2024

Hidden Battles: Patterns and Nuances of Violence against Female Journalists in Nigeria

PRESS

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Executive Summary

Violence against female journalists in Nigeria has been a persistent and multifaceted issue with deep-seated cultural and sociopolitical roots. This research examines the patterns and nuances of this phenomenon, drawing insights from recent research and media reports. The analysis reveals that female journalists in Nigeria face a wide range of violence, including physical assaults, sexual harassment, online abuse, and even lethal attacks. These acts of violence are often perpetrated by state actors, non-state armed groups, and even members of the public, reflecting the complex and interconnected nature of the problem (Darma et al., 2016). While digital platforms can amplify the voices of female journalists, they also exacerbate the risks of harassment and threats.

This research further explores how cultural beliefs, gender norms, and power dynamics within Nigerian society contribute to the marginalisation and vulnerability of female journalists. Patriarchal structures, rape myths, and the normalisation of violence against women all play a role in shaping the experiences of these journalists (Ajayi et al., 2021). Thus, the consequences of violence against women journalists extend beyond immediate physical harm; they can lead to significant mental health issues, including trauma, anxiety, depression, and even suicide. Safety concerns often result in self-censorship, undermining press freedom and the diversity of voices in journalism.

Violence faced by female journalists ranges from physical and verbal abuse to sexual harassment and cyber harassment, often perpetrated by security agents, colleagues, and the public. Incidents, such as police threats (to suppress sensitive information), exemplify the intimidation tactics used against them. Furthermore, workplace dynamics force female journalists to continually "prove themselves" to gain respect, encountering harassment from male colleagues through unwelcome advances, stalking, and damaging rumours. The risk escalates on high-stakes assignments—like covering protests—where journalists report intense physical and psychological danger. These patterns reflect a troubling environment where gender bias, power imbalances, and workplace harassment converge, severely impacting the careers and personal lives of Nigeria's female journalists.

Ultimately, this executive summary underscores the urgent need for comprehensive, multi-stakeholder interventions to address the systemic issues underlying violence against female journalists in Nigeria. Strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing safety protocols, and fostering a culture of gender equality and non-violence are crucial steps towards ensuring the protection and empowerment of these vital voices in the media landscape.

The study adopted a qualitative approach to gather insights from 11 female journalists from various media outlets on their experiences, coping strategies, and recommendations for enhancing their safety. The study examined primary and secondary data sources, including a desk assessment of current literature on violence against female journalists and data from the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development's Press Attack Tracker. A snowball sampling technique was employed to build a robust sample, addressing concerns about repercussions from superiors or perceptions of vulnerability. The study's significance lies in its focus on creating targeted interventions and preventive measures to address the specific realities contributing to violence against female journalists.

Introduction

Freedom of expression comes at a high cost, particularly for journalists at the forefront of information dissemination in Nigeria[1]. They endure a variety of violent attacks, which severely hamper their work and drive to share information[2]. The Press Attack Tracker of the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) recorded that about 1,239 journalists were attacked between 1986 and October 2024, resulting in 28 deaths in Nigeria *(See Figure 1)*. Notably, female journalists in Nigeria are disproportionately vulnerable[3], facing a mix of online harassment, physical attacks, and gender-specific threats[4]. These attacks include stigmatisation, sexist hate speech, rape, unwanted sexual remarks, body groping, sextortion, and even murder. Female journalists also contend with discrimination in newsroom representation and leadership roles[5]. In some communities in Nigeria, the presence of female journalists is seen as a violation of their social norms, leading to reprisals of these females.

Digital platforms also play dual roles in this context. While they can amplify the voices of female journalists, they also increase the risks of online harassment and threats[6]. Some scholars suggest that existing literature has yet to adequately uncover how these platforms contribute to or alleviate the underreporting of violence against female journalists[7]. However, violence perpetrated against female journalists, online or in person, impacts their mental health, leading to trauma, anxiety, depression, or even suicide. It also threatens media diversity, silencing female voices and reducing their participation in relevant public conversations. To safeguard press freedom, appraising these gender-specific threats is crucial for advocacy and designing interventions that can better protect female journalists.

> **"**
> Freedom of expression comes at a high cost, particularly for journalists at the forefront of information dissemination in Nigeria. They endure a variety of violent attacks, which severely hamper their work and drive to share information

1   Committee to Protect Journalists. (2024, October 4). 4 Nigerian journalists face fresh charges over report tying bank CEO to fraud claims. CPJ. https://cpj.org /2024/10/4-nigerian-journalists-face-fresh-charges-over-report-tying-bank-ceo-to-fraud-claims/

2   DW News (2022). *Tobore Ovuorie: 'We must refuse to conform to dictatorship'*. [online] corporate.dw.com. Available at: https://corporate.dw.com/en/tobore-ovuorie-we-must-refuse-to-conform-to-dictatorship/a-57888412 [Accessed 14 Jul. 2024].

3   International Press Institute. (n.d.). Discrimination against women journalists in Nigeria takes many forms. IPI. https://ipi.media/ipinetwork/discrimination -against-women-journalists-in-nigeria-takes-many-forms/

4   Media Foundation for West Africa (2023). Safety of female journalists in West Africa : Nigeria. p.25 [online] Available at: https://www.mfwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/SAFETY-OF-FEMALE-JOURNALISTS-IN-WEST-AFRICA-NIGERIA-final-1.pdf [Accessed 14 Jul. 2024].

