studies; extraction, mapping and charting of data; and summarising, synthesising, and reporting of results.

### **2.2. Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria**

Studies were included if they investigated the prevalence and/or impact of online harassment among journalists. Studies that involved public figures other than journalists were excluded from the review. All types of research designs were included in the review, irrespective of publication status or date of publication. Language limiters (requiring records to be published or translated in English due to the authors' language limitations) were only exercised at the stage of study selection so as to promote transparency in terms of the number of eligible reports in other languages (Pieper and Puljak 2021).

### **2.3. Search Strategy**

The search was conducted until 31st August 2023, in the following databases through the relevant database hosts (in brackets): Web of Science Core Collection (Web of Science); MEDLINE (PubMed); Communication & Mass Media Complete, Education Abstracts, ERIC, OpenDissertations (EBSCOhost); International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Linguistics Database, PAIS Index, Political Science Database, Social Science Database, Sociology Database, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I (ProQuest). The keywords "journalist" and "online harassment" and their synonymous word/phrase forms were truncated and combined using Boolean operators "AND" "OR" accordingly. The keyword strings were searched within Title/Abstract fields according to the availability and functionality of each database host. The reference list of studies which were deemed relevant to the review were checked to identify additional studies for possible inclusion in this review. Although a systematic approach to literature-searching was adopted, there is no assumption that the search and evidence review were exhaustive.

### 2.4. Study Selection

All studies that were deemed relevant to the research inquiry were exported to a reference management software (Mendeley Reference Manager). Studies were then de-duplicated and screened by reading titles and full abstracts. Studies were either retained or discarded, based on the aforementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria. The selection process was transparently recorded in accordance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al. 2021) whilst the PRISMA 2020-compliant flow diagram was created using the digital interactive application produced by Haddaway et al. (2022) (Figure 1). The search strategy yielded a high volume of records across 4 database hosts, however, when the search was limited to abstract-searching, only 802 potentially relevant articles were found. Of these, 454 were duplicates. After screening the induplicate records ( $n = 348$ ) by reading titles and abstracts, 310 studies were deemed ineligible since they fell within the exclusion criteria or were irrelevant to the research inquiry. The remaining 38 studies were deemed potentially relevant and were thus retrieved in full text for further screening. Of these studies, a further 21 studies were deemed ineligible since they did not meet the inclusion criteria. Citation-searching yielded another 2 eligible studies. The final selection of studies amounted to 19 records.

### 2.5. Data Extraction, Collation & Synthesis

The following data items were extracted from the retained articles into an Excel spreadsheet: (i) author/s and date of publication, (ii) location of study, (iii) research method, (iv) study sample, (v) key findings, (vi) prevalence of cyberharassment, (vii) impact of cyberharassment, (viii) coping strategies adopted, and (ix) associations with sociodemographic factors, if any. Data extraction was performed independently by the first and second authors (F.S. & M.B.), followed by a meeting to discuss any discrepancies. The data was

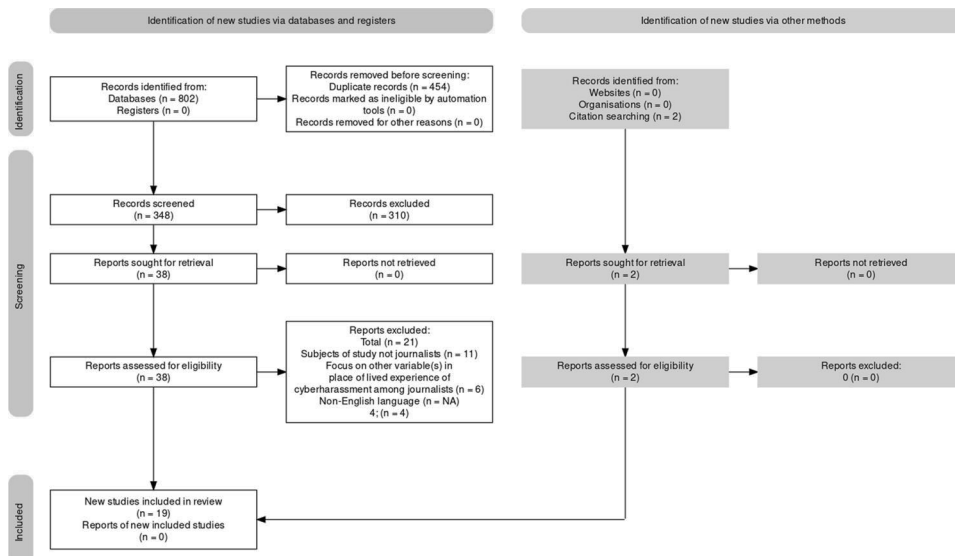


Figure 1. PRISMA flow diagram, produced using PRISMA2020 by Haddaway et al. (2022).

then collated and summarised in a tabular format for data items (i) to (v) (Table 1), whereas data items (vi) to (ix) were synthesised in a narrative fashion.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1. General Characteristics of Selected Studies**

The studies featured in this review employed a variety of research methods. Most studies employed qualitative methodology featuring in-depth or semi-structured interviews (Barrios and Miller 2020; Kantola and Harju 2023; Koirala 2020; Pain and Chen 2018; Phung 2020; Riives, Murumaa-Mengel, and Ivask 2021; Sarikakis et al. 2023; Tandoc, Sagun, and Alvarez 2023). Several other studies adopted a mixed-methods approach: Davis Kempton and Connolly-Ahern (2022) paired semi-structured interviews with Twitter discourse analysis; Heckman, Chung, and Santos (2022) paired a mixed-methods survey with focus groups; and three studies (Binns 2017; Blanco-Castilla, Fernández-Torres, and Cano-Galindo 2022; Miranda et al. 2023) paired an online survey with in-depth/semi-structured interviews. Lastly, six studies adopted a survey design (Adams 2018; Carlson and Witt 2020; Lee and Park 2023; Lewis, Zamith, and Coddington 2020; Obermaier, Hofbauer, and Reinemann 2018; Stahel and Schoen 2019).

The studies included in this review offer a breadth of diversity due to their transcontinental nature: 9 studies were performed in Europe, 4 in North America, 4 in Asia, 1 in South America, and 1 was a global online survey. This allowed the researchers to conceptualise and compare the issue of cyberharassment among journalists across various socio-political and economic contexts. The existing literature focuses largely on female journalists' lived experiences of cyberharassment, with particular regard to sexist, gendered, or misogynistic harassment. Out of 19 studies included in this review, there was a singular study that focused exclusively on male journalists (Riives, Murumaa-Mengel, and Ivask 2021). The remaining studies either researched both male and female journalists, or else focused entirely on female journalists.

All the studies included in this review estimated the prevalence of cyberharassment among their study populations, unless lived experience of cyberharassment was a prerequisite for study participants. There were two studies that did not explore the impact of cyberharassment on journalists (Lewis, Zamith, and Coddington 2020; Stahel and Schoen 2019) and two studies that did investigate the coping strategies that were adopted by journalists in order to deal with online harassment (Heckman, Chung, and Santos 2022; Lee and Park 2023).

General study characteristics and key findings for each individual study are outlined in Table 1.

#### **3.2. The Prevalence & Types of Online Harassment**

All studies featured in this review demonstrate that journalists are significantly exposed to online harassment. This is partly because the researchers ensured a large representation of individuals with previous experience of cyberharassment within their samples. In fact, several studies actively sought, or made part of their inclusion criterion, journalists with lived experience of cyberharassment (Barrios and Miller 2020; Heckman, Chung, and