



Unifor Media Sector **SURVEY ON HARASSMENT** **– ONLINE AND IN THE FIELD**

Produced by:
Unifor Media Council



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Survey On Harassment – Online And In The Field

May 2022

Unifor’s Media Industry Council conducted a survey on harassment for Unifor members from Dec. 8, 2021, to Feb. 12, 2022, and 129 media workers responded:

- The vast majority (69.4%) of respondents identified as female, while 34.7% identified as a person of colour, and 6.9% identified as LGBTQ and 6.9% identified as workers with disabilities.
- When asked if they had experienced harassment in the field, 60.6% said yes. Attacks ranged from minor incidents (ie: “just angry sports fans”) to physical threats, and death threats.

“Callers will sometimes call me racist insults, or make hateful personal attacks ... they will repeatedly call back sometimes for hours.”

“Men hitting on you when you are a part of a TV crew. I had someone follow me back to a hotel when I was working on location for a shoot and the hotel staff had to intervene.”

“Threats like ‘there are millions of us and we are coming for you, you have no idea what you have coming to you.’”

- 50.8% reported experiencing online harassment, specifically.
- 23.5% of respondents reported daily harassment, while 22.1% reported once a week.
- Rude and insulting behaviour was the most common form (98.8%), followed by verbal abuse (78.8%), followed by threats of violence (43.5%). Sexist and racist comments ranked high, at 36.5% and 28.2% respectively, while death threats totalled 17.6%.
- The harassers’ preferred methods of communication were direct messages or tags on Twitter (53.5%), Facebook comments (52.3%), and email (52.3%). In person harassment also ranked high (36%), followed by phone calls (33.7%).
- When asked to describe the impact, 63.2% reported feeling angry, which was the most common response. A significant percentage – 26.4% – were frightened for their safety, while 25.3% thought about leaving journalism, and 20.7% felt isolated.
- When asked to identify current resources available in the workplace, a third of the 94 respondents who answered – 33 in total, the largest group – were unaware of any resources, while 14 said there was nothing.

“No resources. My boss is great and we have been asked to block comments or hide them on social media, but not addressing these commenters doesn’t sit well with me and I feel very stressed with the constant hate from the public towards journalism.”

- When asked what kind of resources people would like to have available, clear reporting and response procedures ranked No. 1 at 74.8%. A point-person to report to with specialized training on how to deal with harassment was the second most-chosen resource at 69.2%. Improved health benefits with enhanced counselling ranked third (50.5%), followed by paid stress leave (43.9%) and improved employee assistance program (EAP) counselling/support 34.6%.

“Just closing comments on website and Facebook would be a major improvement. For now, closing comments on all COVID coverage would be a good start. For potentially dangerous assignments, send two staff instead of one.”

- When asked what resources they wanted from their union, respondents chose clear reporting/response procedures bargained in their union contracts as the No. 1 choice at 73.3%. The second most wanted resource was a shop steward with specialized training on responding to harassment (57.1%). Support networks for affected workers (ie: online gatherings to share experiences) and stronger representation with management on the issue were both tied for the third most requested resources at 53.3%.
- Lobbying government to combat online harassment was chosen by 42.9%, while digital security training was supported by 28.6%, and educational forums were last with 26.7% support.

“I can’t stress enough how dangerous any form of digital or in field harassment is ... In other parts of the world, laxity on this front has resulted in the death of journalists and terrible burnout and suicide rates. I would really like for it not to escalate along those lines, in this country.”

“I would like my union to hold monthly Zooms with members. There is no communication in my newsroom. I haven’t seen or heard from these people in years. I love seeing and talking to my fellow union members! We’ll do the morale work if management won’t.”

Unifor Media Sector Survey On Harassment

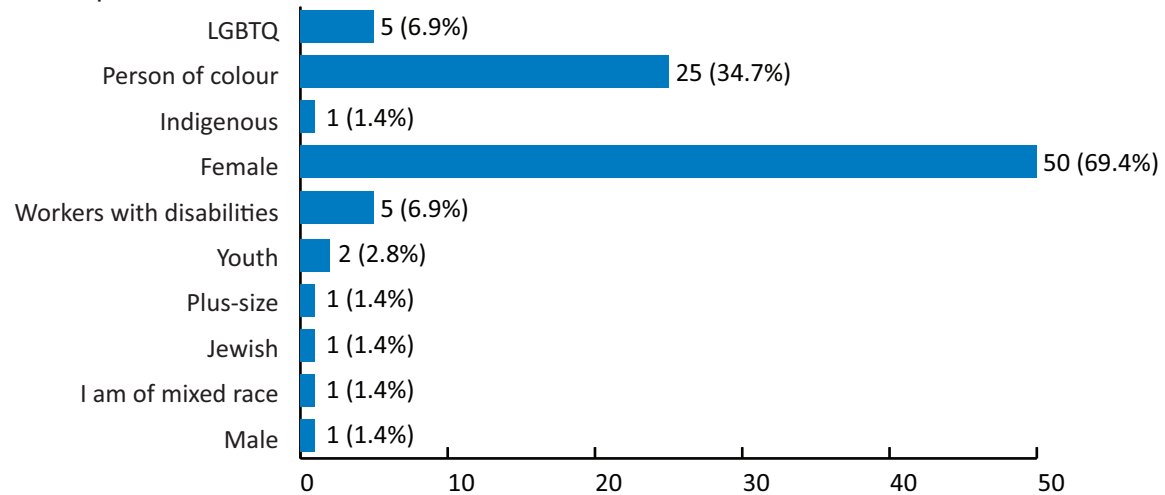
Full Report

Unifor's Media Industry Council conducted a survey on harassment from Dec. 8, 2021, to Feb. 12, 2022, and 129 media workers responded. The survey was self-selecting and distributed via email to media locals, with encouragement to spread widely among their members. The survey was intended for Unifor members only, and all but one of the respondents were Unifor members. (These responses were removed.) For some questions, members were able to write in their own answers.

1. The vast majority (69.4%) of respondents identified as female, while 34.7% identified as a person of colour, and 6.9% identified as LGBTQ and 6.9% identified as workers with disabilities. Respondents were asked to select all categories that applied.

Do you identify with any of these groups? Click all that apply.

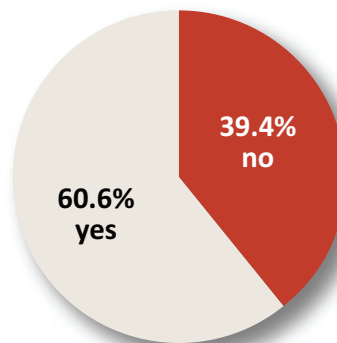
72 Responses



2. When asked if they had experienced harassment in the field, 60.6% said yes.

Have you ever experienced harassment in the field as a journalist or media worker?

127 Responses



3. Those who responded yes to the previous question were asked to describe their experiences. Attacks ranged from minor incidents (ie: “just angry sports fans”) to physical threats, and death threats. Many reported verbal harassment, including passersby yelling and name calling, and accusations of “fake news”. Physical assaults at the hands of protesters and police were also mentioned, as well as people interfering with equipment or the shot.

“Callers will sometimes call me racist insults, or make hateful personal attacks. Sometimes if I try to hang up on them they will repeatedly call back sometimes for hours.”

“I have been harassed by readers (and bosses) throughout my career, but I have never seen the level of massive, cruel, vicious, obsessive harassment being dished out now. Threats of torture and death are one thing, but the daily swarming of people complaining to my editors (urged on by extremists like Derek Sloan) about me are scary. I doubt my editors’ understanding of how swarmings work. Sometimes I fear for my job.”

