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### Abuse and Harassment of Female Journalists in Karnali

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#### Abstract

This study explores the experiences of abuse and harassment faced by female journalists in the Karnali Province. In the base of concurrent research design, mixed method was adopted in this study. For quantitative method, questionnaire was developed and online survey was conducted for data collection. For that 60 respondents were selected. Like that, for qualitative study, focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews were performed. Where 3 senior female journalists were selected for the interview and 10 victims were selected for focus group discussion. This study set up within the theoretical framework of objectification and spiral of silence. Results reveal that patriarchal societal norms contribute to the objectification of female journalists, leading to a high prevalence of abuse that is often not reported due to ineffective laws, discrimination, shame, economic vulnerability, and lack of political access. The result also shows that female journalists often lack self-confidence and may bear the harassment silently or try to hide it due to the fear of social boycott. It highlights the issues of unequal wages, lack of credit for their work, and exploitation by senior journalists.

**Keywords:** Objectification, violence, discrimination, gender, exploitation

#### Introduction

This research mainly focuses on the impact and experience of women's harassment. It is feminist in nature and the concerning issues are the experience and impact of harassment among female journalists. Hence, the study deals with three pertinent questions regarding the silent nature of women, the objectification of a female journalist by a male gazer, and examining the nature and impact of harassment on women's professional and personal lives. First, what is the nature of harassment or abuse experienced by the female journalist in Karnali Province,

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Nepal? Second, to what extent has abuse or harassment impacted their personal and professional lives? Third, why is the female journalist forced to remain silent without reporting the abuse or harassment against her?

According to Panday (2011) in Bangladesh, most of the newspaper offices and media rooms are not women-friendly. For example, some media institutions do not provide separate toilets for women which is the basic thing for women's safety. Since women are overlooked by the dominant male presence, they feel like fish out of water and intimidated by their colleagues.

UN estimated that one in three women experience sexual or physical violence in her lifetime. It also explains that abuse is inescapable and ubiquitous across the continuum of real and virtual world. Women journalists have faced harassment from many sectors including state agents, politicians, news sources, and including male journalists.

Worldwide, female journalists are undergoing abuse, violence, and harassment in newsrooms and in the field. Then the impact of violence upon them is manifested directly in their physical and psychological health and influences their work. Currently, social media and the Internet are also tools for violence against female journalists. It raises the question that do female journalists protect themselves? Or can they? (Koirala, 2020).

The report of IMS (International Media support) 2019 identifies several core challenges in three categories. These challenges include physical security, where women journalists are at a higher risk of being targeted for sexual violence, compared to their male counterparts. Additionally, women journalists face verbal threats and online abuse, which includes explicit threats of sexual violence and personal insults that have a significant impact on their psychological and emotional well-being. Finally, sexual harassment and gender inequality are also major challenges for women journalists, where they face unequal pay, limited representation in decision-making roles, and a lack of protocols to address sexual harassment within workplaces. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure the safety, well-being, and professional growth of women journalists in the media industry.

Gender-based violence against women journalists is a global problem that takes many different shapes and forms, including intimidation, threats of rape, threats against family, and sexual harassment in the newsroom and in the field (Feldner, 2019). Feldner's statement has been supported by data from CFWIJ (Coalition for Women in Journalism), during the first quarter of 2021, there were 348 documented cases of violence and threats against women journalists worldwide. This number

represents a substantial increase of 284.8 percent compared to the first quarter of the previous year.

Kafle (2021) describes that most of the women journalists associated with the media organizations don't see women-friendly environment within the newsroom and overall administrative policy and practices. Male journalists with the masculine attitude and patriarchal culture dominate the entire media houses.

Karnali Province is geographically the largest province of Nepal. According to the Federation of Nepali Journalists, 859 journalists are members of the federation in Karnali province, and 728 male and 131 female journalists are associated with the Federation. Most of them (60 percent) are in Surkhet and the least are in the Mugu district. Surkhet branch of the Nepal Journalists' Association estimates that around two hundred journalists who are not members of any journalist organizations. Among them, the number of female journalists is about 50.

