Breaking the News:

Media Workers Under Attack

UNIFOR
theUnion | lesyndicat

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Executive Summary

What is the Problem?

All workers – including journalists and media workers – have a fundamental right to work and live free from harassment and abuse.

However, the day to day reality for journalists and media workers is that harassment and abuse are rampant, both online and in person.

Further, a great deal of this mistreatment is rooted in white supremacy, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, Islamophobia, and other systems of oppression.

Online harassment and in-person harassment are closely linked and they seem to feed off each other in a negative feedback loop.

Defining Harassment

- The concepts of discrimination and harassment are legal concepts, the definitions of which stem from provincial, federal and international pieces of human rights and health and safety legislation.

- According to Part II of the Canada Labour Code (the Code), harassment and violence means "any action, conduct or comment, including of a sexual nature, that can reasonably be expected to cause offence, humiliation or other physical or psychological injury or illness to an employee, including any prescribed action, conduct or comment."

- This includes all types of harassment and violence, including sexual harassment, sexual violence and domestic violence.

- According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety, internet harassment "is the term used to describe the use of the Internet to bully, harass, threaten, or maliciously embarrass."

Media Workers Face Particular Forms of Harassment

- Journalists and media workers often face harassment that is racist and sexist in nature.

- Women, workers of colour, Indigenous workers, 2SLGBTQIA+ workers and those from other equity-deserving groups are disproportionately affected by harassment.

- The harassment of journalists is targeted and personal; it radiates to include the personal lives of the victims; it is extreme, intense and prolific and cumulative; and it is often organized, coordinated or orchestrated.

The Lens of Intersectionality

- The idea of intersectionality is that race, gender, religion, class, sexual orientation, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another and overlap.

- People who share multiple characteristics have different and often compounded experiences of oppression, harassment and mistreatment.

What is Driving Harassment?

- It's clear that the Trumpist narrative of "fake news" that arose during the 2016 US election and Trump's term in office has drifted north of the border.

- A general increase in the polarization of political discourse, driven by a rise in extreme right-wing ideologies, and coupled with the Covid crisis and its public health and economic responses, have contributed to the weaponization of harassment and abuse against journalists.

What is at Stake?

- The harassment of journalists doesn't just cause harms for individual victims, it also causes fundamental harm to democracy itself.

- Coordinated and networked campaigns of harassment and abuse are meant to threaten, intimidate, and most troublingly, silence journalists.

> **Journalists and media workers have a fundamental right to do their work free from harassment. Unifor believes that media employers, unions, digital platforms, governments, politicians, the criminal justice system, Courts and Tribunals and members of the public all have a role to play in keeping them free from harm.**

- This is especially true for women, workers of colour, Indigenous workers, 2SLGBTQIA+ workers and those from other equity-deserving groups.

- This silencing is not about individual journalists: rather, it is a strategic and programmatic coordinated effort to reduce the diversity of voices in reporting and shift the content of reporting according to more right-wing, reactionary narratives.

What Can We Do?

- Unifor has developed an Action Plan to address the harassment of journalists and media workers. We know the importance of creating a plan that is concrete, practical and effective, and that simultaneously supports victims and promotes accountability and prevention.

- Unifor's Action Plan includes the establishment of a Working Group, the creation of a support website and an online campaign, the release of a comprehensive discussion paper, the development of internal and external training and education materials and programs, and a government lobbying plan.

Unifor's Two-Path Approach to Confronting Harassment

- Unifor proposes a two-path approach to confronting harassment.

- The first path involves supporting victims of harassment, with practical, flexible and victim-focused supports; while the second path involves demanding accountability and promoting prevention.

> **We are the largest union of journalists and media workers in Canada, and as such, it is our duty to confront this growing problem and provide support for our members and other journalists and media workers across the country.**

Supporting Victims of Harassment

- When a journalist or media worker is the victim of harassment, the most important first step is to provide them with support.

- Based on the experiences of our own members and those of other media workers, we know that the response must be immediate, practical, trauma-informed and flexible, providing the victim with empathetic care and a variety of options for support.

In addition to developing more comprehensive and robust support programs in every media workplace, much more work must be done to raise awareness of the existence of these programs.

Demanding Accountability & Promoting Prevention

We all have an obligation to support and protect victims of harassment, to hold perpetrators and facilitators accountable, and to work toward eliminating the harassment.

- Media employers, unions, digital platforms, governments, politicians, the criminal justice system, Courts and Tribunals and members of the public all have a critical role to play in addressing the problem.

Holding the Digital Platforms Accountable

- A common theme regarding the culpability of digital platforms is that they possess the technological capacity to do so much more to reduce and even prevent online harassment from occurring on their platforms, but they lack the motivation.

- Digital platforms should be required to: act upon reports of harassment from news publishers and journalists within 24 hours; invest in technology to detect online hate against journalists; detail online harm against journalists in their transparency reports; be held accountable through Canada's libel, defamation, and hate laws; face economic penalties when they fail to comply with Canadian laws; make it impossible for internet trolls to 'profit' from the monetization of content that harms journalists.

The Role of Media Employers

- Like all employers, media employers have a number legal obligations under occupational health and safety legislation, employment and labour acts/codes and human rights acts/codes.

- These obligations include having workplace violence and harassment policies and prevention plans, conducting risk assessments and preventing unsafe or poisoned work environments.

- Media employers need to create a workplace plan to address the problem of harassment, and this plan should emphasize the need to support employees who become victims.

- This plan should be built on industry best practices and developed in partnership with unions, employee groups and relevant experts, and employees at all levels should receive appropriate education and training on the plan.

The Role of Media Unions

- Through their role as collective bargaining agents, unions can make use of a number of opportunities to address harassment and improve protections for media workers, including: bargaining stronger anti-harassment and health and safety provisions in our collective agreements; enforcing workplace health and safety and anti-harassment policies and procedures; and filing grievances for health and safety and human rights complaints in accordance to the collective agreement and prevailing legislation.

- One tangible step media unions can take to is to make improving supports in our benefit plans a priority during bargaining.

- Media unions can and should use their resources and political power to lobby governments to pass legislation that protects media workers from harm and hold digital platforms and other stakeholders accountable.

The Role of Journalism Schools

- Journalism schools have an important role to play, especially when it comes to supporting victims of harassment.

- There is already a push underway to promote a more trauma-informed approach to education in journalism, in recognition of the mental health impacts of reporting on challenging subjects and the often-toxic and harassment-filled work environments journalists and media workers face.

Reporting to the Police

- One option available to victims of harassment and abuse is to file a formal police report, with the hope of using the criminal justice system to help enforce existing anti-harassment laws.

- But for many journalists and media workers, this option is a fraught one.

- Employers, colleagues and advocates working to support victims of harassment must recognize that not all complainants have the same perception or history of experience with the police.

- As a best practice, the victim themselves must guide the decision-making regarding this option.