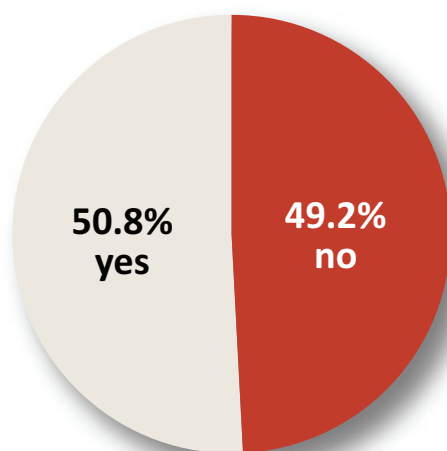
“Men hitting on you when you are a part of a TV crew. I had someone follow me back to a hotel when I was working on location for a shoot and the hotel staff had to intervene.”

“Working in the office the phone call harassment happens several times a day. Called everything from a liar to far worse. Threats like ‘there are millions of us and we are coming for you, you have no idea what you have coming to you.’”

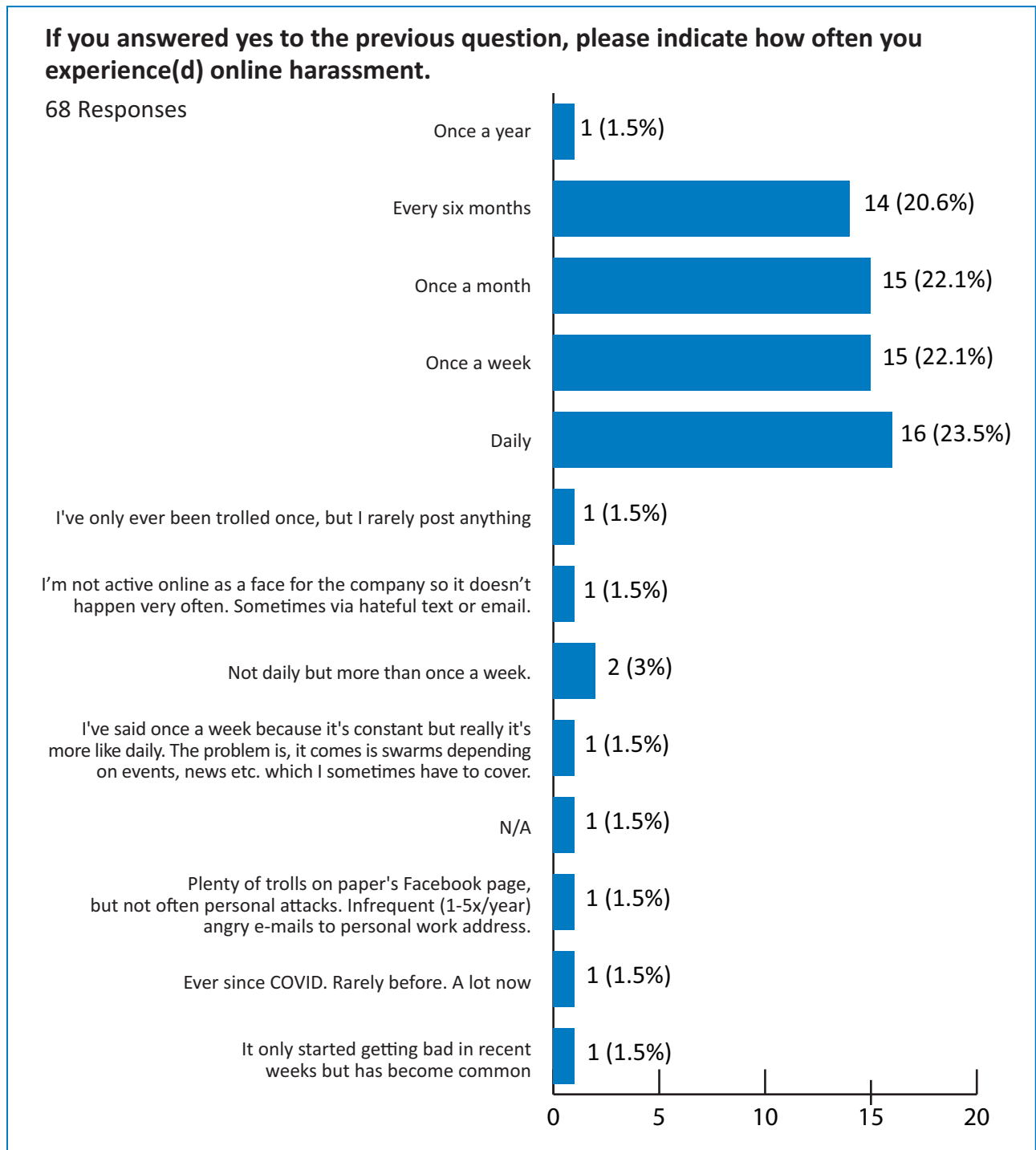
4. When asked specifically about **online** harassment, 50.8% of the 126 respondents to this question reported experiencing it.

Have you ever experienced ONLINE harassment as a journalist?