The research study is an attempt to see the phenomenon through the lens of objectification theory and the spiral of silence theory. Objectification theory provides an important framework for research in understanding the experience of being female in a culture and society where the female body is objectified for sexual purposes. It shows that women are more pathetic in mental and physical work than men. In particular, women's views and works are considered inferior in society. However, the appearance of a woman's body is considered treasured for beauty, showbiz, and sexual deeds in every field. Objectification theory is used to observe the consequences of women living in the sexual objectified environments. Objectification Theory was first proposed in 1997 by Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts. When women are in a social environment that regards the female body as use and entertainment for a long time, they will internalize the observer's perspective to form self-objectification (Pant, 2021).

According to Tamor (2011), the relationship between the media and women has a certain structure where women are trapped as an object. The role of women in the media in decision-making is reflected in the poor representation of women's issues and concerns.

This research study examines the negative effects of objectification of women journalists in the Karnali society, particularly when they are portrayed as characterless or reduced to their physical appearance rather than their professional skills and contributions. Objectification involves treating individuals as objects, often emphasizing their physical attributes over their intellect, skills, or humanity.

Hence, using another theory, the spiral of silence as a lens, it tried to

understand the individual willingness to express or remain silent against abuse and harassment which they faced. This theory was proposed by Elizabeth Noelle Neumann in 1974. According to this theory, if there is a dominant opinion present effectively, the chances of expressing an opposing opinion are less likely or stopped (Thakur, 2022).

Fear of isolation or social rejection can lead women journalists in Karnali to a “spiral” where they can’t openly express their opinions or share their experiences about harassment. This theory can be applied to understand how societal norms and power dynamics contribute to keeping silence for women journalists in Karnali who raise other’s problems, can’t evoke their issues by them.

Pandey (2011) explains that those women who have survived in the profession do not have happy stories. They, too, feel their position remains precarious, despite long years in the profession.

This study is unique in that it reveals the abuse and harassment faced by the female journalists in Karnali Province. Since little studies have been carried out in this field of journalism in Nepal, this will be a milestone to know about that problems that the female journalists face.

### **Methods and Procedures**

This research study is the outcome of the empirical study based on quantitative and qualitative approaches. For that, evidences are presented to support the validity of the theoretical premise.

For the quantitative method, survey design was applied. The survey was based on a questionnaire undertaken to collect the data online from December 2022 to January 2023. The survey was undertaken among 60 from 131 female working journalists from Karnali Province and questionnaires were distributed using a snowball sampling technique. Female journalists were contacted from the databases of the Nepal Journalist Association, Surkhet, and asked to forward the survey to other female journalists working in Karnali province.

For qualitative method, focus group discussion and key informant interviews were conducted. The purposive sampling method was used for both methods where 4 senior female journalists were selected for key informant interview and 10 survivors were selected for focus group discussion. Virtual platforms or communication tools were used to facilitate these interactions.

The analysis is made through descriptive statistics and tabulations. The study concentrated on the physical, psychological, and societal impact and experience on survivors after facing abuse or harassment. It also reveals why survivors are afraid to report it.

## Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the survey and the interviews have been presented below with analysis, interpretation and discussion.

### Results from Survey

Table 1 below shows that 30 percent respondents were participants from Surkhet. Like that 15 percent respondents were from Jajarkot, 15 percent from Dailekh, 10 percent from Salyan, 6.5 percent from Jumlla, 5 percent from each district as Dolpa, Mugu, Rukum Paschim, and only 3.5 percent respondent participate from Humlla. In total, married were 33 (55 percent) while unmarried were 27 (45 percent).

