



Violence Against Women Journalists in Digital and Physical Spaces. Ecuador Case Study

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Abstract. This document gathers some of the results obtained from the study on women journalists facing violence and discrimination in Ecuador, developed by Ecuadorian organisations Consejo de Desarrollo y Promoción de la Información y Comunicación (Consejo de Comunicación), the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (UTPL), the Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi (UTC), the Federación Nacional de Periodistas de Ecuador (FENAPE) and the Unión Nacional de Periodistas (UNP). This research is based on a conceptual theoretical approach and mixed methodological application for the systematization and analysis of recurrences in 100 interviews. Gender violence was evidenced in physical and digital spaces, in the workplace and in the exercise of informative work. At the same time, the rights, intersectional, gender, intercultural and intergenerational approaches were transversalized to address different aspects of this problem, which is current in the Ecuadorian journalistic culture and directly related to the right to freedom of expression.

Keywords: Women Journalists · gender-based violence · journalistic culture

1 Introduction

In principle, «violence» as such is the “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or de-privation” [1]. It recognizes three levels of violence: direct, cultural, and structural [2, 3], the last two being invisibles.

At the level of current dogma, specifically “violence against women» means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” [4]. Likewise, multiple documents mention the responsibility of the state to prevent, confront and eradicate this problem; the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador [5], which declares the urgency, among other things, of formulating and executing public policies that contribute to achieving equality between men and women, without eliminating responsibilities at different levels of society.

To characterize violence against women and establish the forms in which it manifests itself, there is the Organic Law to Prevent and Eradicate Violence against Women, which conceptualizes the types of violence [6], which, in the case of the study, are: physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and patrimonial, symbolic and digital sexual violence. In the case of “online or digital violence” [7], modalities such as: cyberbullying, which is the sending of intimidating or threatening messages; sexting, which is the sending of messages or photos with explicit content with or without authorization; doxing, which consists of the publication of private information or information that identifies the victim; and trolling, which are acts of online abuse.

In connection with other rights, it is also recognized, in addition, certain classifications on groups of priority attention or in vulnerable situations, with respect to age, disability, belonging to peoples and nationalities, people in mobility situations, GLBTIQ+ community, among others in the application of the rights, intersectional, gender, intercultural and intergenerational approaches [8]. It should be noted that, under Ecuadorian law, the different types of violence against women are classified as crimes or misdemeanors [9]. In addition, a typology may be present in a single event.

Now, in order to understand this problem in the informative sphere, it is planned to characterize the “journalistic culture” in the world context until addressing the particularities of the Ecuadorian one.

1.1 Journalistic Culture

The «journalistic culture», both globally and locally, reflects a society where, historically, glass ceilings, sticky floors and other exclusionary practices are built and maintained within the media [10] and, in turn, violence persists in the exercise of their work; in both cases it occurs both in the physical and digital space. The seriousness of these facts goes beyond the general level, where any affectation to the integrity or work of a journalist represents an attack against freedom of expression [11]; and adds risks for those who perform this task only because they are women [12], with consequences such as desertion and low participation of their peers in this sphere.

To mention some global figures on violence against women journalists: “2/3 of women journalists polled have experienced abuse or harassment” [13]; and, in 2020, out of 714 surveys of women journalists, 73% suffered online violence [14]. In the Ecuadorian case, from 2020 to 2021, sexist and misogynist acts will increase from 19 to 46; with special attention to online attacks where anonymity increases these facts [15].

At the local level, technical inputs and tools reveal data on the working conditions of women and people of sexual dissidence in the media where 50% have received more than once negative comments about their appearance or gender; and 4 out of 10 receive 500 dollars or less for working more than 40 h a week [16] - far below the minimum wage defined for this group [17] -. Likewise, the “Registro Público de Medios” [18] quantifies that of the total number of communication workers registered in the registry, only 32% are women [19].

In the country, although it is determined the «protection of journalists» who perform risky tasks and designates the Consejo de Desarrollo y Promoción de la Información y Comunicación (Consejo de Comunicación) as the coordinating body of this action from the public [20]; there is no gender specificity at the time of safeguarding the informative

work. On the other hand, for female workers there is a Protocol for Prevention and Attention to Discrimination, Workplace Harassment, and all forms of Violence against Women in the workplace [21], and the Ministry of Labor is in charge of ensuring its compliance.