5   Urbániková, M. (2024). The many shades of sexism: Female journalists in leadership positions reflect on barriers to career advancement in journalism. Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly. https://doi.org/10.1177/10776990241240119

6   Ward, S. (2011). Digital journalism: Creativity and innovation in a changing media world. Routledge.

7   Uwalaka, T. (2023). Beyond "online notice-me": Analysing online harassment experiences of journalists in Nigeria. Journalism Studies. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2260499

8   Free Press Unlimited (n.d.). Safety of women journalists – FPU Knowledge & Quality. [online] Available at: https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/themes/safety-of-journalists/dimensions-of-safety/safety-of-women-journalists/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20global%20study [Accessed 14 Jul. 2024].
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> **Addressing these barriers requires a nuanced understanding of how these factors shape the experiences of female journalists and the development of targeted interventions**

Sadly, safety concerns often lead to self-censorship or withdrawal from public spaces, undermining press freedom. A report by the Free Press Unlimited highlights that under-reporting is prevalent, while comprehensive data collection and analysis is elusive[8]. This gap hinders effective advocacy for policy changes and enhanced safety measures for women in the media. Under-reporting stems from multiple factors, such as stigma, fear of retaliation, and socio-cultural barriers.

FIGURE 1: Number of Violent Attacks on Journalists in Nigeria (1986 – October 2024)

Murder	28
Access Denial	310
Sanctions	48
Equipment Damage & Seizure/Property Damage	42
Harrassment/Threats	168
Physical Attacks	438
Kidnap	11
Unlawful Imprisonment	66
Unlawful Arrest	115
Cyber Bullying	2
Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation	10

*A total of **1,239** Attacks have been recorded against press*

Source: Press Attack Tracker of the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID), 2024.

Addressing these barriers requires a nuanced understanding of how these factors shape the experiences of female journalists and the development of targeted interventions. Therefore, this research seeks to address this gap by collecting data to uncover the extent and hidden patterns of violence against female journalists in Nigeria. By combining numerical data with captivating anecdotes from women who have experienced violence drives change, this research provides comprehensive data on the prevalence of violence against female journalists in Nigeria.

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8   Free Press Unlimited (n.d.). Safety of women journalists – FPU Knowledge & Quality. [online] Available at: https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/themes/safety-of-journalists/dimensions-of-safety/safety-of-women-journalists/#:~:text=According%20to%20a%20global%20study [Accessed 14 Jul. 2024].

It aims to raise awareness while contributing to knowledge and informing data-driven policy-making for the safety and well-being of female journalists in Nigeria.

1.1 Research Aim and Objectives

The specific research aim and objectives are to:

- Examine the extent of violence against female journalists in Nigeria.
- Leverage data with powerful narratives to advocate for policy changes and improved safety measures for female journalists in Nigeria.
- Recommend strategies for a safer working environment for female journalists in Nigeria.

1.2 Scope and Significance of the Study

This research examined the attacks on female journalists in Nigeria while they perform their professional duties. It encompasses various areas of journalism, including investigative reporting, political journalism, feature writing, and digital journalism. Respondents for the qualitative interviews were selected from multiple modern and traditional media outlets nationwide. The increasing attacks on journalists, especially female journalists, underscore the importance of this study. It aims to highlight the scale of attacks against female journalists, assess the current situation, amplify the stories for policy changes, and proffer pathways to mitigating the violence. The study's significance stems from its emphasis on developing tailored remedies and preventive strategies that address the specific factors contributing to violence against female journalists in Nigeria.

1.3 Methodology

The study used primary and secondary data sources to gather comprehensive insights. Qualitative data were collected through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with responses from 11 female journalists from diverse media outlets nationwide. These interviews were conducted digitally via secure video conferencing platforms like Google Meet and Zoom. While Johnson, Scheitle, and Ecklund (2021) emphasise the advantages of in-person interviews for fostering conversation and producing transcripts, Weller (2017) notes that the informality of mediated communication can alleviate the "pressure of presence." The remote setting often promotes a greater sense of ease among respondents[9].

The interviews centred on the journalists' personal or shared experiences with attacks in the line of duty, their coping strategies, and their recommendations for enhancing the safety of female journalists. Respondents' comments were treated with the utmost discretion to ensure confidentiality, and pseudonyms were utilised to protect their identities when reporting findings.

For secondary data, a comprehensive desk review was conducted to examine existing literature on violence against female journalists. Additionally, the study analysed tracked

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[9] Netscribes. (2024). Benefits of conducting face-to-face interviews for qualitative research methods. Netscribes. https://www.netscribes.com/benefits-of-conducting-face-to-face-interviews-for-qualitative-research-methods/
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data from the Centre for Journalism Innovation & Development's Press Attack Tracker (PAT), a platform dedicated to documenting attacks on the Nigerian press. This data was sourced from media reports detailing violent incidents involving journalists in Nigeria.

A snowball sampling technique was employed, where initial respondents were encouraged to identify additional potential subjects. This approach was particularly relevant given that existing research indicates that journalists in Nigeria may be reluctant to openly share their experiences due to concerns about repercussions from superiors or perceptions of vulnerability. By leveraging recommendations from participating female journalists, the study aimed to build a robust sample while addressing these sensitivities.