- The creation of an online database that allows for the reporting and tracking of harassment and abuse could be an important resource for the police.

- Police services should prioritize specialized training on the issue of the harassment of journalists and media workers.

- Police services should be encouraged to coordinate more across jurisdictions.

Legislative and Regulatory Solutions in Canada

- Legislative and regulatory responses to the online harassment and abuse of media workers, or to the problem of online harassment and toxic behavior in general, have proven to be fraught with challenges.

- The fundamental challenge for legislators revolves around the interplay between potentially dangerous, toxic or illegal activity online, and concerns over Charter-protected free speech.

- Unifor's Action Plan includes lobbying goals that would require governments to: put more resources into addressing and ending the harassment and abuse of journalists; make it a more serious offence to attack a journalist, verbally or physically; and pass legislation that makes digital platforms responsible and accountable for the content posted on their websites, through a variety of mechanisms.

Looking to Other Jurisdictions

- The harassment of journalists and media workers is a global problem, and we have the benefit of learning from other jurisdictions when looking for solutions.

- Both the United Kingdom and Australia are in the process of updating how they regulate and address online harassment and abuse. While these legislative and regulatory reforms focus on online behaviour only, and are not aimed at protecting journalists in particular, we have the benefit of learning from their experiences as the Canadian government moves to tackle the problem.

- In the U.K., recognizing the scope and complexity of these issues facing journalists and media workers, The National Committee for the Safety of Journalists was formed. Their purpose is to, "bring together representatives from government, journalism, policing, prosecution services and civil society to work in collaboration to make sure journalists in the U.K. are able to operate free from threats and violence." The purpose of the committee is, "to develop a National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists. This will set out how the safety of journalists in the UK can be protected."

> **All workers have a basic right to work in a harassment-free and safe environment.**

Introduction

Journalists and other media workers have always experienced harassment on the job. In the pre-internet era, this often meant angry anonymous letters, including even death threats, or an abusive disruption during a live news hit. The rise of the internet and social media brought with them a level of connectedness, access and anonymity that made it even easier for members of the public to target journalists and media workers and subject them to hateful messages, threats and abuse.

Most recently, the COVID crisis and an increase in extreme right-wing populism in many parts of the world – including here in Canada – seem to have super-charged the frequency, severity and scope of this harassment. In fact, numerous reports and surveys have shown that for journalists and media workers, the problem of workplace and work-related harassment is getting worse, and has become their number one concern on the job.

Unifor members work in a wide array of media occupations, including in broadcasting (television and radio), film and TV production, newspapers, magazines, periodicals, print (including graphic design, pre-press and production) as well as online services. Unifor's 12,600 media members are distributed across 200 bargaining units in nine Canadian provinces.

We are the largest union of journalists and media workers in Canada, and as such, it is our duty to confront this growing problem and provide support for our members and other journalists and media workers across the country. It is also our responsibility to develop solutions that support victims of abuse and harassment, reduce the amount of harassment that occurs, and hold perpetrators and facilitators accountable.

Journalists and media workers have a fundamental right to do their work free from harassment. Unifor believes that media employers, unions, digital platforms, governments, politicians, the criminal justice system, Courts and Tribunals and members of the public all have a role to play in keeping them free from harm.

About This Paper

This document will begin with a section called **What is the Problem**, where we will outline the nature, scale and scope of the issues, and provide some basic definitions for the harassment journalists and media workers experience. Unfortunately, a great deal of this mistreatment is rooted in white supremacy, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, Islamophobia, and other systems of oppression, and we will explore how identity politics play a role in this phenomenon.

We will also examine what is driving the increase in harassment, in general, with a closer look at where the harassment is occurring. This section will close with a closer look at the rates of abuse and harassment from various journalist surveys, with a focus on a survey Unifor undertook within our own media sector.

In the next section, called **What is at Stake?,** we will look at how individual journalists and media workers are affected by harassment, in terms of their health and safety and their ability to do their jobs effectively. But beyond those individual impacts, we will also explore how the mistreatment of journalists affects broader society. This will require some discussion of the 'fourth estate' in a functional and thriving democracy, and how journalists all too often become the target of populist leaders and demagogues.

The section titled, **What can we do?**, is all about solutions; where we outline Unifor's plan of action. We believe there are two parallel paths that must be followed to address this crisis. First, we must support journalists and media workers who are victims of harassment, and hold accountable those who perpetrate and facilitate these attacks. But beyond dealing with individual attacks as they occur, we also need to focus on reducing the level of harassment in the first place. This second path involves a number of prevention strategies, including technological solutions, legislative and regulatory responses, legal and criminal options, the responsibilities unions and employers have and we look to other jurisdictions to see how they're handling similar crises.

What is the Problem?

The Harassment of Journalists and Media Workers

Journalists and media workers have always faced harassment in some form or another. The basic purpose of reporting the news is the search for truth and accountability in support of the common good, but the fundamentally public-facing nature of journalism means that journalists and media workers across the industry are uniquely vulnerable to harm from members of the public. Women, workers of colour, Indigenous workers, 2SLGBTQIA+ workers and those from other equity-deserving groups are disproportionately affected by harassment.

The recent rise in right-wing extremism around the world, coupled with a global pandemic and the difficult public health and economic impacts that came with it, have super-charged the volume, frequency, and intensity of harassment targeting journalists. While industry culture in the past may have claimed that a certain amount of harassment is just 'part of the job' for media workers, all workers have a basic right to work in a harassment-free and safe environment.

It is important to note that for journalists and media workers, harassment is a serious issue, whether the abuse takes place online or in 'real life.' There is nothing about online harassment that makes it less severe or traumatizing. In addition, it is clear that as online harassment has increased, so too has in-person harassment – the two cannot really be discussed as separate phenomena.

Defining Harassment

The concepts of discrimination and harassment are legal concepts, the definitions of which stem from provincial, federal and international pieces of human rights and health and safety legislation. Some forms of harassment are defined and prohibited through human rights legislation (for example, the Ontario Human Rights Code), while other forms are addressed through workplace health and safety legislation (such as Ontario's Occupational Health and Safety Act).[a]

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a   The CCOHS has a good summary table of sources of legislation regarding harassment and violence at https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/ violence_legislation.html

According to Part II of the Canada Labour Code (the Code), harassment and violence means "any action, conduct or comment, including of a sexual nature, that can reasonably be expected to cause offence, humiliation or other physical or psychological injury or illness to an employee, including any prescribed action, conduct or comment." This includes all types of harassment and violence, including sexual harassment, sexual violence and domestic violence.