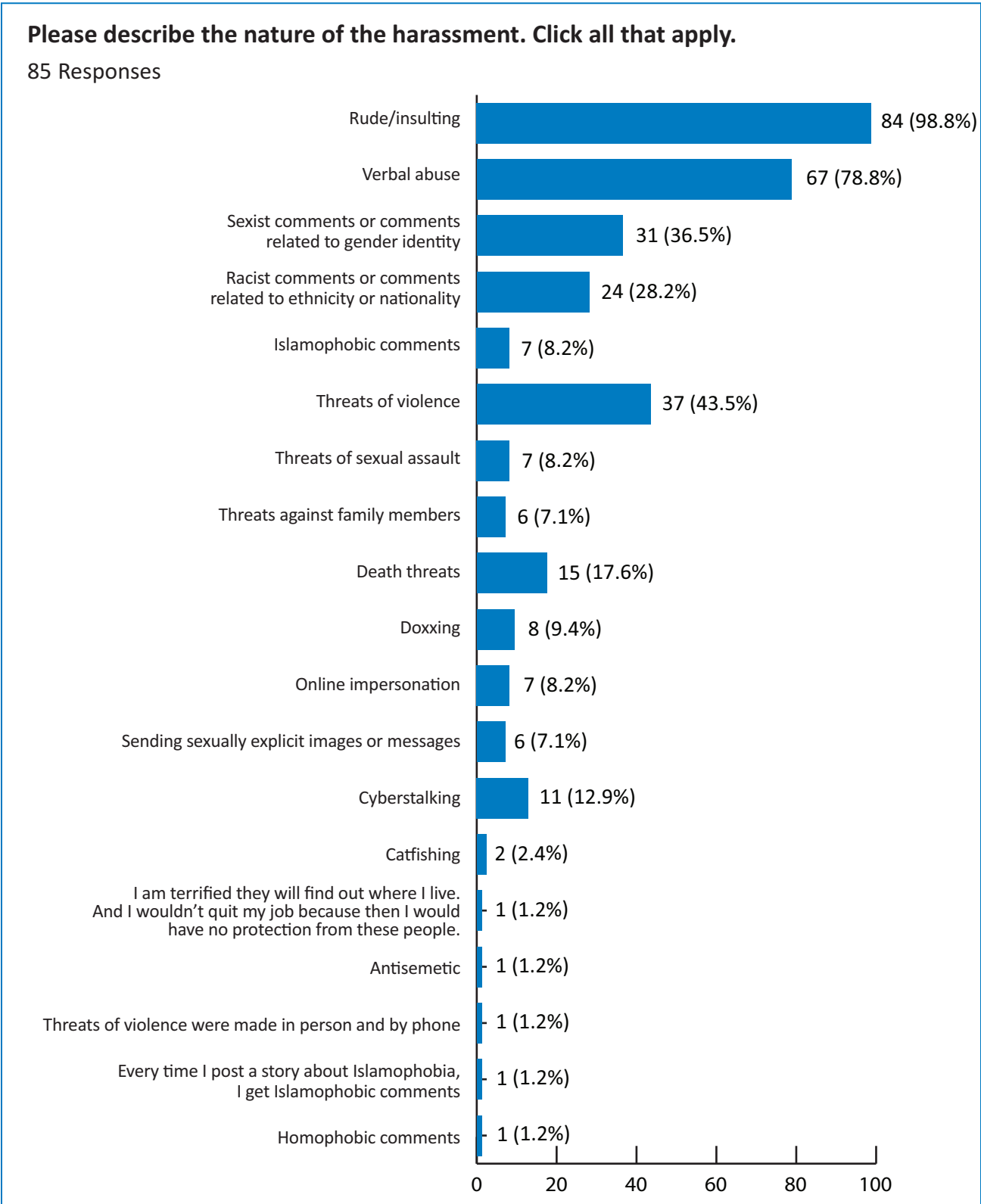
126 Responses



5. Respondents who answered yes to the previous question were asked to comment on the frequency of harassment. Almost a quarter – 23.5% – reported daily harassment, while 22.1% reported once a week, and another 22.1% reported once a month, while 20.6% reported once every six months.



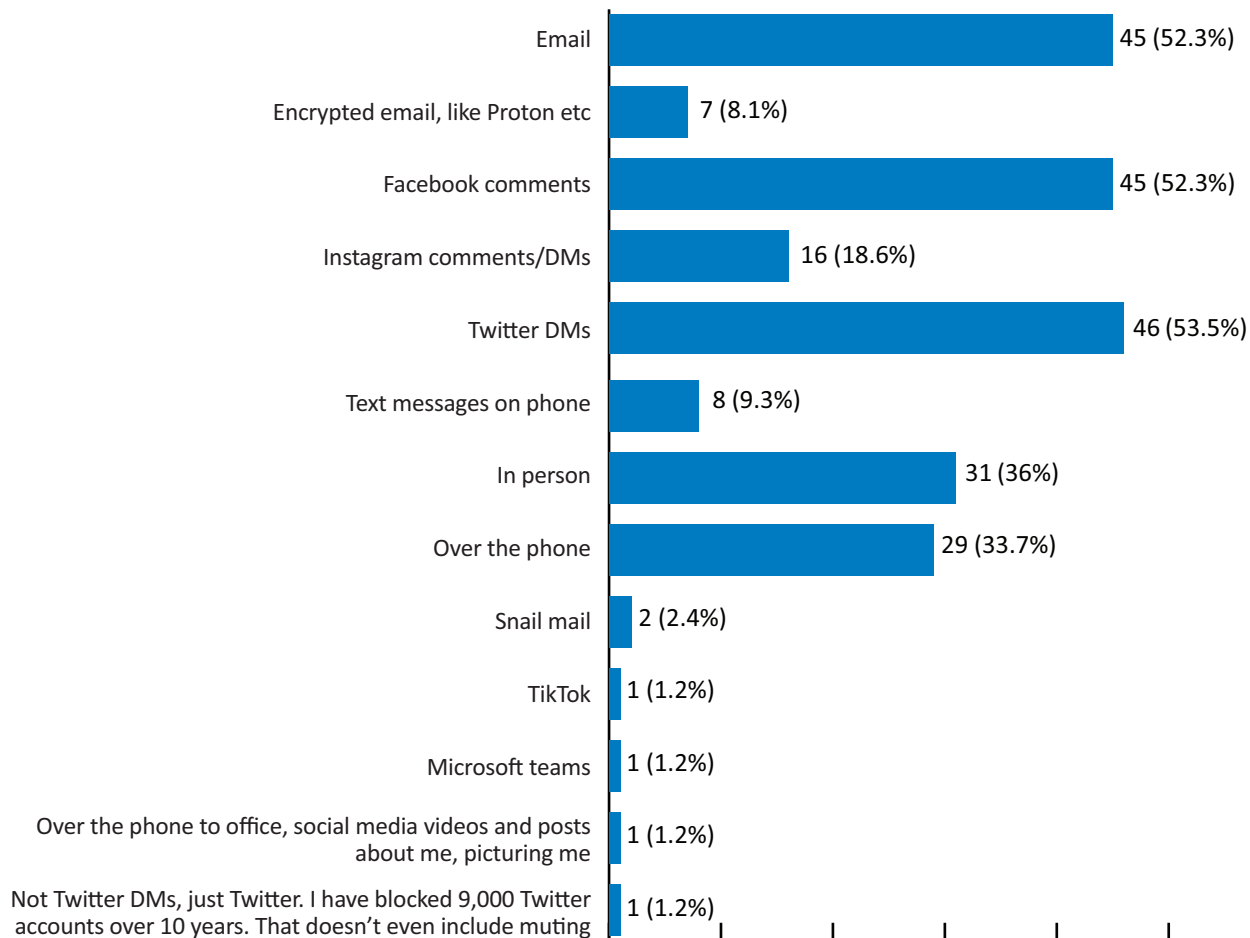
6. Respondents who experienced harassment were asked to describe the nature of the harassment and asked to click all that apply. Rude and insulting behaviour was the most common form (98.8%), followed by verbal abuse (78.8%), followed by threats of violence (43.5%). Sexist and racist comments ranked high, at 36.5% and 28.2% respectively, while death threats totalled 17.6%.