The latter protects all female employees from all those actions that hinder access to employment, hiring, promotion, stability, or permanence in the same, demanding requirements on marital status, maternity, age, physical appearance, regarding a possible state of pregnancy, unjustified inequality in remuneration or conditioning the hiring or permanence in the job in exchange for acts of a sexual nature [22]. This type of violence is carried out by persons in an employment relationship and independently of the hierarchical correlation.

In view of the above, it is worth asking: In Ecuador, how does violence against women journalists manifest itself, both in the physical and digital space?

2 Method

This study is part of an inter-institutional work led by the Consejo de Desarrollo y Promoción de la Información y Comunicación (Consejo de Comunicación) of Ecuador, within the framework of its attributions [23], calls for the collaboration of academia and journalism associations for the fieldwork. The Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (UTPL), the Universidad Técnica de Cotopaxi (UTC), the Federación Nacional de Periodistas del Ecuador (FENAPE) and the Unión Nacional de Periodistas (UNP) [24], from their specificities, are participating in the study.

The first two worked on the ground to locate the interviewees and then apply the forms, systematize and monitor the quality of the material collected; and the two organizations maintained direct contacts with their members to participate with their experiences. It should be noted that, as part of the research protocols, the confidentiality of the source in terms of personal identification data and the environment where the interviewees work is maintained.

The methodology used is of a mixed type, applied through interviews. This instrument was designed with closed and open questions for the subsequent systematization and analysis of recurrences to meet the objective set, which is to investigate how violence against women journalists is manifested, both in the physical and digital space.

Prior to the methodological application and the elaboration of the interview form, the following steps were taken:

1. State of the art, for a theoretical and conceptual approach that allows us to locate the current debate and other experiences on the treatment of the topic.
2. Training on rights issues and interview application, prior to the application of the instrument, to UTPL and UTC students, through their own teachers and with the support of virtual training spaces of the Consejo de Desarrollo y Promoción de la Información y Comunicación (Consejo de Comunicación).

After completing these steps, the interview form was consolidated, with a series of parameters for analysis: socio-demographic data of the interviewee and the media where she works -if applicable-; closed and open questions on violence as workers and in the

exercise of their work, due to the fact that they are women; and a section on violence in the digital space. At the same time, the rights, intersectional, gender, intercultural and intergenerational approaches were mainstreamed to address different aspects of this problem, which is current in the Ecuadorian journalistic culture and directly related to the right to freedom of expression.

The interviews were conducted on two fronts: 1) The university students approached and interviewed women journalists, who freely and voluntarily shared their experience. Each interviewer was responsible for presenting the results for further evaluation with UTPL and UTC professors. 2) In the case of FENAPE and the UNP, they facilitated the contact with their members in the territory, being the research team of the Consejo de Desarrollo y Promoción de la Información y Comunicación (Consejo de Comunicación) the ones who made contact with them. 3) Systematization and analysis under the modality of recurrences to generate a technical report, team of the Consejo de Desarrollo y Promoción de la Información y Comunicación (Consejo de Comunicación).

2.1 Sample

A sample of 100 women journalists is handled under a filter that entails a sex-generic identity of being a woman under an intersectional approach; and, in the case of “journalist”, it is based on an idea with conceptual support. The latter, referring to international documents, are defined as people who observe, describe, document and analyze events and document statements, policies and any proposal that may affect society, with the purpose of systematizing this information and gathering facts and analysis to inform sectors of society or society as a whole [25].

For its part, the Ecuadorian law establishes certain particularities about this guild. The Organic Law of Communication considers that journalistic tasks of a permanent nature in “social communication media”, that is, radio, press, television, audio or video by subscription, together with their content replicated on the Internet [26], must be carried out by qualified professionals, except for opinion or specialized spaces, community media and those that carry out activities in the languages of peoples and nationalities [27]. It should be noted that current Ecuadorian law does not regulate “personal content on the Internet” [28] and, at the time of writing, there is no regulation defining the media or journalistic activities in the digital space.

With this background, the most favorable rights [29] are recognized for the understanding of “journalist” and it is considered as the person - in the case of women only - who performs informative tasks regardless of their level of training or channel.

3 Results

3.1 Characterization of Interviewed Journalists

A total of 100 interviews were conducted with journalists living in Ecuador in 17 provinces/19 cities and two abroad, with the following characteristics:

Age range: 20–29, 27%; 30–39, 47%; 40–49, 16%; 50–59, 6%; 60 or more, 1%; no information, 3%.