Some examples of workplace harassment and violence include, but are not limited to:

aggressive or threatening behaviour, including verbal threats or abuse

physical assault

spreading malicious rumours or gossip about an individual or a group

socially excluding or isolating someone

damaging, hiding or stealing someone's personal belongings or work equipment

persistently criticizing, undermining, belittling, demeaning or ridiculing someone

swearing at someone or using inappropriate language toward them

using the Internet to harass, threaten or maliciously embarrass someone

using the Internet to make sexual threats, or to harass or exploit someone sexually[1]

It will be helpful at this point to provide a specific definition of what we mean when we talk about online or internet harassment in particular. According to the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety, internet harassment "is the term used to describe the use of the Internet to bully, harass, threaten, or maliciously embarrass."[2]

> **Women, workers of colour, Indigenous workers, 2SLGBTQIA+ workers and those from other equity-deserving groups are disproportionately affected by harassment.**

The CCOHS goes on to give some examples of this kind of behaviour, including:

- Sending unsolicited and/or threatening e-mail.

- Encouraging others to send the victim unsolicited and/or threatening e-mail or to overwhelm the victim with e-mail messages.

- Sending viruses by e-mail (electronic sabotage).

- Spreading rumours.

- Making defamatory comments about the victim online.

- Sending negative messages directly to the victim.

- Impersonating the victim online by sending an inflammatory, controversial or enticing message, which causes others to respond negatively to the victim.

- Harassing the victim during a live chat.

- Leaving abusive messages online, including social media sites.

- Sending the victim pornography or other graphic material that is knowingly offensive.

- Creating online content that depicts the victim in negative ways.

However, based on Unifor's experience of anti-harassment advocacy the above definition and examples do not paint a *complete* picture of the phenomenon at hand. As we will see, journalists and media workers often face harassment that is intersectional, personal, targeted, cumulative and high-volume.

Media Workers Face Particular Forms of Harassment

A great deal of the harassment experienced by journalists and media workers is racial in nature. According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission, "Racial harassment means that someone is bothering you, threatening you or treating you unfairly because of your perceived race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, ethnic origin, creed, or citizenship."[3]

Of course, the other main form of harassment aimed at journalists is misogynist and sexist harassment. In April 2021, members of the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) released a comprehensive discussion paper commissioned by UNESCO, titled *The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists*.[4] This groundbreaking paper provides some vital analysis of the phenomenon of gendered online harassment and violence, specifically as it pertains to women journalists. According to *The Chilling*,

> *Gendered online violence can be understood as a combination of:*

- *Misogynistic harassment, abuse and threats.*

- *Digital privacy and security breaches that increase physical risks associated with online violence.*

- *Coordinated disinformation campaigns leveraging misogyny and other forms of hate speech.*

The Chilling uncovers some important aspects of the misogynistic harassment of women journalists that apply to other forms of abuse journalists face, especially racial and ethnic harassment. Specifically, the harassment of journalists is targeted and personal; it radiates to include the personal lives of the victims; it is "extreme, intense and prolific," with numerous individual attacks piling up to devastating cumulative effect; and it is "often organised, coordinated or orchestrated."

A study conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs, called *Online Harm in Journalism*,[5] involved a survey of more than a thousand Canadian media workers in September-October 2021, which was designed to, "measure and understand the online harm journalists and others working in the media sector are experiencing in doing their jobs."

Among its key findings, Ipsos found that:

Harassment is prevalent and pervasive

The impact of harassment experienced on the job has severe personal effects and industry-wide consequences

Much of the harassment goes unreported

In addition, Ipsos found that female and younger workers were targeted more for all forms of harassment.

In October 2021, the Coalition for Women in Journalism released a report called *Canada: Right-Wing Populist Leaders Weaponize Social Media to Silence Journalists*.[6] The report details an infamous incident that took place in September-October 2021, when right-wing populist politician Maxime Bernier encouraged his followers to target and harass a number of women journalists and journalists of colour. Bernier's actions were a textbook example of a "pile-on," where a leader agitated for a coordinated, networked attack on media workers, specifically for the purpose of subjecting them to abuse.

> **Specifically, the harassment of journalists is targeted and personal; it radiates to include the personal lives of the victims; it is "extreme, intense and prolific," with numerous individual attacks piling up to devastating cumulative effect; and it is "often organised, coordinated or orchestrated."**

At least 18 women journalists received vile and threatening emails after right-wing politician Maxime Bernier tweeted a provocative message to his followers. Displeased by their coverage of his work, and their line of inquiry, Bernier encouraged his supporters to "play dirty," sparking a violent and targeted harassment campaign. He even went so far as to publish the email addresses of some of the journalists online, exposing them to online abuse.

The Lens of Intersectionality

The fact that a great deal of this mistreatment is rooted in white supremacy, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, Islamophobia, and other systems of oppression must be understood through the lens of *intersectionality*. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, a professor at the UCLA School of Law and Columbia Law School, and an American civil rights advocate and leading scholar of critical race theory, developed the concept of intersectionality thirty years ago.

The concept has become controversial in recent years, but simply put, the idea of intersectionality is that race, gender, religion, class, sexual orientation, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another and overlap. People who share multiple characteristics have different and often compounded experiences of oppression, harassment and mistreatment.

> **...the idea of intersectionality is that race, gender, religion, class, sexual orientation, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another and overlap. People who share multiple characteristics have different and often compounded experiences of oppression, harassment and mistreatment.**

The Chilling explores in great depth how intersectionality plays out in the harassment of journalists. One simple example: when asked about the rate of in-person attacks associated with online violence, 20% of all women survey respondents experienced this form of harassment, compared to 53% of Arab women respondents.

In the world of journalism and media work, this notion of intersectionality also includes job status and tenure. In October 2021, the Canadian Association of Journalists and the Carleton University School of Journalism and Communication organized a roundtable for journalists to discuss the issue of harassment, its impact(s), and what could or should be done to address the problem. The resulting report on the roundtable, titled *Poisoned Well*, contains wide-ranging and thorough analysis and recommendations to address the growing problem of harassment in the media sector. On the subject of what journalists are the most impacted, the report notes:

> *Globally, freelancers are disproportionately women and especially women of colour, noted discussant Kiran Nazish—the CFWIJ monitoring from 92 countries shows this to be true for journalists who are most targeted for harassment. In Canada in particular, this group received the most frequent and vicious forms of online harassment.*[7]

> **A general increase in the polarization of political discourse, driven by a rise in extreme right-wing ideologies, and coupled with the Covid crisis and its public health and economic responses, have contributed to the weaponization of harassment and abuse against journalists.**

What is Driving Harassment?

While identity politics and intersectionality are fundamental aspects of the harassment experienced by journalists and media workers, it is clear that larger political ideologies are also significant drivers of targeted abuse. According to the Ipsos study, "accusations of reporting 'fake news' is the most common factor leading to online harassment, closely followed by objections to the media organization one works for."

It's clear that the Trumpist narrative of "fake news" that arose during the 2016 US election and Trump's term in office has drifted north of the border. A general increase in the polarization of political discourse, driven by a rise in extreme right-wing ideologies, and coupled with the COVID crisis and its public health and economic responses, have contributed to the weaponization of harassment and abuse against journalists.