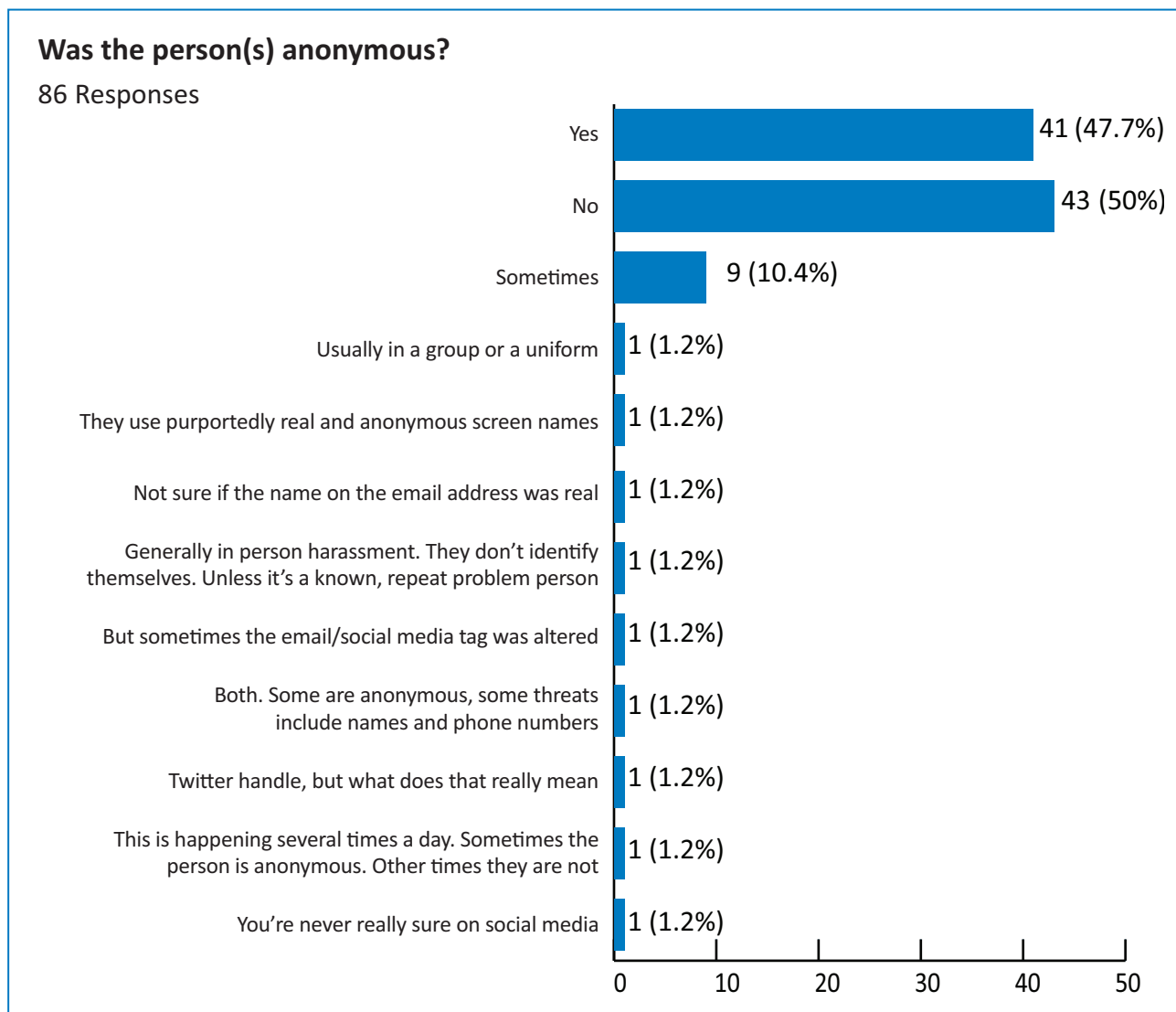
7. According to respondents, the harassers' preferred methods of communication are direct messages or tags on Twitter (53.5%), Facebook comments (52.3%), and email (52.3%). In person harassment also ranked high (36%), followed by phone calls (33.7%).

How did the harasser communicate with you?

86 Responses



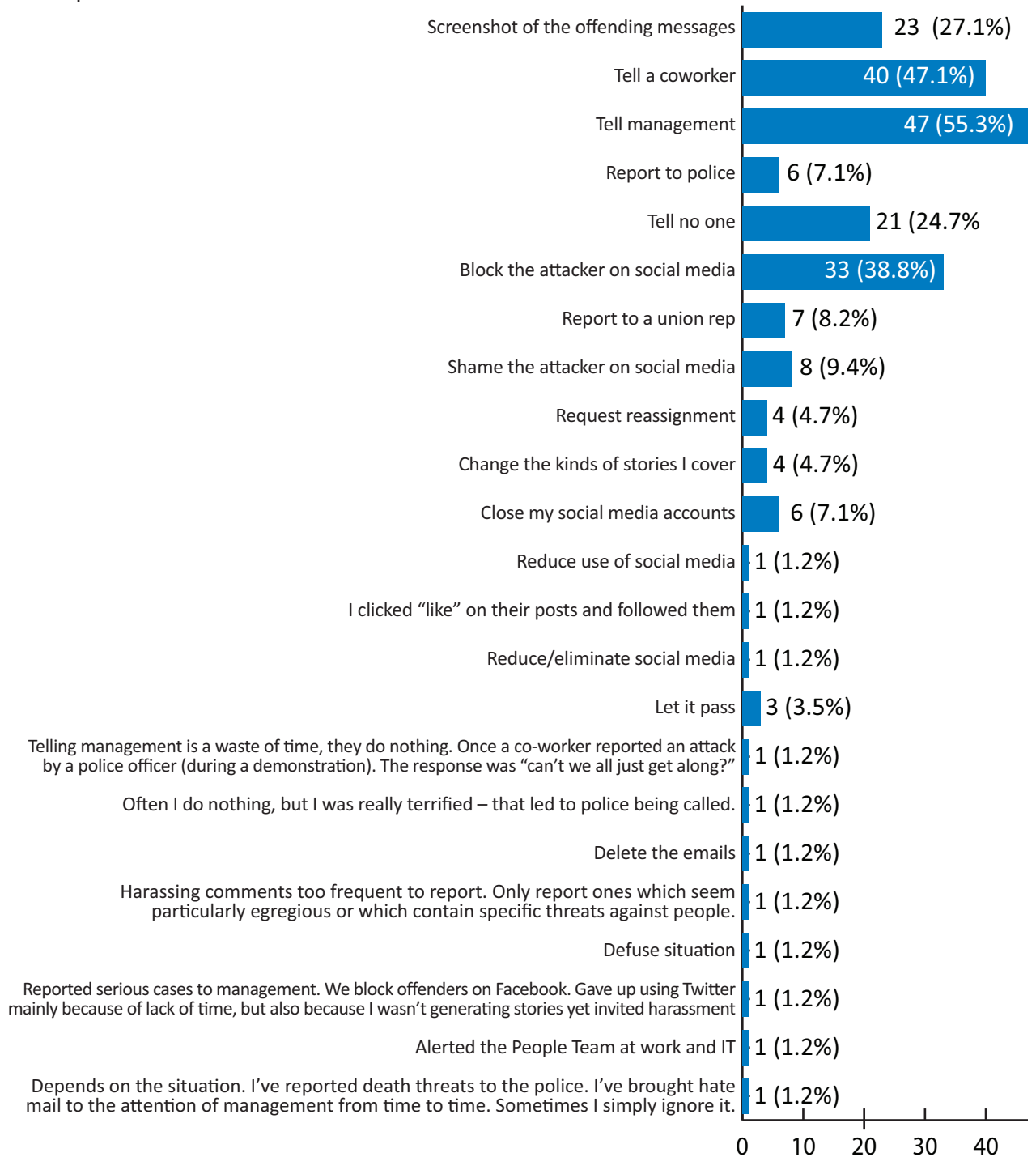
8. Anonymity was a factor in roughly half (47.7%) of the cases.