2.0 Contextual Analysis

Cultural, political, and professional norms in the media all have an impact on violence against female journalists[10]. In Nigeria, this phenomenon has culminated in a variety of violent manifestations such as killing, imprisonment, disparagement, censorship, harassment, and severe criticism[11]. For example, five female journalists were violently attacked during the 2023 general elections in Nigeria[12]. In August 2024, immigration officers attacked a female journalist, resulting in her arm being dislocated[13]. Despite recognition for journalists' contributions to human communication and good governance, critics frequently condemn their conduct and reporting quality. A report by the International Press Institute in 2022 revealed that women are also discriminated against at work because of their marital status. There is a misconception that women have little time to do their professional obligations because they must care for their families, even though this is not true for many women.

The growing accessibility and availability of digital platforms around the world have increased the frequency of violence conducted via various infrastructural channels[14]. For example, research has shown that platform affordances like Feeds and DMs provide abusers with additional ways to exert control, intimidate, and harass women[15]. The seeming lacklustre posturing of society has resulted in a growing rate of these online attacks on female journalists.

According to a new global poll, the insidious problem of online violence against female journalists is spilling over into the real world, with possibly fatal repercussions for 20 per cent of female journalists and media workers who took part in the survey conducted by the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), reported being targeted with offline abuse and attacks that they believe were related to online violence they had experienced. Early results from the study, which got 1,210 responses, also indicate increased online aggression against female journalists[16]. While a few news organisations in Nigeria have adequate policies in place to combat gendered online violence, social media platforms have proven incapable of monitoring and limiting the propagation of hate in Nigeria's local languages.

[10] Uwalaka, T., & Amadi, F. (2023). Beyond "Online Notice-Me": Analysing online harassment experiences of journalists in Nigeria. Journalism Studies, 24(12), 1937–1956. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2260499

[11] Ibid

[12] Council of Female Journalists in Nigeria. (2023, February 27). CFWIJ condemns attacks on journalists Bolanle Olabimtan and Ajayi Adebola during presidential elections. Women in Journalism. https://www.womeninjournalism.org/threats-all/nigeria-cfwij-condemns-attacks-on-journalists-bolanle-olabimtan-and-ajayi-adebola-during-presidential-elections

[13] Bello, U. A. (2024, August 2). Immigration officers' assault female journalist in Edo. Daily Trust. https://dailytrust.com/immigration-officers-assault-female-journalist-in-edo/

[14] Divon, T., Halabi, N., Lundqvist, M., & Morales, E. (Eds.). (2024). Contextual complexities of violence on digital platforms [Special issue]. New Media & Society. https://ecrea.eu/page-18206/13299486

[15] European Communication Research and Education Association. (2023). Special issue for New Media & Society: Online violence and digital platforms. https://ecrea.eu/page-18206/13299486

[16] International Center for Journalists. (2023, October 22). Online attacks on women journalists leading to real-world violence, new research shows.

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3.0 Results and Findings

Findings show that female journalists in Nigeria operate in an environment marked by constant threats of violence—verbal, physical, and online. This section sheds light on these challenges based on responses from the conducted Key Informant Interviews by drawing from raw, unfiltered testimonies of female journalists who have experienced harassment and abuse first hand. As a result, this section is categorised into four themes that align with the study objectives. They include (a) the prevalence of violence against female journalists in Nigeria, (b) Barriers to Reporting and Seeking Justice, (c) the Impact of Violence on Professional and Personal Lives and (d) the Intersection of Gender, Patriarchy and other Social Norms.

3.1 Prevalence and Forms of Violence Against Female Journalists

Across the board, female journalists in Nigeria report feeling unsafe or threatened because of their work. This sense of danger is not limited to specific incidents. Still, it permeates their everyday professional lives, casting a shadow over their decisions to pursue a particular report. Identified patterns include sexual harassment, verbal threats, online harassment, and physical assault. Perpetrators include security agents, colleagues, sources and random strangers.

One of the journalists interviewed shared her experience of being verbally threatened by a law enforcement agent: *"A senior police officer once warned me to stay off a story I was investigating on the forceful abduction of an underage girl. The girl's parents had contacted a Non-governmental Organisation (NGO) to help them rescue their daughter, and the NGO carried me along so I could make reports"* (Journalist 004, interview, October 2024). *The journalist had done a series of reports on the matter but needed to talk to the Divisional Police Officer (DPO) overseeing the case. She was warned to stay off after realising that the police were on the side of the alleged culprit." I immediately stopped because I was a single parent and wouldn't endanger my life because that would affect my kids"* **(Journalist 004, interview, October 2024).**

While some respondents noted that sources (persons that provide timely information) treated male and female journalists equally, others highlighted stark differences. One journalist shared a poignant story from her early career: *"I was going to interview a senior government official, and his aides literally pushed me so much that even the governor had to look back in shock. Other male journalists were in the scene, and I'm not sure why I was the one who was pushed away"* **(Journalist 007, interview, October 2024).** This experience of physical intimidation and exclusion underscores the reality that women often face an additional layer of hostility in the field.