According to respondents of the Ipsos survey, the following were the most common factors leading to being a target of harassment:

Media climate/accusations of 'fake news' (77%)

The media organization for which I work (72%)

The angle I took or the way I reported a story (64%)

The stories I cover (57%)

The changing reputation of journalists (57%)

COVID-19/position on vaccination (55%)

My political position or ideology (27%)

Tracking and quantifying incidents of harassment and abuse is a challenge, due to an understandable reluctance to report (discussed in more detail below), and the lack of a single, comprehensive reporting system. The Ipsos survey asked Canadian media workers about the frequency of different types of harassment, to see if certain forms of abuse are becoming more or less common. While not exhaustive, the results reflect the feedback we've received from our own members and from other surveys of media workers around the world. According to the Ipsos survey, the respondents felt that:

Online harassment:
- Increased 73%,
- Stayed the same 10%,
- Decreased 1%,
- Don't know 16%

In person harassment:
- Increased 42%
- Stayed the same 10%,
- Decreased 1%,
- Don't know 16%

Physical attacks:
- Increased 25%,
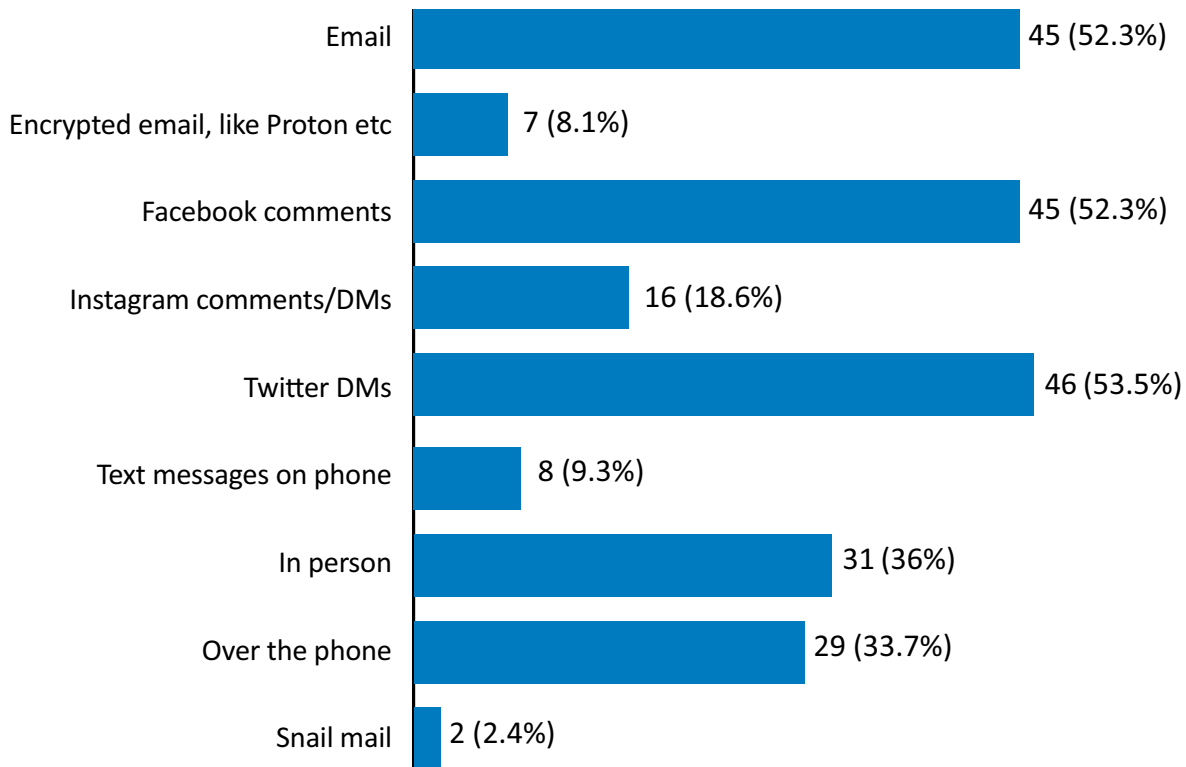- Stayed the same 18%,
- Decreased 1%,
- Don't know 56%

Phone harassment:
- Increased 18%,
- Stayed the same 23%,
- Decreased 7%,
- Don't know 52%

Again, due to the relatively low rate of formal reporting, and the lack of a centralized reporting system, getting quantitative data on *where* the online harassment of journalists and media workers is most common is a difficult task. According to *The Chilling*, Facebook was by far the most-used digital platform for female journalists, and also the platform upon which most harassment took place.

> *But Facebook was disproportionately identified as the platform to which respondents most frequently reported online attacks (39%), with Twitter attracting complaints at the rate of 26%. Facebook was also identified as the least safe of these high-use platforms, with 12% rating it "very unsafe" - almost double the number (7%) who rated Twitter "very unsafe". WhatsApp, YouTube and Instagram were identified as "very unsafe" by 4% percent of respondents.*

According to our Unifor media member survey, Twitter and Facebook were also key vectors of abuse. From that survey, "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%)."

Method	Count (Percentage)
Email	45 (52.3%)
Encrypted email, like Proton etc	7 (8.1%)
Facebook comments	45 (52.3%)
Instagram comments/DMs	16 (18.6%)
Twitter DMs	46 (53.5%)
Text messages on phone	8 (9.3%)
In person	31 (36%)
Over the phone	29 (33.7%)
Snail mail	2 (2.4%)

For journalists and media workers, online harassment is a particularly challenging phenomenon partially because so many employers have, until recently, required or at least highly encouraged their workers to maintain a public presence on platforms like Facebook, Twitter and TikTok. The massive structural change that has been taking place within the media industry – the transition from print and broadcast media to digital platforms – has increased the connection between journalists and their audience, but has also exposed media workers to increasing levels of abuse from the public, populist politicians, and even other less-principled media personalities.

What Form Does Harassment Take?