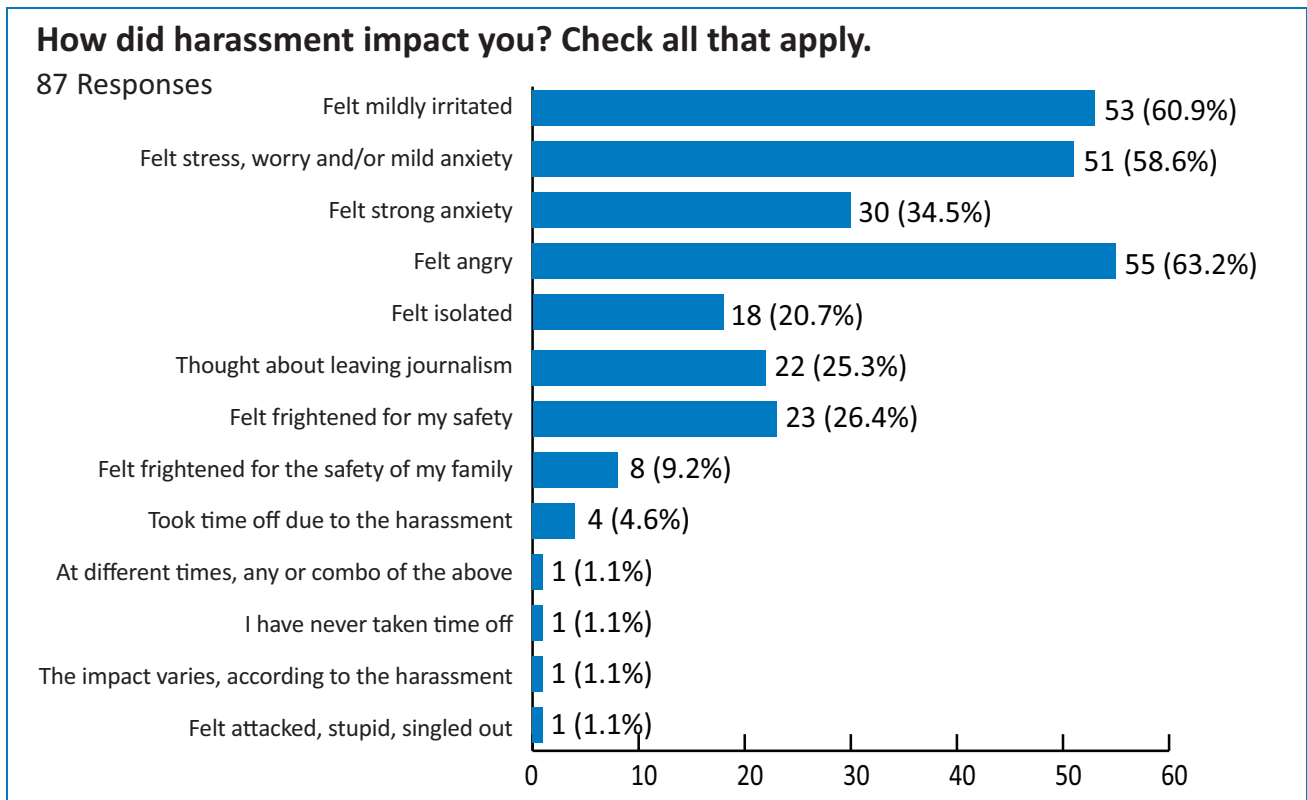
9. Media workers' responses varied, but the most common was to tell management about the harassment (55.3%), followed by telling a co-worker (47.1%), and then blocking the person on social media (38.8%). In many of the instances (27.1%), the media worker documented the attack with screenshots. Only 8.2% of the respondents reported the harassment to the union, while 7.1% reported to the police.

What did you do in response?

85 Responses



10. When asked to describe the impact, 63.2% reported feeling angry, which was the most common response, while 60.9% were mildly irritated, and 58.6% reported stress, worry or mild anxiety. A significant percentage – 26.4% – were frightened for their safety, while 25.3% thought about leaving journalism, and 20.7% felt isolated.



11. The overwhelming majority (more than 80) of the respondents reported that they felt comfortable (or would feel comfortable) reporting the harassment to management. Only 13 answered no to this question, and reasons were management's inability or unwillingness to address the problem. One respondent commented rather cynically, *"I have done that recently, after getting email from a sex killer. But here's what the union should understand. Professing to care about worker welfare is a bandwagon, and they're climbing on for a while. But it will end. The Star has no interest in newsroom individual welfare. It just sounds nice."*
12. When asked to identify current resources available in the workplace, a third of the 94 respondents who answered – 33 in total – were unaware of any resources, while 14 said there was nothing. For those who named resources, the most mentioned was reporting to HR or management (mentioned 16 times). The second most-cited resource was counselling available through an employee assistance program (EAP), which was mentioned 12 times. A few (three) mentioned modules on BellNet, and another three mentioned (informal) peer support as a resource.

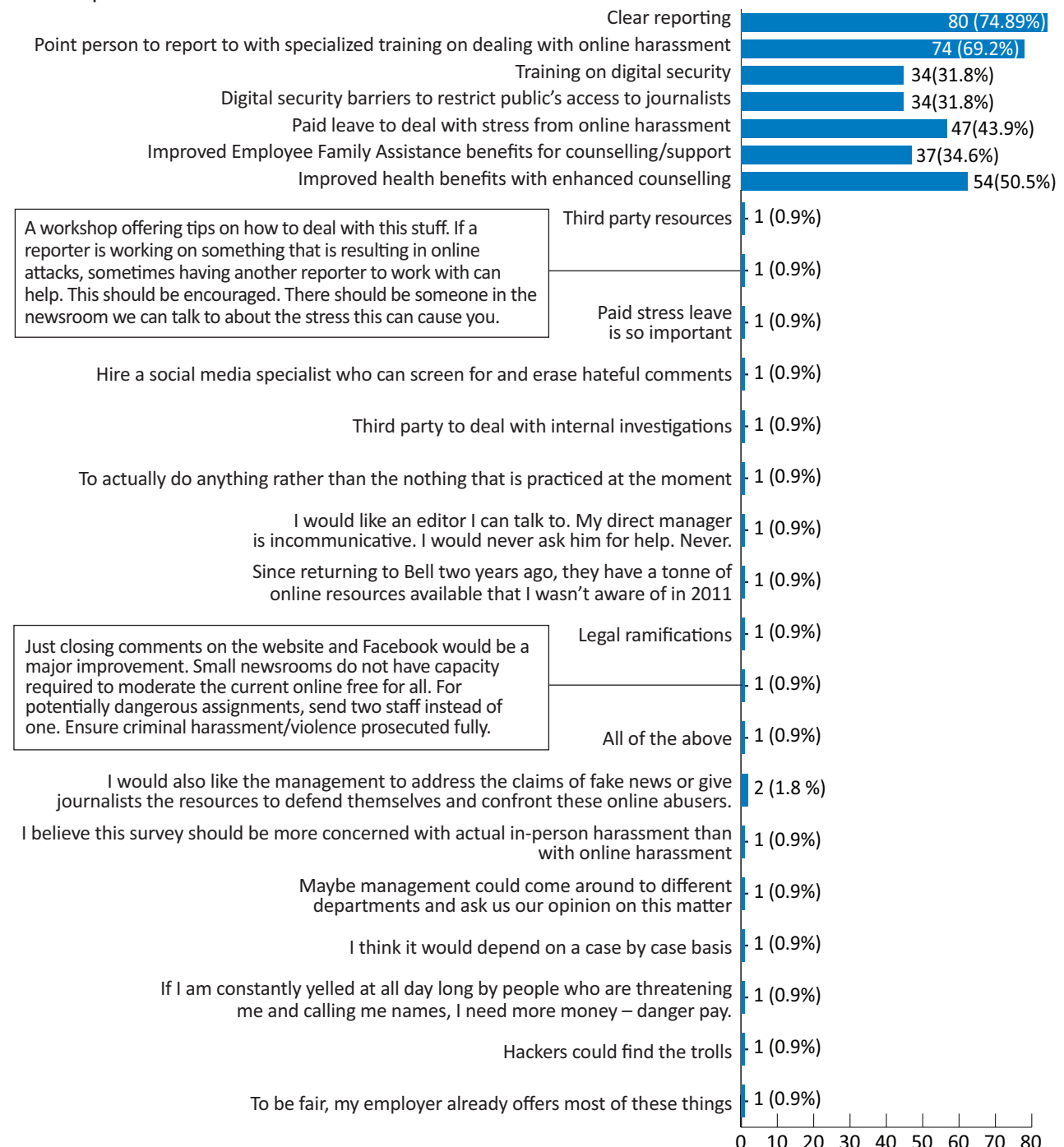
"My employer changed the number online for people to contact the newsroom. However we are on the speed dial of many of these individuals and they are still calling our newsroom line."