In contrast, another respondent argued that sources tend to judge journalists based on professionalism rather than gender: *"Respondents also like to be interviewed by smart and skilled journalists who did his/her homework, and carry out thorough research. It doesn't matter whether the journalist is male or female"* **(Journalist 9, interview, October 2024).** However, she acknowledged that female journalists must work harder to earn respect, often needing to *"make a name for themselves"* before being treated as equals. Another respondent shared the harrowing experience of her office being attacked during the #EndSARS protests in October 2020. *"I felt so unsafe,"* she recounted, *"especially when my office was stormed, and I received online threats through unwarranted chats"* **(Journalist 006, interview, October 2024).**

Findings also revealed that female journalists face harassment from colleagues and within their newsrooms. For example, a journalist retorted, *"I have encountered sexual harassment within and outside the newsroom and from a senior management staff "* **(Journalist 009, interview, October 2024).** A female journalist shared her experience: *"Many male journalists view new female journalists as easy targets. Several of them asked me out, and when I declined, I was accused of sleeping with nine men in the newsroom. That's the humiliation I endured "* **(Journalist 011, interview, October 2024).**

Another journalist said: *"After my editor found out that I was divorced, I met with him in his office one day. As I was about to leave, he remarked, 'Your backside is getting bigger; who's taking care of you?' The second editor, who shares the office with him, added, 'You need a man to take care of you; you can't just stay without sex.' It was one of the most embarrassing moments because these men had previously respected me and addressed me as "madam." But now that I'm divorced, they believe I no longer deserve that respect"* **(Journalist 002, October 2024).**

Another respondent shared her experience of being stalked by her colleague: *"A senior male staff member throwing advances at me was capturing my pictures in every move I made at the office without my knowledge. He also set up a watchman on me"* **(Journalist 003, October 7, 2024).**

There were cases in which female journalists experienced physical or sexual harassment from their sources. A respondent recounted, *"My first assignment was covering a murder at a police station. The DPO welcomed me, then suddenly locked the door and attacked. When they want to rape you, they're incredibly strong. I had to think fast. The police commissioner in Abuja often made surprise visits to stations, so I warned him it wouldn't look good if the commissioner showed up unexpectedly. That was why he let me be"* **(Journalist 011, interview, October 2024).**

> "Many male journalists view new female journalists as easy targets. Several of them asked me out, and when I declined, I was accused of sleeping with nine men in the newsroom

For female journalists, the fear that violence could strike at any moment is ubiquitous, leading many to constantly weigh the potential risks of covering specific stories. A respondent vividly described the underlying anxiety that comes with her stories. A respondent vividly described the underlying anxiety that comes with her profession: *"As a journalist, you read about what is happening to others —colleagues who have been attacked, arbitrarily arrested, or harassed by state or non-state actors—and it forces you to ask yourself: could I be next?"* **(Journalist 007, interview, October 2024).**

This unpredictable violence leads to a form of induced or self-censorship where female journalists question whether pursuing specific assignments is worth the risk or not. The fear subtly reshapes their professional paths and productivity, limiting the scope of stories they feel safe covering and forcing them to navigate a landscape where their safety is hardly guaranteed. The stories shared in this report reveal how pervasive yet invisible these threats are, regardless of the nature of the assignments. In her experience of being verbally attacked while covering the 2023 elections, a journalist said:

"I was at my polling unit, just trying to cast my vote, and suddenly people around me started shouting insults. 'Go back to Imo State,' they said, accusing me of voting for the wrong party. They threatened to come after me, claiming I didn't belong there" **(Journalist 007, interview, October 2024).** What struck her most about the incident was the hostility and indifference of those around her.

"The police officers and election officials didn't intervene. I left feeling terrified, knowing that if I had lived in that area, they might have followed through on their threats" **(Journalist 007, interview, October 2024).**

The same journalist described the psychological toll of facing legal threats following an investigative story she published *"After publishing the first part of my story, the plaintiff sent a legal notice demanding 250 million Naira in damages. It was the first time I had received a lawsuit because of my reporting, which deeply affected me. I became hesitant, questioning whether pursuing certain stories was worth the emotional strain"* **(Journalist 007, interview, October 2024).**

Threats are a daily reality for many female journalists and are often delivered through online platforms where anonymity emboldens harassers. "The online harassment is relentless," one respondent said: "I receive unwarranted messages all the time, ranging from threats to sexual harassment, and there's little recourse available" **(Journalist 007, October 6, 2024).** *These threats often extend beyond the digital realm, bleeding into real-life confrontations where women are made to feel vulnerable. Sometimes, too, they are from male colleagues who bully, shame or discriminate against female journalists.*

"When I made a post on my Facebook page on the discrimination I was facing since becoming a divorcee, a male colleague called me a feminist and said that I should go back to my husband and stop being a gender equality advocate. I was pained because he had no idea of the challenges I faced in the marriage, nor have I ever shared to him or on social media the actual cause of the divorce but I was shocked that he could conclude that the failed marriage was my fault" **(Journalist 002, October 6, 2024).**

As explained by one of the respondents, there is a clear double standard when it comes to to the level of violence female journalists are expected to endure compared to their male counterparts. "If I'm walking through Yaba market with a male colleague, he'll worry about getting his phone stolen while I have to deal with being groped or called names," one respondent explained. "It's the same in journalism. Women are more likely to be harassed, called derogatory names like 'Ashawo,' or subjected to unwanted attention simply because we're women in a space traditionally dominated by men" **(Journalist 007, interview, October 2024).**