**Table 1**

*Districts Ways Respondents*

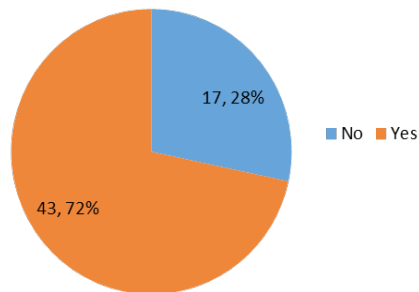
S.N.	District	Respondents in Number	Respondents in Percent
1	Surkhet	18	30
2	Salyan	6	10
3	Dailekh	9	15
4	Jajarkot	9	15
5	Rukum West	3	5
6	Kalikot	3	5
7	Jumla	4	6.5
8	Dolpa	3	5
9	Mugu	3	5
10	Humla	2	3.5
	Total	60	100

According to the age group, there were 39 (65 percent) female journalists with age 20-30 years, and 19 (31.7 percent) journalists with age 30-40 years. However, the age of the youngest respondent was 19 years old and the eldest respondent was 42 years old. This study also reveals that most female journalists left their job in their 40s and were involved with another place due to insecurity. The survey discloses the female journalist experience of harassment and abuse that they had confronted in media houses or in the working place.

According to IFJ (2015), the media industry in Nepal is overwhelmingly male. Based on research done in Kathmandu, only 24 percent of journalists are women. The top-level management of most media organizations is dominated by men. Almost all editors and owners of media houses are men.

## Figure 1

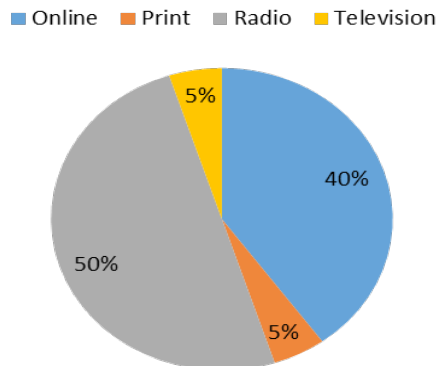
### *Taking Journalism as a Main Profession*



This figure shows that 43 percent of respondents' profession is journalism or media, whereas only 17 percent of respondents work part-time in media. This result indicates the presence of women in journalism and media is a good indicator.

## Figure 2

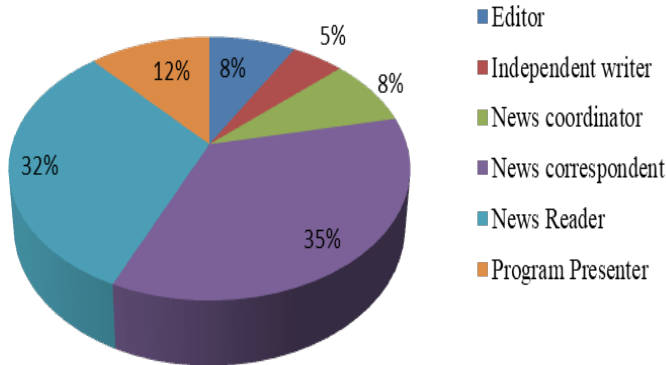
### *Engaged Media by Respondents*



Most of the respondents were employed on the radio (50 percent). Online media (30 percent) is also the most wanted media to work in. The result shows that the oldest forms of media (Print (5 percent) and Television (5 percent)) are lacelike media platforms for female journalists.

**Figure 3**

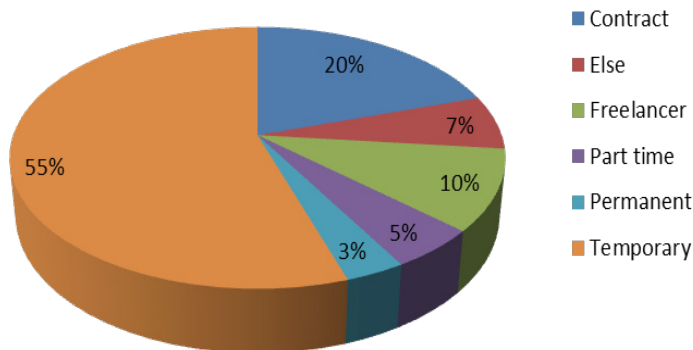
*Employment Status of Respondents in Media*



The study also shows that most of the respondents were employed as news correspondents 35 percent and as news readers 32 percent. While 12 percent of respondents worked as program presenters. Like that news coordinators 8 percent, editors 8 percent, and 5 percent of respondents are independent writers.