"No resources. My boss is great and we have been asked to block comments or hide them on social media, but not addressing these commenters doesn't sit well with me and I feel very stressed with the constant hate from the public towards journalism."

13. When asked what kind of resources people would like to have available, clear reporting and response procedures ranked No. 1 at 74.8%. A point-person to report to with specialized training on how to deal with harassment was the second most-chosen resource at 69.2%. Improved health benefits with enhanced counselling ranked third (50.5%), followed by paid stress leave (43.9%) and improved employee assistance program (EAP) counselling/support 34.6%. Training on digital security tied with digital security barriers to restrict public access to journalists, both chosen 31.8% of the time.

What kind of resources would you like the employer to provide in response to online harassment?

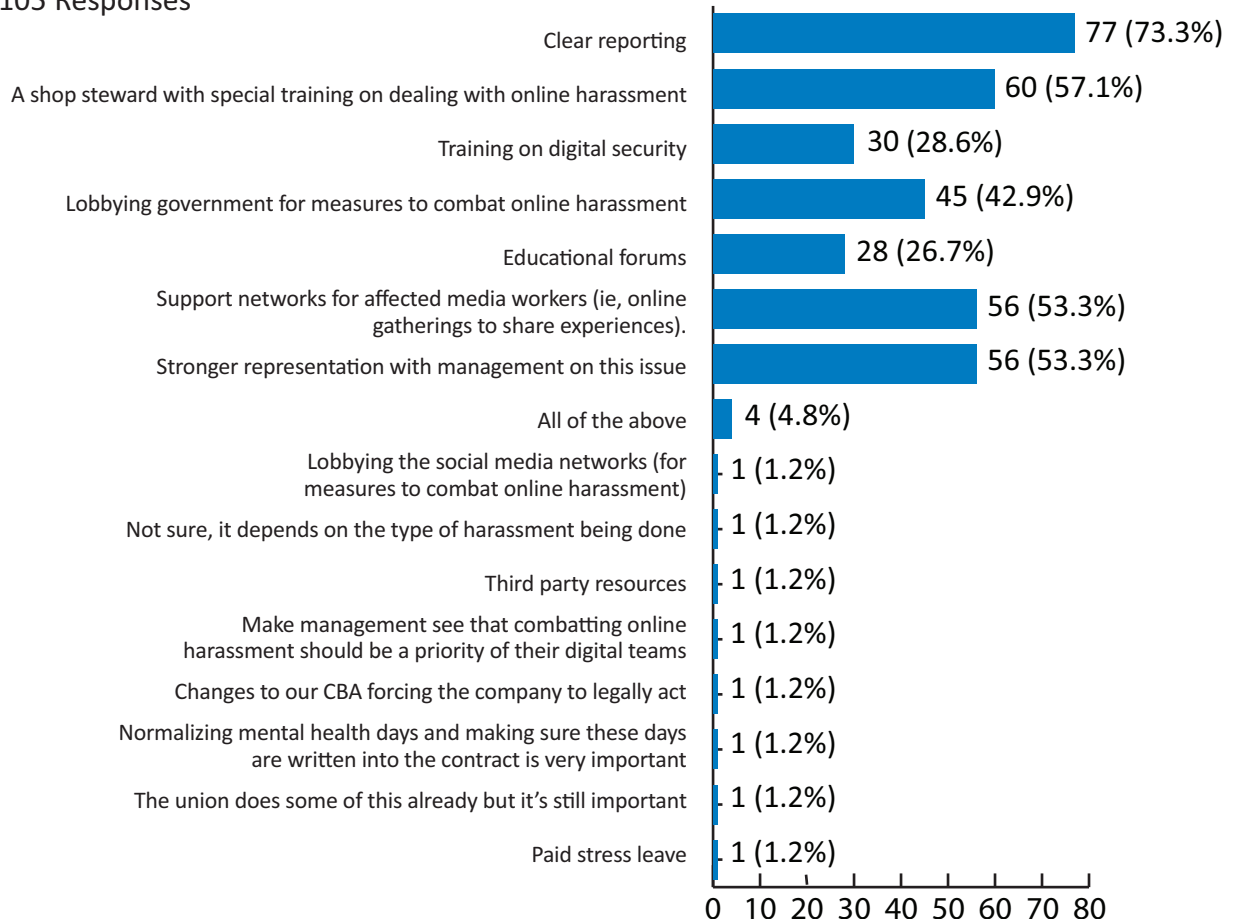
107 Responses



14. When asked what resources they wanted from their union, respondents chose clear reporting/response procedures bargained in their union contracts as the No. 1 choice at 73.3%. The second most desired resource was a shop steward with specialized training on responding to harassment (57.1%). Support networks for affected workers (ie: online gatherings to share experiences) and stronger representation with management on the issue were both tied for the third most requested resources at 53.3%. Lobbying government to combat online harassment was chosen 42.9%, while digital security training was 28.6%, and educational forums were last at 26.7%. A couple of respondents commented “all of the above.”

What kind of resources would you like your union to provide in response to online harassment? Click all that apply.

105 Responses



15. When asked if there was anything else the respondents would like to share, several offered additional comments.

“We journalists need breaks from all the negativity, some kind of way to take a day or week away without using the few vacations days we have would be really helpful.”

“As an international correspondent, I can’t stress enough how dangerous any form of digital or in field harassment is. It’s really important that Canadian media realizes how serious this is and moves as one against it with a cohesive policy. In other parts of the world, laxity on

this front has resulted in the death of journalists and terrible burnout and suicide rates. I would really like for it not to escalate along those lines in this country.”

“I’m wondering if there is a way to let those who would harass journalists know that no such behaviour will be tolerated. Like what if we were to try to make public the names and comments of those who harass journalists? Tell their employers and families. I know this is probably wishful thinking but it’s amazing how people change if suddenly they aren’t anonymous.”

“I would like my union to hold monthly Zooms with members. There is no communication in my newsroom. I haven’t seen or heard from these people in years. I love seeing and talking to my fellow union members! We’ll do the morale work if management won’t.”

“A difficult balance to walk between being accessible to the public to receive tips and information and hear from people’s experiences, and trying to block out people who spew rude, hateful messages. Would like to see the union support or execute public awareness campaigns to help educate the public about the important role professional journalists play in society (providing accurate, balanced and reliable information), as well as the fact that quality journalism takes hard work and dedication to produce on a daily basis (vs the multiple aggregator apps, socials that just rip off work produced by credible outlets)”

“We are in the public eye so there has always been harassment and threats but I’d say they have intensified and increased since Trump was president and during the pandemic. In my 20 + years I never had someone tell me I should be hung up in the street until after Trump. Shocking! Distrust of anyone in the media is at an all time high. I think dealing with increased harassment should be a factor when discussing how we haven’t had a pay raise in over 12 years.”