Politics, security, and crime beats were consistently identified as high-risk areas. One journalist described politics as particularly dangerous, saying it exposes reporters to *"the extremism of loyalists and the entitlement mentality of politicians"* **(Journalist 006, interview, October 2024).** "Another noted that *"these beats bring reporters face-to-face with suspects and pitch journalists against the sponsors of crime and criminality."* The combination of powerful interests and volatile situations increases the likelihood of harassment or physical violence. However, it is not only the beat itself but the story's stakes that can heighten the risk. As one journalist explained, *"It may not just be because of the beat but because of those who have vested interest in it"* **(Journalist 006, interview, October 2024).** Whether covering politics or entertainment, the depth of investigation and the power dynamics can expose female journalists to unexpected threats.

3.2 Barriers to Accessing Support and Justice

A recurring theme across all the interviews is the reluctance to report violent incidents to law enforcement or the management of their newsrooms. Whether due to the perception that authorities will not take the situation seriously or a lack of physical evidence of harm, female journalists are discouraged from seeking Justice or legal recourse. One respondent encapsulated this when she said, *"I did not report the incident because I considered they would not take it seriously, seeing as there was no physical harm"* **(Journalist 010, interview, October 2024).**

Another respondent shared a similar sentiment, choosing to handle the situation herself rather than reporting: *"As at the time they happened, I didn't think of reporting to anybody. I handled it my way"* **(Journalist 009, interview, October 2024).** This self-reliance, born from a lack of faith in law enforcement, is a common thread throughout the responses. It demonstrates a broader issue of mistrust in formal channels of Justice and exacerbates their emotional toll.

> **"**
> I did not report the incident because I considered they would not take it seriously, seeing as there was no physical harm

Many female journalists also spoke about the indifference or powerlessness of their newsrooms to protect them. *"When I received that lawsuit, I felt completely alone,"* one journalist admitted. *"The media house that published my story eventually pulled it down after being pressured by the people affected, making me feel even more vulnerable"* **(Journalist 007, October 2024).**

Sometimes, however, female journalists hold back on reporting because they are unclear about the existence of reporting channels. *"I didn't report the online violence because I'm not well informed on how to go about it. I would gladly do it if I could still pursue the case to a conclusion. People should not make unguided comments on someone else's post. That audacity to insult me without knowing me is still a shock, and I would do something about it if I knew the right way to go"* **(Journalist 002, October 2024).**

Support within newsrooms varies significantly, with some media organisations offering comprehensive mechanisms to address violence against female journalists while others provide little to no protection. One journalist, reflecting on her two-decade career, stated, *"I have worked in two newsrooms. While one provided an avenue for sexual harassment to be dealt with, the other didn't provide any sort of mechanism for such cases"* **(Journalist 009, interview, October 2024).**

A few respondents, however, indicated that their organisations had implemented safety protocols, such as training and insurance, even though these were on a low scale. Another respondent stated that her newsroom ensured safety measures like transportation for those working late, but formal policies regarding violent attacks were unclear: *"There were some forms of protection... the driver takes you home if you're in the office till 7 PM"* **(Journalist 007, interview, October 2024).**

Outside of the newsroom, knowledge of support systems for female journalists exposed to violence is mixed. Some respondents knew of organisations like the Media Rights Agenda and the International Press Centre (IPC). Still, these groups do not provide services exclusively for female journalists, leaving many without tailored support when it is most needed. Although there is growing awareness of the need for safety training and protocols, many media organisations still lack comprehensive support structures to minimise exposure to violence. One respondent noted that while her newsroom offered training and insurance, "there are no safety kits, and the response to violent incidents remains slow and inadequate" **(Journalist 010, interview, October 2024).**

For female journalists covering beats like crime, conflict, politics, and other investigative genres, this gap in protection further exposes them to physical and psychological harm. One respondent expressed disappointment:

"I'm aware of a whole lot of support structures, but they are not exclusively for female journalists, and I don't know if they give preference to female journalists" **(Journalist 007, interview, October 2024).**

3.3 Impact of Violence on Professional and Personal Lives

The constant battle against all the forms of threats identified in this research and societal judgments weighs heavily on the mental and emotional well-being of female journalists. Many of the women interviewed expressed frustration over how their work and accomplishments are constantly undermined by the assumption that they use their sexuality to get ahead. *"There's this existing stereotype that female journalists rely on 'bottom power' to rise in their careers,"* one journalist noted. *"This belief devalues our work and puts us at greater risk for harassment because people see us as easy targets"***(Journalist 006, interview, October 2024).**

The emotional fallout from these experiences is profound, with many of the women recounting feelings of fear, anger, and exhaustion. *"The first time I was threatened with a lawsuit, I was terrified,"* one journalist recalled. *"It wasn't just the legal implications—the emotional weight of knowing that my work had put me in this position. I started questioning my career choices, wondering if I should avoid certain stories to protect myself "* **(Journalist 002, October 6, 2024).** These moments of doubt highlight the insidious way violence can erode professional ambition, as women are forced to weigh their passion for journalism against the genuine dangers they face.