At this point, it's worth taking a closer look at what form this harassment takes. This section will conclude with a closer look at the rates of abuse and harassment from various journalist surveys, with a focus on a survey Unifor undertook within our own media sector membership.[b]
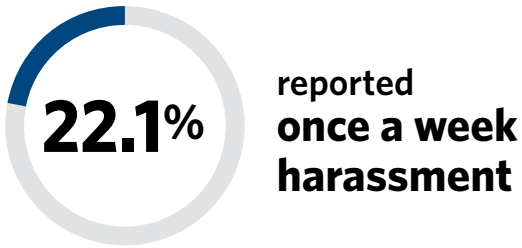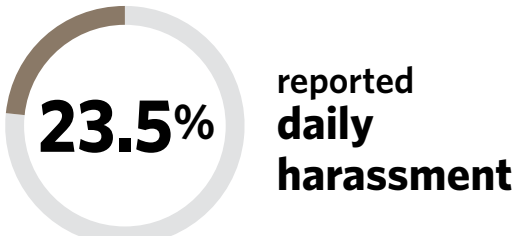
Between Dec, 8, 2021 and Feb. 12, 2022, Unifor's Media Sector Council conducted a survey on harassment among our membership, in which 129 media workers participated.[8] In terms of the demographics of the respondents, more than two-thirds (69.4%) of respondents identified as female, while 34.7% identified as a person of colour, 6.9% identified as 2SLGBTQIA+ and 6.9% identified as workers with disabilities.
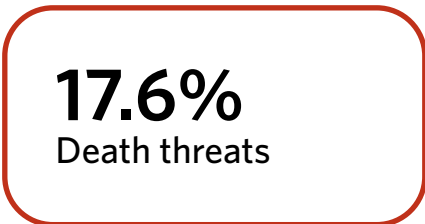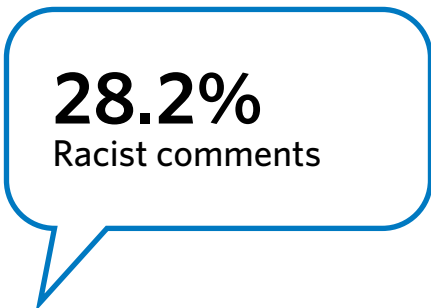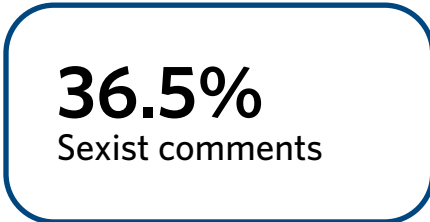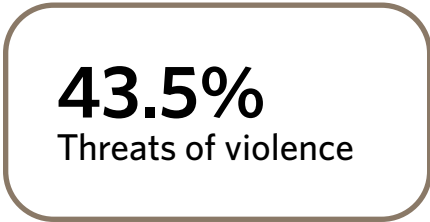
Some highlights from the survey:

- 60.6% of respondents said they had experienced harassment in the field. Attacks ranged from minor incidents (i.e.: "just angry sports fans") to physical threats, and death threats.
- 50.8% reported experiencing online harassment, specifically.
- 23.5% of respondents reported daily harassment, while 22.1% reported once a week.

60.6% of respondents **experienced harassment** in the field

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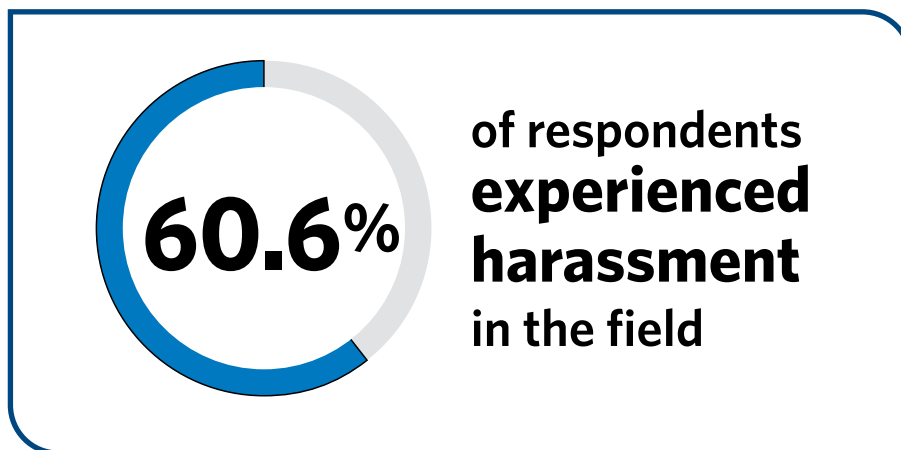
b   The Unifor media membership survey, as well as other surveys quoted in this paper, allowed respondents to select multiple answers to some questions, so the responses for many questions add up to more than 100%.

23.5% reported **daily harassment**

22.1% reported **once a week harassment**

50.8% of respondents **experienced online harassment**

In terms of the types of harassment our media members experienced:

98.8%
Rude and insulting behaviour

78.8%
Verbal abuse

43.5%
Threats of violence

36.5%
Sexist comments

28.2%
Racist comments

17.6%
Death threats

The harassers' preferred methods of communication were:

 53.5% **Direct messages or tags on Twitter**

 52.3% **Facebook comments**

 52.3% **Email**

 36% **In person harassment**

 36% **Phone calls**
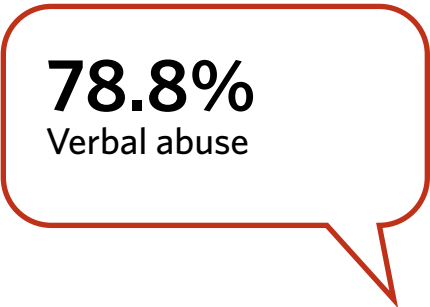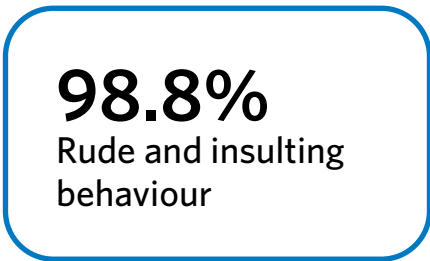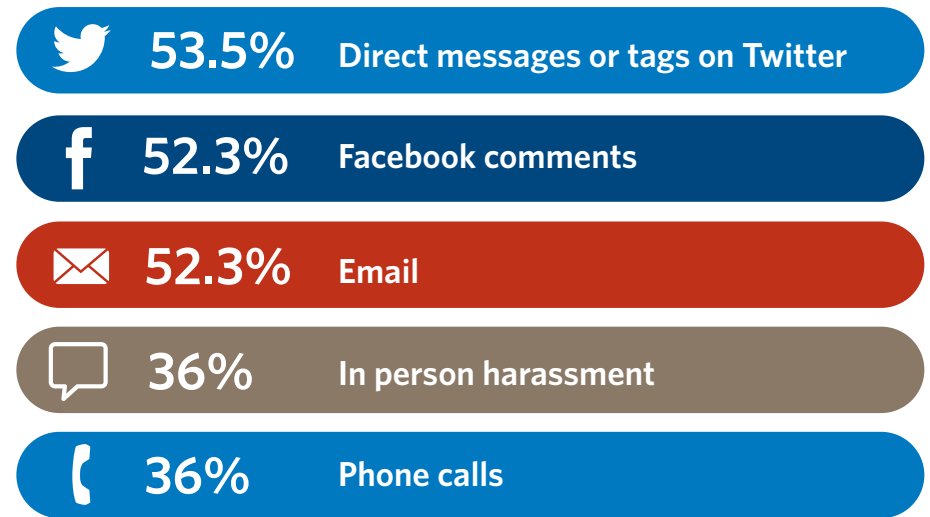
When asked to describe the impact:

63.2%
reported feeling angry
(which was the most common
response)

25.3%
thought about leaving
journalism

26.4%
were frightened for their
safety

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.