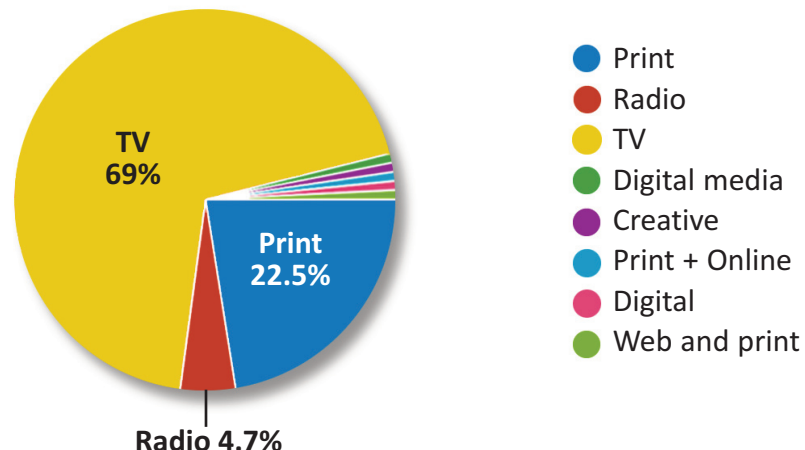
“I have worked in media for 20 years and the harassment and threats have reached an all time high. ‘Bad’ calls/callers were on average three to four times per week. They are now at least five to ten times a day. Emails are well over a dozen.”

“I’m working on a PTSD Toolkit for journalists.”

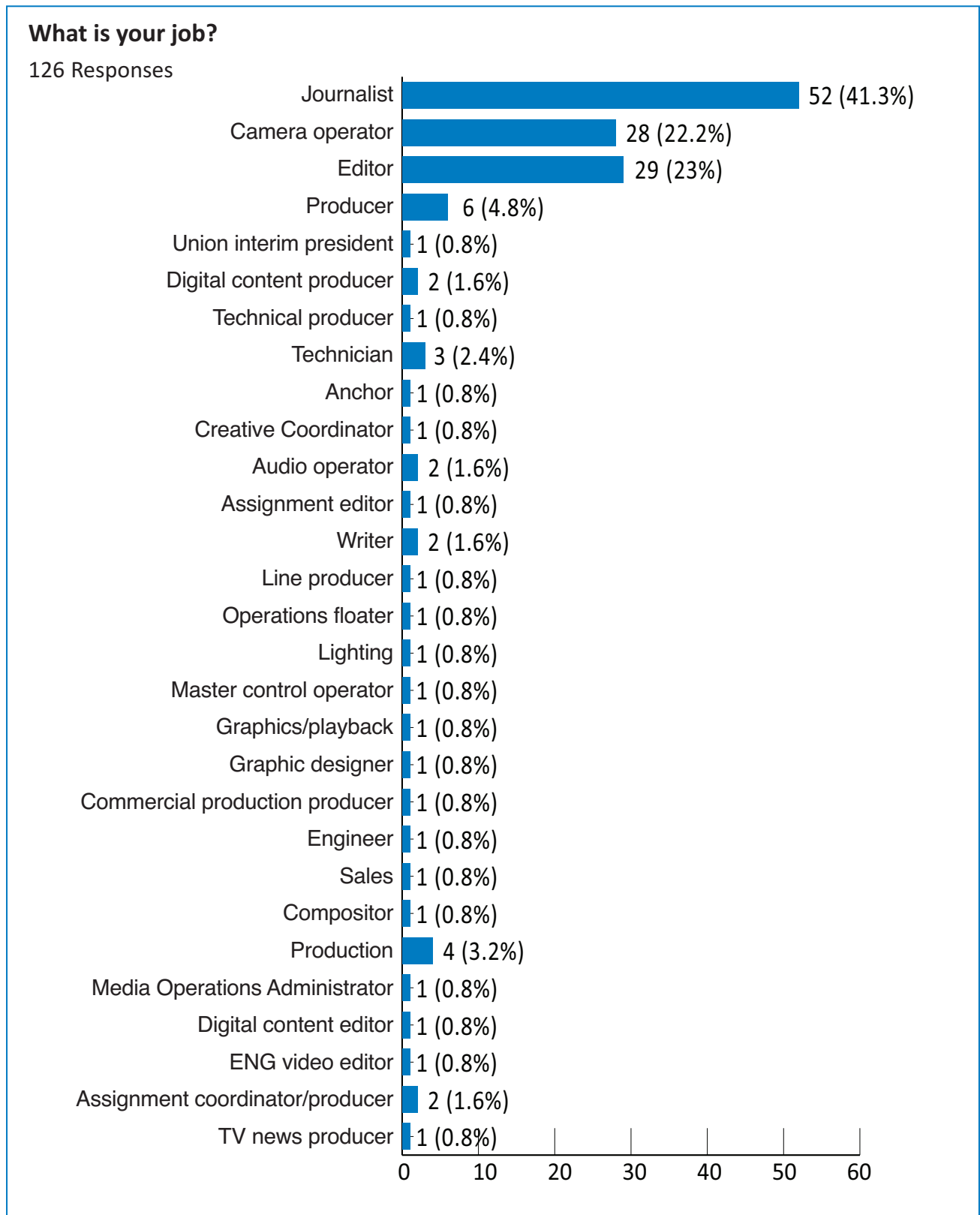
16. The majority of survey respondents – 69% – work in TV, while 22.5% work in print, and 4.7% work in radio. Other self-identified categories included digital media (1.6% or two people), print and online (1.6%, two people) and creative (0.8%, one person).

What kind of news outlet do you work for?