Violence and harassment present significant barriers for female journalists in Nigeria, not just physically but also professionally and psychologically. Across the industry, women in journalism navigate a complex environment where fear of violence shapes their choices, limits their access to critical assignments, and even influences their career trajectory. One of the most recurring themes in the voices from these interviews is the hesitancy prompted by fear of violence and harassment when selecting assignments. Several female journalists reported that the fear of encountering violence has directly impacted their willingness to pursue certain types of stories. For instance, one respondent said, *"It certainly does, especially if it is a sensitive or security issue"* **(Journalist 010, interview, October 2024).** This revelation highlights how high-risk topics such as politics and security exacerbate these fears.

However, not all respondents shared the same experience. One journalist noted that in the early stages of her career, the fear of harassment wasn't a factor, mainly because she had no choice in selecting her assignments. *"The fear of facing violence or harassment has never been a hindrance in any way,"* she said **(Journalist 010, interview, October 2024).**

> **"**
> There's this existing stereotype that female journalists rely on 'bottom power' to rise in their careers

3.4 Intersection of Gender, Patriarchy and Other Social Norms

Gender discrimination remains a persistent issue, deeply intertwined with social norms that define gender roles both inside and outside the newsroom. Respondents overwhelmingly agreed that these norms fuel discrimination and violence against female journalists. "*Social norms around gender dynamics often play a vital role in gender discrimination and violence*" **(Journalist 009, interview, October 2024),** one journalist remarked, emphasising that Nigeria's patriarchal society imposes additional hurdles on women in the media. These norms shape how female journalists are treated in the field and limit their access to managerial and editorial roles.

" Someone asked why I should be the one covering elections. Another person asked why I wore a dress instead of being fully kitted

Female journalists, according to one respondent, "have to work twice as hard to prove they can lead their newsroom." The biases that permeate society at large are also present within media organisations. Another respondent highlighted the impact of societal perceptions, recalling the responses she received after posting her experience of covering an election. "*Someone asked why I should be the one covering elections. Another person asked why I wore a dress instead of being fully kitted"* **(Journalist 009, interview, October 2024).** This situation reflects how people think specific roles are for men or women in the newsroom. This journalist pointed out that *"some employers are reluctant to hire female journalists due to "the frequency of childbirth,"* an indicator of the deep-seated gender biases that can influence hiring and promotion decisions within media houses **(Journalist 009, interview, October 2024).**

The impact of violence and harassment extends beyond professional challenges, affecting the personal lives of female journalists as well. The constant threat of danger requires many to make difficult decisions about their work-life balance. One journalist noted, "*The newsroom isn't isolated from society; biases, whether enshrined or unconscious, follow us into our personal lives.*" Women journalists, especially those in managerial roles or those seeking promotions, must balance proving their competence and managing the personal toll of these challenges.

4.0 Gender Spotlight on Press Freedom Violations from Press Attack Tracker (PAT)

This section examines data collected from the Centre for Journalism Innovation & Development's Press Attack Tracker (PAT), a tool dedicated to documenting attacks against Nigerian journalists. The data is generated from media reports on violent incidents involving journalists in Nigeria. It is used to supplement Key Informant Interview (KII) data to visually represent the trend, actors, locations, and frequency of violent attacks against female journalists. This cross-verification is also necessary to enhance the validity of insights from KII. Notably, the database covers both male and female journalist attacks in a space that, oddly, has a big pool of unreported violent attacks on journalists, particularly female journalists.

FIGURE 2: Trend of Violent Attacks on Female Journalists in Nigeria (1998 – 2024)
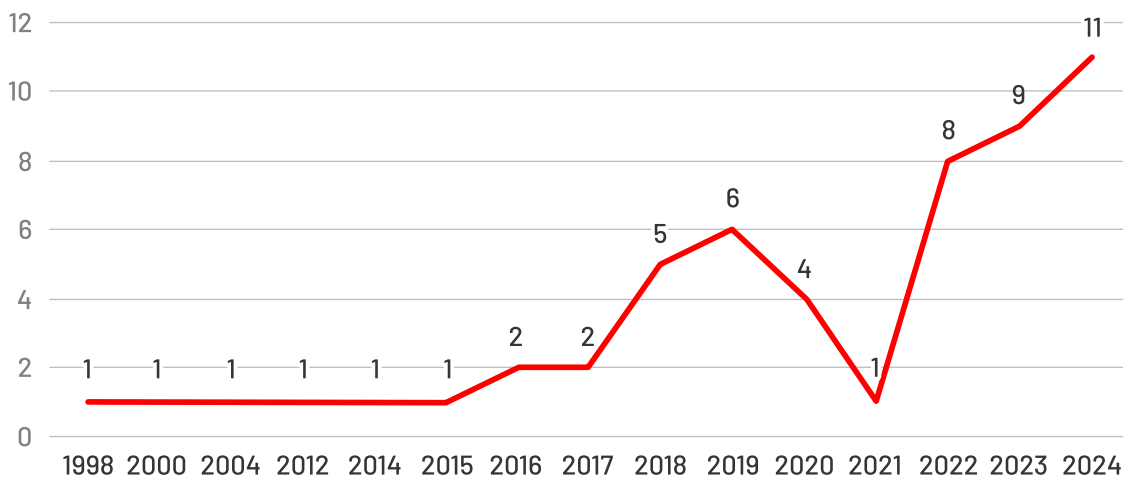
Source: CJID – Press Attack Tracker

In terms of violent trends, Figure 2 shows 44 attacks against female journalists between 1998 and 2024. The data show increased attacks from 2022 to 2024 after a slight dip in 2021. The year 2024 records the highest number of attacks (11).