**Figure 4**

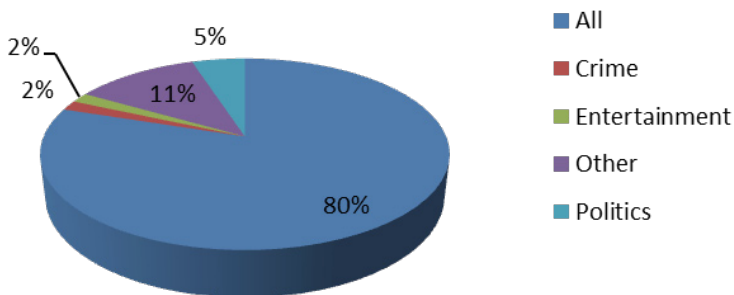
*Employment Position*



However, the position for employment reflected that 55 percent were engaged as temporary full full-time regular workers, and 20 percent were full-time in a contract. Another 22 percent respondents were engaged as part-time regular or freelance. Only 3 percent of respondents were engaged permanently.

**Figure 5**

*News Beat Covered by Respondents*

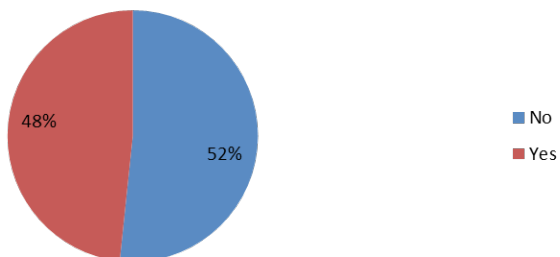


According to the survey, 80 percent of respondents covered all beats.

This study shows that most of the respondent’s (67 percent) education level was +2 when they started to work in the media, and only 15 percent of respondents had Mass media and journalism as the major subject. However, 13 percent of respondents passed Bachelor’s degree and 3 percent respondents of them had Mass Communication and Journalism as their major subjects. 5 percent of respondents had a master’s degree when they started to work in media. According to the survey, the present education status of respondents is very upright, where 63 percent respondents had bachelor’s degrees and 13 percent of them passed their bachelor’s in mass communication and journalism. That is, 19 percent respondents had master’s degrees and only 18 percent passed their +2.

**Figure 6**

*Abuse or Harassment while at Work*





Respondents were asked did they have experience about abuse or harassment. The answer reveals that that 52 percent (n=31) of respondents didn't have experience with abuse or harassment but 48 percent (n=29) of respondents had experiences with it. The result also shows that the media industry that raises the voices for freedom, equality, and safety is not safe for a female journalist.

The report reveals that among the 29 individuals surveyed, a significant 52 percent experienced daily instances of abuse or harassment, while 27 percent encountered such behavior once a month and 20.6 percent faced it weekly. When asked why they endured this mistreatment silently, respondents provided open-ended responses. They cited reasons such as the fear of being socially rejected and isolated, alongside a lack of confidence in the fairness of the justice system. Consequently, these individuals chose not to speak up, even though the continuous harassment was taking a toll on them emotionally. Many expressed the notion that they would consider leaving their current job if they found a suitable alternative due to the distress caused by the ongoing mistreatment.

The study shows that most of the abuse or harassment was verbal (37 percent) and emotional harassment was faced by 23 percent of respondents. 10 percent of respondents faced sexual harassment and 10 percent of respondents faced financial harassment. All kind of harassment faced 15percent respondents.

Out of the 29 responses, the majority (69 percent) of the female journalists had faced harassment in the workplace (field and office), and 24 percent of respondents were harassed at the office. Only 7 percent of respondents were harassed in another field.

The next question of the study tried to identify who the perpetrators were. Respondent were allowed to select multiple options. Out of 29 responses 34 percent were harassed by co-workers, 28 percent respondents abused by media owners and 28percent by other perpetrators. Media owners and co-workers both turn into perpetrator for 10 percent respondents.