Online harassment and in-person harassment are closely linked, and they seem to feed off each other in a negative feedback loop. One unfortunate example of this is a vulgar catchphrase, popularly known by its acronym FHRITP, that harassers shout at female journalists doing live TV hits. This appalling trend began as a catchphrase used in a staged video that eventually went viral. It is a measure of the scale of the problem of harassment and the low expectation of consequences that perpetrators usually shout the phrase at female reporters while they are on camera.

In one infamous example in 2015, several male fans shouted the phrase at a female CityNews reporter doing a live hit in front of Toronto FC soccer game. One of the harassers was identified as a Hydro One employee and he was subsequently terminated by his employer (although he subsequently apologized to the reporter and was eventually reinstated following a workplace arbitration).

Unifor's media survey results are in keeping with an international survey of journalists undertaken as part of the ICFJ/UNESCO report mentioned above. The data and analysis in *The Chilling* are based on an international survey of 901 journalists from 125 countries, long-form interviews with 173 journalists and experts, and a number of deeper-dive case studies and literature reviews.

There are a few major differences between the Unifor survey and ICFJ/UNESCO survey. The latter focused on disaggregated data from female journalists for the short-form survey, while the Unifor survey included media workers of all genders. The ICFJ/UNESCO survey interviewed journalists from multiple countries with a focus on the developing world, while the Unifor survey was limited to our members in Canada.

> **Online harassment and in-person harassment are closely linked, and they seem to feed off each other in a negative feedback loop.**

What is at Stake?

Both Individual Journalists and Democracy Itself Under Attack

The immediate and most obvious effect of the harassment of journalists and media workers is the negative impacts on the individual victims themselves. These impacts can range from feelings of anger and isolation, all the way to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sometimes causing the journalist or media worker to leave the industry altogether.

Our media member survey asked respondents to describe the impact of harassment on the job:

> **63.2% reported feeling angry, which was the most common response**

> **20.7% felt isolated**

> **26.4% were frightened for their safety**

> **25.3% thought about leaving journalism**

According to the Ipsos survey, *Online Harm in Journalism*, when asked how they felt following incidents of harassment, respondents reported having had some of the following experiences:

- Have deleted or taken a break from my social media profile/account (37%)
- Thought about leaving journalism/changing career (33%)
- Experienced strong negative feelings such as fear, horror, anger, guilt or shame (30%)
- Avoided certain stories (26%)
- Had trouble sleeping (26%)
- Struggled with mental health issues (24%)
- Experienced strong negative beliefs about yourself or other people (21%)

- Felt scared for your physical safety (20%)
- Felt scared for the safety of your family and friends (15%)

Compounding this trauma is the reality that most media workplaces already have their own problems in terms of deep, structural challenges with white supremacy, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, Islamophobia, and other systems of oppression. In addition, the work of journalism already exposes journalists and media workers to a higher level of trauma, an issue explored in greater depth in a report from the Canadian Journalism Forum on Violence and Trauma, called *Taking Care: A Report on Mental Health, Well-Being & Trauma Among Canadian Media Workers*.[9]

These overlapping layers of trauma mean that media workplaces and employers may be ill-equipped to support victims of harassment and address incidents of abuse, and they often make matters worse. According to participants in the *Poisoned Well* roundtable, victims of targeted abuse are often left feeling isolated and re-traumatized by the lack of care and support they receive at work.

> *Onslaughts of abusive online messages are the norm for racialized journalists in Canada. The stress of receiving these messages is compounded, discussants told us, by a feeling that the majority-white institutions they work for do not understand their experience and are not willing to support them in addressing it.*

"Compounding this trauma is the reality that most media workplaces already have their own problems in terms of deep, structural challenges with white supremacy, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, Islamophobia, and other systems of oppression."

But the broader impacts are also deeply troubling and harmful. Coordinated and networked campaigns of harassment and abuse are meant to threaten, intimidate, and most troublingly, silence journalists. This is especially true for women journalists and journalists of colour. This silencing is not about *individual* journalists: rather, it is a strategic and coordinated effort to reduce the diversity of voices in reporting and shift the content of reporting according to more right-wing, reactionary narratives.

The Chilling captures the goals and impacts of this "chilling effect" early on. While, as noted, that report focuses on gender/sex-based harassment in journalism, the conclusions hold true for the harassment of journalists and media workers in general.

> *Online violence against women journalists is designed to: belittle, humiliate, and shame; induce fear, silence, and retreat; discredit them professionally, undermining accountability journalism and trust in facts; and chill their active participation (along with that of their sources, colleagues and audiences) in public debate. This amounts to an attack on democratic deliberation and media freedom, encompassing the public's right to access information, and it cannot afford to be normalized or tolerated as an inevitable aspect of online discourse, nor contemporary audience-engaged journalism.*

The chilling effect of harassment can take a number of forms. Journalists may feel personally silenced, and unwilling to report on certain subjects or issues. Editors may be more selective when assigning certain events or subjects to different reporters, but

> **"Coordinated and networked campaigns of harassment and abuse are meant to threaten, intimidate, and most troublingly, silence journalists."**

> **The harassment of journalists and media workers is almost never random. It is embedded within, and encouraged by, formal and informal networks and structures of social media and political manipulation.**

even when out of legitimate concern over a journalist's safety, this could further entrench problems of *who* gets to report on *what* and through which lens our news is seen. At the same time, some politicians and public figures, especially extreme right-wing populists, have increasingly begun to circumvent the press altogether, using social media and other platforms to spread misinformation and disinformation, free from the scrutiny and accountability provided by the press.

The harassment of journalists and media workers is almost never random. It is embedded within, and encouraged by, formal and informal networks and structures of social media and political manipulation. So far, we have yet to discuss in detail the role that digital platforms themselves play in this phenomenon. In the same way that harassment of journalists isn't random, the digital platforms are not passive entities. In the next section, we will explore how the digital platforms themselves must be held accountable, and we will examine a whole spectrum of solutions we must undertake to address this growing problem.

What Can We Do?

Supporting Victims, Demanding Accountability and Promoting Prevention

There has been much more attention paid lately to the problem of the harassment of journalists and media workers, both as a workplace health and safety issue for journalists, and as an attack on democracy itself. As explored above, a number of discussion papers and research projects from around the world have spelled out the problems and provided helpful analysis of who is being affected and how. Ultimately, this work will help answer the most pressing question of all, namely:

What can we do about it?

> **First, we must provide meaningful and ongoing support for victims of harassment and abuse as it occurs.**

> **Second, we must advocate for policies, laws, and other solutions that create accountability measures and promote prevention.**

In other words, the second path involves holding perpetrators and those who facilitate them accountable, while also preventing the harassment from occurring in the first place.