FIGURE 3: Prevalent Attack Types Against Women Journalists in Nigeria (1998 – 2024)
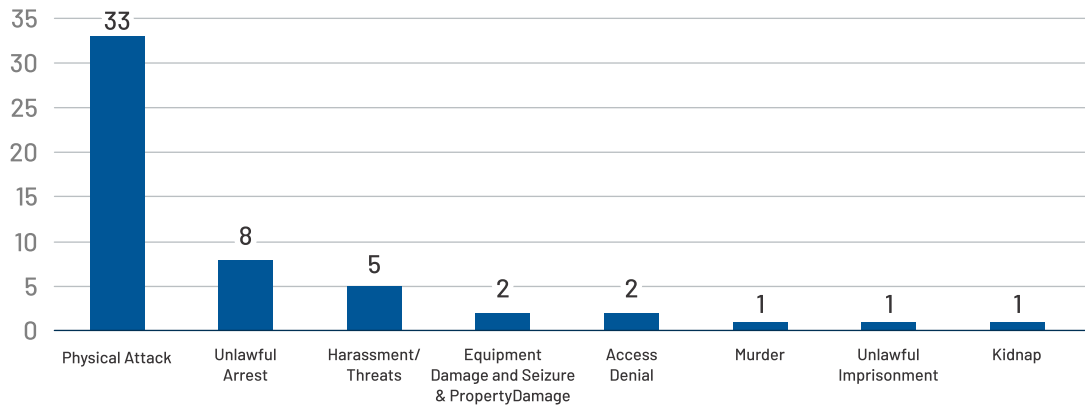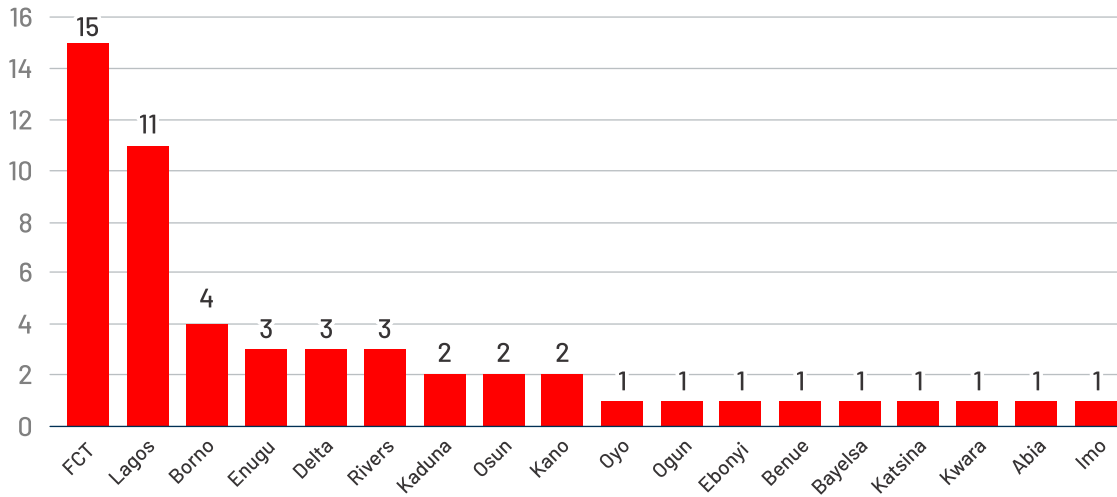

Source: CJID – Press Attack Tracker

As illustrated in Figure 3, the most frequent form of attack between 1998 and 2024 is physical abuse, with 33 incidents recorded. In contrast, there is one reported incident each for kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, and murder. Beyond physical abuse, illegal arrest and harassment rank as the second and third most prevalent forms of assault. However, key informant interviews (KIIs) uncover insidious and pervasive attacks that are often overlooked and unrecorded. These include sexual smears, rape, unwanted sexual or demeaning remarks, body groping, sextortion (coercing sexual favours in exchange for information), punishment via denial of access for refusing sexual advances, stalking, social media trolling, and cyberbullying.

Furthermore, there are subtler forms of discrimination that are difficult to track yet equally damaging. These manifest through biases in newsroom representation, management, and leadership roles, as well as through media ownership structures and the suppression of women's bylines.
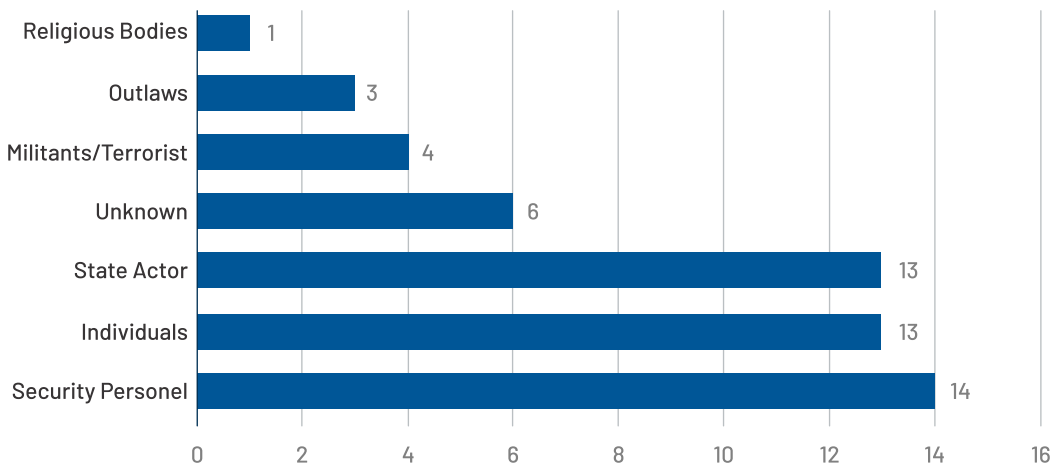
FIGURE 4: Attacks Against Women Journalists by States in Nigeria (1998 – 2024)