Another question they asked that did they reported to anyone the abuse they faced. Out of 29 responses, 41percent of journalists didn't take any action and 59 percent of journalists reported about it. According to the report, only 14 percent (n=2) of respondents reported to the police. While 57 percent of respondents shared with co-workers, 19 percent of respondents reported to a journalist organization and 10percent had reported to an editor.

Respondents also asked that after the report they get relief or support from anybody. Out of 17 respondents, 51.7 percent said they didn't get any support from

anybody but 20 percent get support from co-workers as well as editors and 28.3percent from outsiders.

Out of 12 respondents who did not report said that they considered changing their career at some point after facing harassment. The main reason behind the silence was fear of social blame 37 percent, 38 percent of respondents said that no one is serious with her discomfort because of the perpetrator's social, political, and financial status.

The finding indicates that the abuse was affecting their opinion, journalistic content, and even in their life. 12 respondents bear emotional effects after abuse. Like that 11 respondents were psychologically affected and 3 of them were taking medicine for depression. However, 6 respondents were socially affected and 2 respondents' family life was ruined.

Respondents were asked if they thought their organization was helping them to cope with such harassment. Only 8 out of 60 respondents were positive about their organizations' approach to harassment. The majority of respondents had doubts that their media house was supportive of such issues.

Respondents also asked the question that if they knew about the female journalist who works with them in the media field has been abused or harassed. Out of the 60 respondents, 31 knew about it. While 18 respondents did not want to talk and 11 respondents were unknown of such incidents.

When another question about how they knew about the female journalist harassment was asked. Most of the respondents 15 said they perceived by survivors. 13 respondents said they perceived from the third person and only 3 respondents saw the survivor was abused directly.

The finding reveals that respondents helped to the survivors who shared their problems but hearing incidents were out of their concern. Out of 18 respondents, 13 respondents supported the survivor emotively and 6 helped them to complain to the senior staff of the media house. Only 3 respondents helped them to report the police.

### **Results from Focus Group Discussion**

The findings of this discussion proved that most female journalist have been facing abuse or harassment in their working place. Many of the participants agreed that they had faced harassment through touching, gazing, verbal as well as online platform. But lack of social security and fear of being isolated they are silently facing abuse or harassment. They are scared to share their bad experiences about violence.

One participant from Surkhet said she had faced sexual violence due to financial incentives, before joining the offender's media she was working in a local FM for 5 thousand rupees. While, she was offered a job with FM, the owner of media promised timely rise in the salary and better training, she started facing all kinds of harassment for following ten months after first two months. She was forced to resign, when she could not bear the harassment anymore and reported to the police. Unfortunately, she did not receive the justice she deserved and had to face social harassment as well.

Another participant from Jumla said that she had to face several harassments when she wrote the news about the dual marriage of local leaders. At that time she did not get any help from the Nepal Journalist federation and colleague. Besides help, she had to survive the threats that came from journalists and political leaders. Due to this reporting, her personal life had been destroyed.

This study finds that in some cases, female journalists were abused because they had to rely on their male colleagues for commutation to the news site. Many of them said that they had transportation problems as most of them did not have a vehicle and they go with male journalists for news collection. Because of this, female journalists had encountered character assassination and offensive activities. That was the pervasive problem of female journalists in Karnali province.

One participant of Surkhet said she had been a victim of this type of harassment. When she was sitting on the back seat of the motorcycle of a male journalist while heading for reporting, someone took their photograph. Based on that photograph, her character was assassinated, and it was propagated that she had an immoral relationship with him. It was so exaggerated that the wife of that journalist filed a complaint against her. Because of this she could not tolerate it had to face mental anxiety. She had to go to the court, and the case is going on.

Another participant from Jajarkot said there are many sorrows of working in local level media organization. The mental stress cannot be endured if she makes male friends, if she doesn't she could be deprived of information and her work becomes hard.