Unifor's Action Plan

Since this section is all about solutions, we will begin by laying out Unifor's Action Plan to address the harassment of journalists and media workers. We know the importance of creating a plan that is concrete, practical and effective, and that simultaneously supports victims and promotes accountability and prevention. Below is an abridged version of our Plan.

Journalists on the Front Lines - Combating Harassment, Hate and Abuse

Journalists, especially women, journalists of colour, indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, and journalists from equity deserving groups, are being disproportionately targeted by harassment, hate and abuse. Unifor condemns this behaviour. Hate, harassment and abuse have no place in our society. Not only must we decry this behaviour, we must take action.

Therefore, we commit to the following:

1 **Issue a statement** decrying the harassment and outlining Unifor's Action Plan.

2 **Educate staff**: Meet with media National Representatives to bring awareness to the issue and provide some tools to immediately address the situation with employers and Health and Safety Committees.

3 **Develop common bargaining language and a bargaining strategy** to combat hate and harassment in the workplace (See the section below, "Sample Collective Agreement Language," for examples).

4 **Create an online campaign** that gives voice to journalists and condemns harassment, hate and abuse.

5 **Survey our members** on their experiences with harassment and online harassment and what action they want from their union and employer. Publish the survey results on a new website page and issue a press release on the findings.

> " **First, we must provide meaningful and ongoing support for victims of harassment and abuse as it occurs. Second, we must advocate for policies, laws, and other solutions that create accountability measures and promote prevention.** "

6 **Strike a working group** to better advise our committees and to monitor the progress of the plan. Media Council and Media Action Plan will reach out to our team and our potential allies to tap into any initiatives that can be accessed. Our team includes Media Council Executive, Media Action Plan, Media Equity Committee, Unifor's Journalist Advisory Panel, local equity committees, interested journalists selected in the above process, and Unifor's Communications, Women's, Research and Human Rights departments.

7 **Partner with allies**: Potential partners to reach out to are other unions, employers, journalism advocacy groups, international journalism rights groups, etc.

8 **Plan Unifor workshops**, which can include the creation of an online/in-person training sessions for journalists and union leadership. These training sessions can include:

- Awareness with tools for journalists to activate union and company supports.

- Trauma training and using benefits and supports to deal with trauma.

- Digital security, how do we protect ourselves online?

- Panel discussions on a variety of topics.

9 **Lobby law enforcement and government** to:

- Put resources to ending these illegal behaviours.

- Make it a more serious offence to attack a journalist, verbally or physically.

- Pass legislation that makes tech platforms responsible for the content posted on their websites, including obligations to:

- Act upon reports of harassment from news publishers and journalists within 24 hours.

- Invest in technology to detect online hate against journalists.

- Detail online harm against journalists in their transparency reports.

- Be held accountable through Canada's libel, defamation, and hate laws, just as Canada's news publishers are.

- Face economic penalties when they fail to comply with Canadian laws.

- Make it impossible for internet trolls to 'profit' from the monetization of content that harms journalists.

10 **Call on the federal government to ratify the International Labour Organization's Convention 190**, which recognizes the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment and provides a common framework for action.

11 **Write and launch a discussion paper** on the problem and potential actions we can take.

12 **Support the J-Source Canadian Press Freedom Tracker** to ensure incidents of online harassment are documented.

13 **Develop a pocket guide for members** with tips on what to do if you're being harassed online.

14 **Develop or source specialized training** for shop stewards on how to handle cases of online harassment, targeted trainings for freelancers.

Based on the work of the Unifor Media Council, as well as our review of the growing body of research literature on the subject, and informed by our work with journalism advocates from around the world, Unifor has developed a two-path approach to addressing the problem of the harassment of journalists and media workers. The first path involves supporting victims of harassment, with practical, flexible and victim-focused supports; while the second path involves demanding accountability and promoting prevention.

> " **Based on the experiences of our own members and those of other media workers, we know that the response must be immediate, practical, trauma-informed and flexible, providing the victim with empathetic care and a variety of options for support.** "

Supporting Victims of Harassment

When a journalist or media worker is the victim of harassment, the most important first step is to provide them with support. Based on the experiences of our own members and those of other media workers, we know that the response must be immediate, practical, trauma-informed and flexible, providing the victim with empathetic care and a variety of options for support.

Despite the increase in awareness and public attention around this problem, many media sector workers don't know what to do if they or a colleague experience harassment or abuse. This is true even in unionized workplaces, which generally have more health and safety policies in place to protect workers on the job. In fact, according to our media member survey, one-third of respondents were unaware of any resources available for victims of workplace harassment, while one in seven believed there were none available at all. This specific survey response reinforces the need to create a more effective outreach plan, hence the emphasis on the development of a number of workshops and trainings in our Action Plan, detailed above.

It's clear that, in addition to developing more comprehensive and robust support programs in every media workplace, much more work must be done to raise awareness of the existence of these programs in the first place. It's worth noting at this point that the onus must not rest on media workers themselves to protect themselves and deal with the fallout from harassment and abuse. We will discuss how media employers, unions, digital platforms, governments, politicians, the criminal justice system, Courts and Tribunals and members of the public also play a critical role in addressing the harassment epidemic. But in our experience, media workers themselves are the experts in how to immediately, effectively and respectfully support victims of harassment.

In a special section at the end of this discussion paper, we provide an excerpt from "Help is Here," an online toolkit hosted by Unifor's Media Council Anti-Harassment Working Group and drawn from best practices developed in our own workplaces and by anti-harassment advocates in other jurisdictions.

> **Social media companies are the main enablers of online violence against women journalists.**

Demanding Accountability and Promoting Prevention

Accountability and prevention are two separate but closely related concepts in terms of addressing the epidemic of harassment facing journalists and media workers in Canada and around the globe. The vast majority of journalists and media workers who become victims of harassment do not report the abuse in any way. According to the Ipsos survey, "Even though the harassment led to mental health and safety concerns, a vast majority (74%) of those who did not report the incident did not see it as serious enough to report."

This low rate of reporting is entirely understandable: victims have a reasonable understanding that employers, the police, governments, and the digital platforms themselves have had an abysmal record in addressing the harassment of journalists and media workers. Unions and other worker advocacy groups share some of the blame as well – as noted above, even in workplaces where there *are* helpful anti-harassment policies and protocols in place, workers in general and victims in particular have often not been adequately trained or informed about how to access these programs.

At this point it is worth mentioning again the value of central, online databases for the reporting and tracking of harassment and abuse targeting journalists. The US Press Freedom Tracker "is a nonpartisan news website and database providing reliable and contextualized information on the number of press freedom violations in the United States — from journalists facing charges to reporters assaulted or stopped at the U.S. border and asked to hand over their electronics."[10]

The Canada Press Freedom Project (CPFP) is a project of J-Source, and is inspired by the US Press Freedom Tracker. The CPFP is "a free, online research hub documenting press freedom conditions nationwide and creating resources to help media workers navigate them."[11] Unifor supports the CPFP, and we believe the project will support journalists in need, but also provide valuable data to help create better legislation and other responses.