Nationality: Ecuadorian, 99%; foreign, 0%; dual nationality, 1%.

Ethnic identification: white, 3%; mestizo, 90%; Afro, 3%; indigenous, 2%; no information, 2%.

Gender: heterosexual women, 95%; women from the GLBTIQ+ community, 2%; no response, 2%; and, 1% no information.

Level of education: basic, 1%; high school, 2%; third level, 59%; fourth level, 35%; technical, 1%; no information, 2%.

Disability: with disability, 1%; without disability, 92%; no information, 7%.

3.2 Violence Against Women Journalists

In general, when asked a closed question, 74% of the women journalists acknowledge having suffered or suffered some type of violence because they are women; however, the percentage rises to 86% when the responses to the open-ended questions are systematized. It should be noted that a difference is made with violence that only responds to work-related or informational issues.

The most recognized forms of violence are psychological, with 47%; symbolic, with 30% and digital, with 19%. It is worth mentioning that 26% say they have not suffered or suffer any type of violence.

3.3 Violence Against Women Journalists in the Workplace

Based on the systematization of the open-ended responses, 75% of the women journalists suffer or suffered some type of violence because they are women in the workplace.

The most recurrent are: 75%, symbolic; 70%, psychological; and 30%, economic. 25% do not suffer or have not suffered violence.

It should be noted that the types of violence can occur individually or more than one at a time. In addition, 4% of digital violence appears as an indicator within the workplace, a subject that will be addressed later.

From the recurrences found in the testimonies, some of the following subcategories were obtained based on what was said by the journalists interviewed about violence in the workplace due to the fact that they are women:

- 29% affirm that journalism is still considered a man's job, where a macho structure and culture is maintained that prevents their labor development. This generates labor, symbolic, economic and/or psychological violence.
- 41% consider that there are limitations in leadership spaces or certain areas such as sports journalism, photojournalism, technical, among others. Furthermore, they are not able to reach high positions because they are underestimated or questioned by their peers; there are also attitudes of overprotection due to gender issues. There is violence: labor, psychological, sexual, symbolic and/or economic violence.
- 40% have suffered or suffer from harassment ranging from macho attitudes naturalized in forms such as «humor» and even aggressions sexual. Violence occurs in the workplace, sexual, symbolic, psychological and physical violence.
- 18% suffer or have suffered affectations due to issues related to motherhood, family, child-rearing/caregiving roles; some women do not find conditions to exercise this facet; and, in turn, these factors are misused as stigmas against those who decide not

to do so or postpone becoming mothers. There is violence: labour, psychological, symbolic, physical and/or economic.

- 30% suffer or have suffered discrimination because of their physique or clothing, especially because of the persistence of the stereotype of «ornamental woman» and its objectification. The following types of violence are present: labor, psychological, symbolic, physical, sexual and/or economic.
- 17% suffer or have suffered age discrimination; both the youngest at the time of entering this sphere and those adults who are of an age that is not in line with the stereotype of youth. There is violence: labor, psychological, symbolic, sexual and/or economic.
- 10% suffer or have suffered a reduction in their income, which caused or were caused by resignation or dismissal due to systematic violence. Violence: labor, psychological, symbolic, sexual, physical and/or economic.

Regarding violence against journalists belonging to priority or vulnerable groups, it was found that:

- Journalists of peoples and nationalities suffer or suffered discrimination because of their ethnic features, attire, use of their own languages. In addition, they are almost always ostracized in alternative or community media.
- Journalists with disabilities are invisibilized and limited in their ability to perform informative tasks.
- In the specific case of mobile journalists, this study did not find problems of xenophobia -which does not mean that it does not exist-; however, there are problems of regionalism where those pejoratively called «from the provinces» are underestimated in the cities or larger provinces.
- Journalists who belong to the GLBTIQ+ Community consider that, in addition to discrimination because they are women, there is homophobia and transphobia.

3.4 Violence Against Women Journalists in the Journalistic Field

Based on the systematization of the open-ended responses, 73% of women journalists suffer or suffered some type of violence because they are women in the course of their work. The most recurrent are: 73%, symbolic; 71%, psychological; and 33%, digital. 27% do not suffer it or have suffered it.