Source: CJID – Press Attack Tracker

Figure 4 shows that the Federal Capital Territory (15) has the highest number of women journalist attacks, followed closely by Lagos State (11).

FIGURE 5: Perpetrators of Violent Attacks Against Women Journalists in Nigeria (1998 – 2024)

Source: CJID – Press Attack Tracker

Data from Figure 5 shows that in Nigeria, security personnel are the most common perpetrators of violent attacks on female journalists (14), followed by governmental entities and private individuals (13 each). While the record is modest, a religious organisation unfortunately documented one incident.

5.0 Recommendations – Strategies for Creating a Safer Working Environment

a) **Establish Safer Work Environments:** Creating safer work environments for female journalists in Nigeria is imperative. Insights from critical informants underscore the need for structural reforms within newsrooms initiated by robust policies that protect against harassment and violence. Implementing comprehensive safeguarding guidelines, health insurance, and training in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) will enhance the protection of female journalists and affirm their value in the workplace. Media leadership must prioritise safety as a core organisational value, acknowledging female journalists' risks and actively implementing strategies to mitigate these challenges. Leaders who understand these unique difficulties foster a culture of safety, respect, and accountability, empowering journalists to perform their duties confidently.

b) **Implement Relevant Policies:** Introducing workplace policies designed to combat abuse and violence is vital for safeguarding female journalists. Supports such as health insurance, life insurance, and provisions for mental health breaks following traumatic incidents reflect an organisation's commitment to employee well-being. Risk-reduction strategies—such as maintaining unpredictability in movement and exercising discretion regarding personal information—are essential. Government bodies and key stakeholders must ensure adherence to these internal policies.

c) **Safety Strategies:** Providing female journalists with effective self-protection strategies is critical. This includes emphasising safety measures that do not impose additional burdens on victims. Encouraging collaborative reporting enhances safety through shared vigilance. Clear anti-harassment policies should be communicated to all staff during onboarding to set expectations for respectful behaviour. Female journalists should be encouraged to report in teams during sensitive assignments to bolster safety through collective presence. Promoting proactive communication and self-care practices is crucial for those working in high-risk environments; informing colleagues or security personnel of a journalist's whereabouts while covering high-risk stories enhances transparency and safety. Continuous training on risk assessment, threat mitigation, first aid, secure communications, conflict-sensitive journalism, and adherence to media laws and codes of conduct is also essential.

d) **Enhance Digital Security:** In an increasingly digital world, safeguarding personal information and maintaining secure communication channels is paramount. Media leaders should prioritise the implementation of practices, tools, and strategies to protect female journalists, as well as digital assets and systems,

from unauthorised access, attacks, or destruction. It is essential to provide journalists with training on best practices for online engagement. Online threats should not be underestimated; they must be reported and escalated to security agencies, as such threats may lead to physical harm. Establishing a reporting mechanism that facilitates swift consequences for offenders will promote accountability and foster a culture of zero tolerance toward harassment.

e) **Increased Government and Stakeholder Interest:** There is a critical need for government agencies and stakeholders to address the challenges journalists face, particularly female journalists. Many hesitate to report abuses due to a lack of trust in the justice system and the volatile nature of their working environment. The rise in violence, abuse, and attacks both within and outside newsrooms demands urgent attention, as it poses significant threats to women's careers in journalism—a predominantly male industry. To combat these issues, it is essential to implement government policies that facilitate the prosecution of offenders while promoting the visibility of these incidents through stakeholder engagement.

6.0 Conclusion

Media groups and the government must work together to provide improved security, legal safeguards, and mental health support to address the threats that Nigerian women journalists experience. These women's tenacity and devotion to journalism, which they display by carrying on with their profession despite the risks, highlight the need for reform. In addition to highlighting the urgent need for policies that shield journalists from targeted gender-based violence, their testimonies underline the gravity of their decisions, balancing their safety with their duty to educate the public.

This study draws attention to the broader ramifications of violence against women in journalism, where assaults are not sporadic but rather explicitly targeted at women because of their gender, line of work, and the responsibility that comes with it. One responder described strategies such as working in teams or relying on the presence of male colleagues for increased safety as examples of the problematic adaptations female journalists make to manage hazards in the field. These adaptive tactics highlight female journalists' bravery and the systematic necessity for protective frameworks that enable them to report safely without jeopardising their well-being.

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