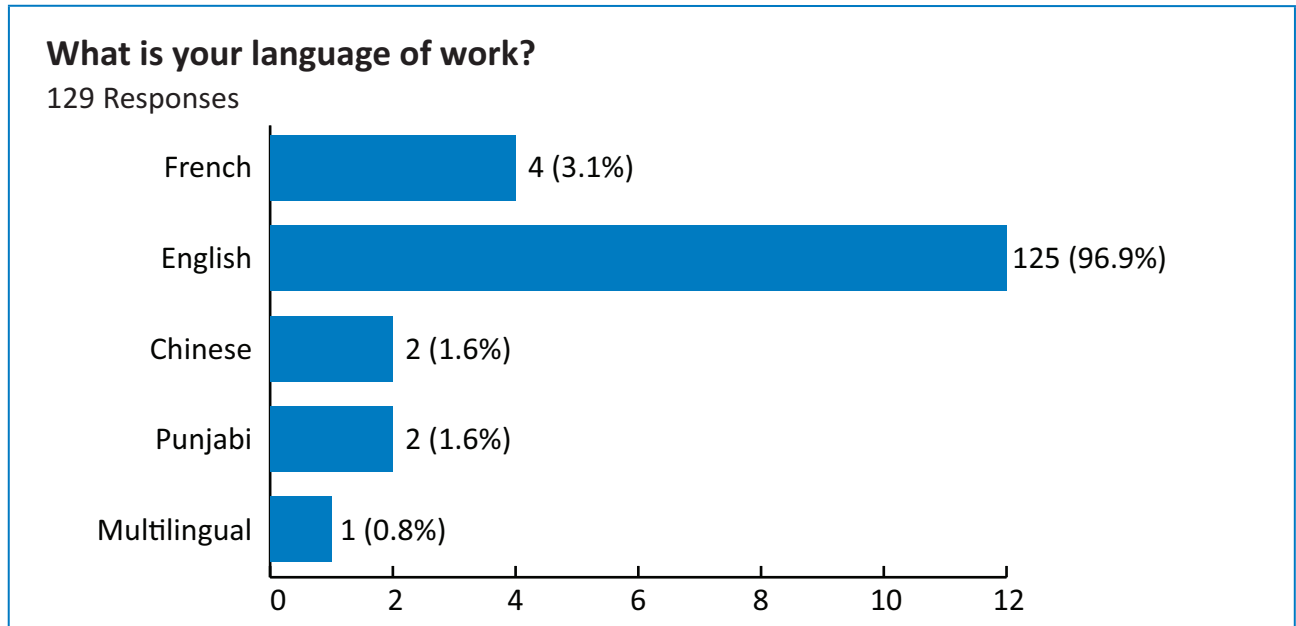
129 Responses



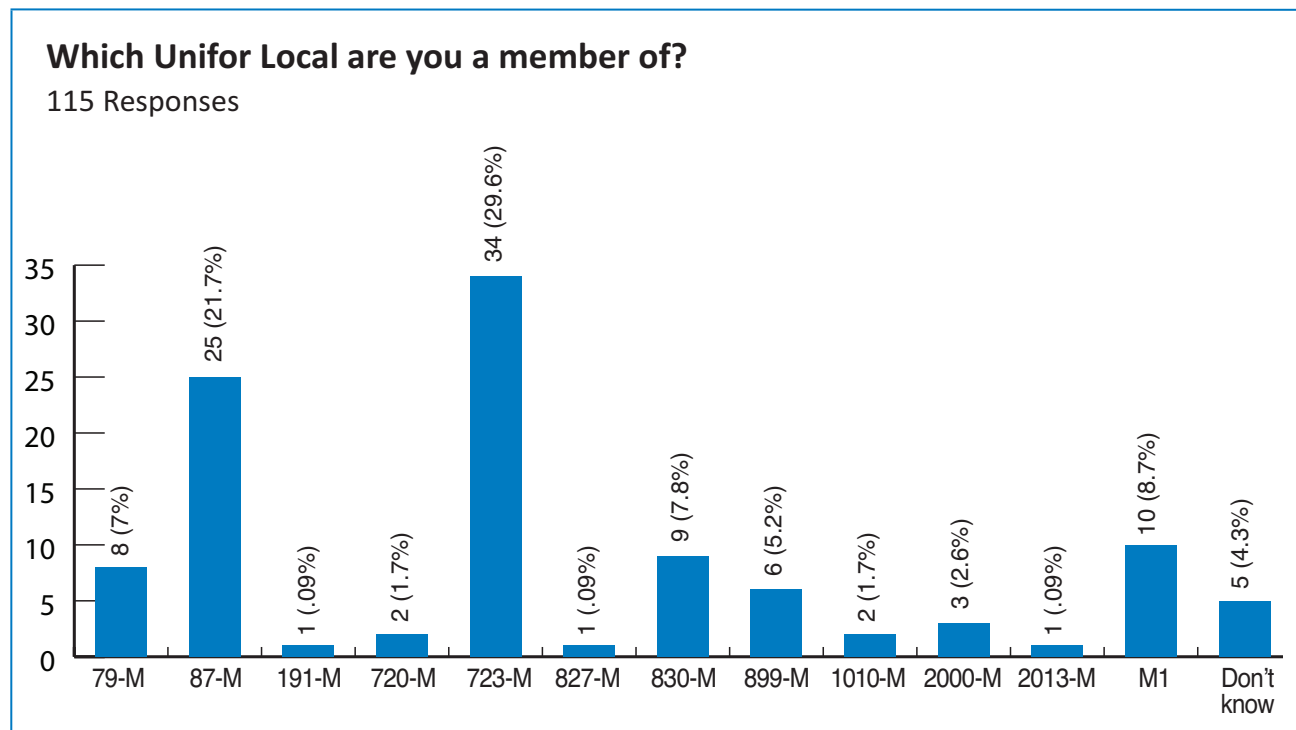
17. Respondents were asked to identify their jobs from a range of positions. The majority – 39.7% – identified as journalist/host. Camera operator/photographer represented 22.2%, while producers were 4.8%. There were several one-person responses for a variety of other positions.



18. English was identified as the language of work for an overwhelming majority: 97% of respondents. Two people identified Chinese as their language of work, while one identified Punjabi, and another “multilingual”.



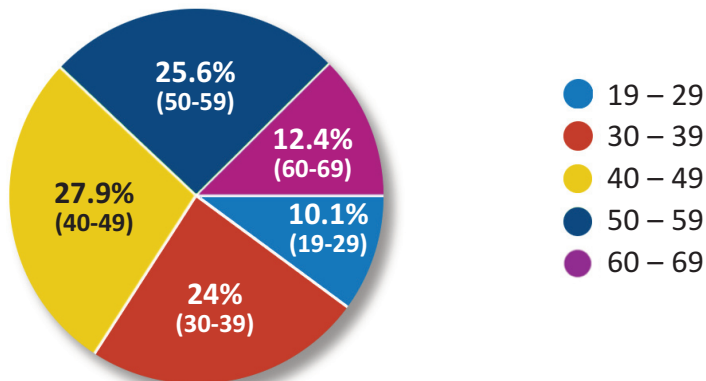
19. When asked to identify their local, 34 respondents were from Unifor Local 723M, 24 were from Local 87M, 12 from M1, and another 12 from Local 2000, 10 from 79M and nine from 830M. Several smaller totals reported from other locals, while at least 10 respondents did not identify their local. Totals for this question were tabulated manually, due to the variations in identifying locals (ie: 87M, versus 87-M, versus Unifor Local 87M etc.)



- 20.** When asked to identify their employer, the majority of respondents, 57, identified Bell Media or a property of Bell Media (CTV, Newstalk1010, CP24 etc.), while 25 respondents identified Rogers (CityTV, Omni) as their employer. TorStar respondents totalled 14, and Global TV totalled 12. Smaller totals reported for Postmedia, Glacier, and the Winnipeg Free Press. Due to the variations in identifying employers, results for this question were tabulated manually.
- 21.** When asked to report on age, the largest group of respondents (27.9%) were 40 to 49 years old, while 25.6% were 49 to 59, and 24% were 30 to 39. Only 10.1% were 29 or younger.

How old are you?

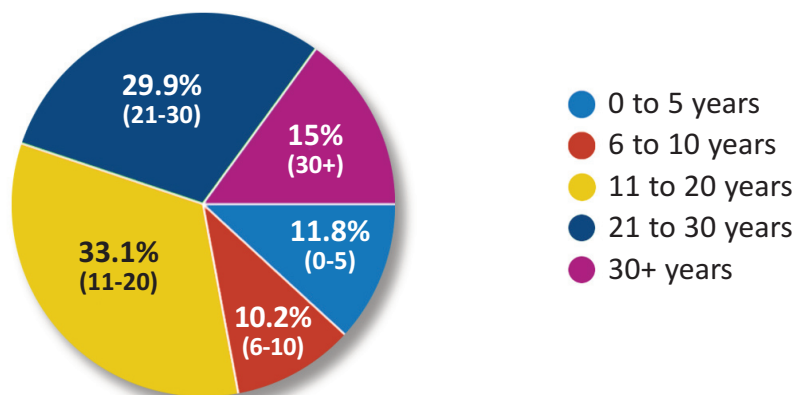
129 Responses



- 22.** More than half of the respondents' journalism careers span one to three decades. A third (33.1%) had worked in journalism for 11 to 20 years, while 29.9% reported working in journalism for 21 to 30 years.

How long have you worked in journalism?

127 Responses



- 23.** Respondents were assured the survey was anonymous, but those who wished to get more involved in the issue were encouraged to leave their emails, and 17 chose to do so.



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