From the recurrences found in the testimonies, some of the following subcategories were obtained based on what was said by the journalists interviewed about violence in the exercise of their work, due to the fact that they are women:

- 19% affirm that journalistic exercise is still considered a men's field; this is evidenced by the preference of male journalists for hard topics, interviews, and the like. Violence: symbolic and/or psychological.
- 20% were or are limited in their journalistic practice as in risk coverage; it should be noted that this attitude responds both to explicit violence and, on some occasions, due to overprotection related to gender. Violence occurs psychological and/or symbolic.
- 49% suffer or have suffered harassment during their journalistic tasks, both from the public and from their interviewees and male colleagues, which is manifested in insults, harassment disguised as «humor», violence in social protest, among others. Violence occurs: psychological, symbolic, sexual and/or physical.

- 11% suffer or have suffered physical violence in the exercise of their journalistic duties, manifested in shoving, hitting, touching and the like. This includes psychological, symbolic and/or sexual violence.
- 14% suffer or suffered violence in contexts of social protest, which manifested itself in physical, psychological, symbolic and/or sexual violence.
- 26% suffer or have suffered violence because of their physical appearance and/or dress of the public, inter-viewers, and colleagues, which, on some occasions, is covered with «humor». Violence is presented: psychological, physical, sexual and/or symbolic.
- 6% suffer or suffered violence for age reasons, in the exercise of their informative work; this was avoided by infantilizing the youngest and isolating those whose age is not in the stereotype. Symbolic, sexual and/or psychological violence is present here.
- 23% suffer or have suffered violence in the exercise of their informative tasks because of the topics they deal with or because they belong to certain media. The most sensitive topics include gender, abortion, gender diversity, among others.

Regarding violence against journalists belonging to priority or vulnerable groups, it was found that:

- Journalists of peoples and nationalities suffer or suffered discrimination because of their ethnic features, attire and use of their own languages. The level of violence is taken to contexts of social protest where their presence causes hostile situations. Journalists with disabilities are invisible and underestimated.
- In the specific case of mobile journalists, this study did not find problems of xenophobia -which does not mean that it does not exist-; however, there are problems of regionalism where those pejoratively called «from the provinces» are underestimated in the cities or larger provinces.
- Journalists who belong to the GLBTIQ+ Community consider that, in addition to discrimination because they are women, there is homophobia and transphobia.

3.5 Violence Against Women Journalists in the Digital Space

43% of the journalists interviewed suffer or suffered violence in the digital space, both within their work and in the exercise of their informative tasks, manifested in sexism, misogyny and objectification. The following particularities were found in this space.

- The internal digital channels of the media can be used as tools to exercise violence against journalists because they are women.
- Live digital programs expose women journalists not only to negative comments from the public, but also from interviewees and their peers.
- In certain types of digital media, age, physical/dress and other discrimination present in the physical space are reproduced.
- The anonymity of digital media increases the possibility of harassment because they are women.
- Digital violence can be transferred to the physical space and/or be complementary.
- There are cases in which digital violence becomes cyberbullying, sexting or sexting, doxing, and/or trolling.
- The digital media that are related to Ecuador allow journalism from different parts of the country and the world. However, the violence responds to the physical space of the national reality.

It should be noted that digital channels range from the use of e-mails, cell phone chats to the various social networks.

4 Conclusions

By way of summary, the shortcomings in the application of the law in relation to the reality faced by women journalists in the face of violence due to the fact that they are women are evident. There is a permanent link between such violence when it is reproduced in the workplace and in the exercise of news reporting, where other types of discrimination -age, ethnicity, disability, others- can be added, beyond the risks inherent to journalism.

It is also considered that an event may contain several types of violence, whether in the physical or digital space. Some are even naturalized in the Ecuadorian journalistic culture, such as the use of “humor”, prevalence of stereotypes where a unique idea of appearance and limits on participation is maintained; none justified on the capabilities and knowledge of the journalists.

In an environment that still has hostile characteristics, it is worth recognizing the survivors and victims who face or faced these circumstances in order to advance in the equal participation and visibility of women as journalists, their work being a determining factor in freedom of expression as an individual and collective right.

On the other hand, it is essential to recognize the percentage of women who claim not to have received gender violence, which does not mean that this is common in Ecuadorian journalism.

It is essential that the State assumes its responsibility not only for the protection of journalists, but also to incorporate aspects of violence against women in its diversity; likewise, the responsibility falls on the different actors of the social communication system as a way to guarantee freedom of expression and press in Ecuador.

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