The discussion reveals that male colleagues are referred to as "journalists" while female colleagues are referred to as "sisters" (Nani) reflects a gender bias and lack of respect towards female journalists. This disparity in how they are addressed can contribute to an unequal and uncomfortable working environment. Junior journalists don't have access to centralized media, and the issues raised by them in the local media are sent to the central media by giving credit to someone else for their work. Even when their work gets award, they are not recognized instead

somebody shows up to take all the credit. These words and behavior shows the demeaning attitude towards female journalist work and gender, which also create embarrassing environment for them.

### **Results from Key Informant Interview**

There are safety and security challenges for journalists in Nepal as well as in other countries of the world. Particularly female journalists are more insecure in Nepal. Some of them feel unsafe in the media where they work. They have to face security challenges when reaching from home to workplace and from workplace to sources of information and events. However, such issues are not revealed most of time. There are many incidents that are difficult to define and quantify. Even when such issues are complained or reported, the chance of getting justice is low. Because, the cases of sexual violence are invisible, it is not easy to bring them out with direct evidence and witness in such cases.

Bindu says that few male or male journalists objectify female journalists only as a sex object; these problems are still the same 28 years ago and now. Most female journalists have been experiencing sexual violence in such ways and situation that they immeasurable. Sometimes it is also overheard that male journalist's physical behavior, talking about women's sexuality and character led female journalist unsafe and humiliation. But it is hard to measure or express. In terms of geography, the suffering of female journalist in remote areas like Karnali province is serious than in other areas. When journalists go to remote areas for news gathering, they have to walk alone and stay in isolated for two to three days which leads to high chance of facing security challenges.

Acharya explains that in local media houses female journalists who raised their voices against the violence of others have not found a means to speak against the violence beside them. There are various ways of violence against women in the media. There is no proper body to complain about it, if they complain to a higher authority, the victim will lose their job and be humiliated even more. Oli agrees with Acharya and shared her story that when she raised the voice for survivor and reported to the police, the survivor ended up being hostile. Then she did not get support from any women journalist. Because of that case her character is assassinated.

### **Conclusion**

This research study focuses on the challenging issue of harassment faced by female journalists, highlighting the lasting negative impacts of physical, psychological, and social attacks. These attacks are a global concern and stem from gender-based biases and judgments about appearance. Harmful beliefs and sexism

contribute to unequal treatment in the media field. The fear of harassment alters the way female journalists behave, act, and report stories. Such mistreatment leads to mental and emotional distress, affecting their well-being and even personal lives for some, underscoring the urgent need to address this problem. Some of them have ruined their family life.

Media involves in investigating into all levels of society to reflect its issues, challenges, culture, and customs. This requires journalists to build relationships across various groups, but a patriarchal mindset hampers women's collaboration with men, impeding progress. Overcoming the objectification of women is crucial. Research reveals pervasive harassment experienced by nearly all women journalists, predominantly by media owners and male colleagues. This mistreatment leads to emotional distress, as female journalists endure harassment, underestimation, and character attacks.

The study's results reveal that among the 29 participants, a significant majority of 20 female journalists experienced harassment in their workplace, both in the field and office settings. Out of these, 7 respondents specifically reported harassment incidents occurring in their office. Only 2 respondents mentioned facing harassment in a different field. In terms of the nature of harassment, 10 respondents were targeted by their co-workers, while 8 participants faced abuse from media owners. Additionally, 8 respondents encountered harassment from other sources. Notably, both media owners and co-workers acted as perpetrators in cases involving 10 percent of the participants. In conclusion, the study highlights a concerning prevalence of workplace harassment, particularly among female journalists, occurring across different roles and sources within the media industry. Lack of awareness and fear of the situation of harassment in the local media is even worse. As a result, women journalists are quitting from the media.

The findings presented here will encourage further research. It suggests that conducting more detailed studies and research is necessary to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges these women encounter and the potential consequences. The ultimate goal of this future research is to gather stronger, more reliable, and valuable results. These results could then be used to advocate for the implementation of necessary policies aimed at protecting female journalists from various forms of harassment or mistreatment.

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