Holding the Digital Platforms Accountable

According to the Ipsos survey, 67% of respondents believe the onus for protecting journalists from potential online harm rests with social media platforms. *The Chilling* plainly states that, "Social media companies are the main enablers of online violence against women journalists." We've already noted above that, according to Unifor media workers, messages on Facebook and Twitter were a key vehicle for harassment and abuse by members of the public.

Once again, *The Chilling* does an extremely thorough job of laying bare the failures of the digital giants to acknowledge and address the torrents of abuse that occur on their platforms.

> *Despite fledgling responsive efforts and stated commitments to enhancing journalists' safety on their platforms, the social media companies are failing to stem online violence against women journalists, with sometimes devastating consequences...*

A common theme regarding the culpability of digital platforms is that they possess the technological capacity to do so much more to reduce and even prevent online harassment from occurring on their platforms, but they lack the motivation. *The Chilling* also explores this theme in further detail.

> *In addition to technical design and business model failures that enable online violence on their platforms, social media companies lack gender-sensitive, human-focused solutions to online attacks on women journalists. Despite capacity to do more, they also lack rapid response units and capability to respond in all languages that their platforms allow.*

" A common theme regarding the culpability of digital platforms is that they possess the technological capacity to do so much more to reduce and even prevent online harassment from occurring on their platforms, but they lack the motivation. "

In terms of concrete actions digital platforms can take to reduce and prevent the harassment of journalists from occurring on their platforms, stakeholders and experts have offered a variety of potential solutions. One significant first step would be establishing stronger conduct guidelines in the platforms' terms of service agreements, followed up by robust enforcement. Unfortunately, at present most platforms require an extraordinarily high level of outrage and public protest to spur them into taking action when users flag harassing behaviour. Even enforcing *existing* guidelines and standards appears to be a huge problem for the digital giants.

As noted in our Action Plan above, any legislation brought forward to demand accountability from the digital platforms must require them to:

Act upon reports of harassment from news publishers and journalists within 24 hours.

Invest in technology to detect online hate against journalists.

Detail online harm against journalists in their transparency reports.

Be held accountable through Canada's libel, defamation, and hate laws, just as Canada's news publishers are.

Face economic penalties when they fail to comply with Canadian laws.

Make it impossible for internet trolls to 'profit' from the monetization of content that harms journalists.

The Role of Media Employers

Like all employers, media employers have a number of legal obligations under occupational health and safety legislation, employment and labour acts/codes and human rights acts/codes. These obligations include having workplace violence and harassment policies and prevention plans, conducting risk assessments and preventing unsafe or poisoned work environments.

It is clear that media workers themselves identify their employers as having an essential role to play in addressing harassment and violence. 73% of respondents to the Ipsos survey believe the onus for protecting journalists from potential online harm rests with employers.

The roundtable discussion from *Poison Well* generated a number of helpful guidelines for appropriate workplace responses when media workers become victim of harassment. The guiding principle for employers seemed to be that, "proactive, preemptive supports for all workers and engagement with leadership establishes the basis for a positive response." But at the same time, the supports must be in tune with the needs of the victim.

> *News organizations need to be much more proactive in educating themselves about online hate and how to protect their staff and stable of freelancers, we heard in this session. Planning ahead and creating clear guidelines is an integral part of that process, discussants said—as is allowing individual journalists to determine what is healthiest and safest for themselves in terms of social media engagement.*

While workplace expectations are slowly shifting in a positive direction, we hear from too many media workers that their employers often explicitly or implicitly tell victims of harassment that a certain amount of workplace harassment comes with the job. According to *The Chilling*, media employers still have room to improve when it comes to responding to harassment.

> *Despite progress made by many employers over the past five years, only 25% of the women survey respondents said they had reported online violence incidents to their employers, and the top responses they said they received when they did were: no response (10%) and advice like "grow a thicker skin" or "toughen up" (9%), while 2% said they were asked what they did to provoke the attack.*

" When individual incidents of harassment occur, having an effective plan already in place creates a huge advantage in terms of providing necessary support urgently and consistently. "

One specific and encouraging change is the trend to de-emphasize social media engagement as part of a journalist's job. According to roundtable participants from the *Poison Well*, at least some employers have recognized that this requirement is unnecessarily placing their employees in harm's way.

News organizations have made some inroads but there is far more to do, discussants said. Until 2017 or 2018, social media involvement was a key part of the job, said discussant Bhupinder Hundal. In the time since, though, as the social media environment has become ever-more toxic, his organization has encouraged their journalists to divest from platforms.

Media employers need to create a workplace plan to address the problem of harassment, and this plan should emphasize the need to support employees who become victims. This plan should be built on industry best practices and developed in partnership with unions, employee groups and relevant experts, and employees at all levels should receive appropriate education and training on the plan. When individual incidents of harassment occur, having an effective plan already in place creates a huge advantage in terms of providing necessary support urgently and consistently.

The Role of Media Unions

Media unions play a critical role in providing support for victims of harassment, protecting journalists from online harm, and holding media employers, online platforms, and governments accountable for providing solutions and preventing abuse.

Through their role as collective bargaining agents, unions can make use of a number of opportunities to address harassment and improve protections for workers, including:

> **Bargaining stronger anti-harassment and health and safety provisions in our collective agreements.**

> **Enforcing workplace health and safety and anti-harassment policies and procedures.**

> **Filing grievances for health and safety and human rights complaints in accordance to the collective agreement and prevailing legislation.**

The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) hosts an online campaign called "Online Trolling: You are NOT alone."[12] Among the useful resources found there are several survey reports that take a deep dive into union responses to the harassment of journalists and media workers. According to those survey responses, media unions and worker organizations have a range of options available to them in terms of supporting their members, including:

- *Collective agreement provisions establishing support and prevention programs,*

- *Tools and resources aimed specifically at freelancers, who are particularly vulnerable to harassment and online attacks,*

- *Development of general protection codes/guidelines,*

- *Training on digital safety and legal tools,*

- *Establishment of a national committee for the safety of journalists,*

- *Online mapping or database of the cases,*

- *Index of physical security and platform to report attacks,*

- *A free media help line to report attacks,*

- *A free legal help line to receive legal counselling.*[13]

The Unifor media member survey asked what resources our media members wanted from their union when it came to addressing workplace harassment and abuse.

> **Media unions play a critical role in providing support for victims of harassment, protecting journalists from online harm, and holding media employers, online platforms, and governments accountable for providing solutions and preventing abuse.**

The top four resources were:

1   Clear reporting/response procedures bargained in their union contracts (73.3%)

2   A shop steward with specialized training on responding to harassment (57.1%)

3   Support networks for affected workers (i.e.: online gatherings to share experiences) (53.3%)

4   Stronger representation with management on the issue (53.3%)

One tangible step media unions can take to is to make improving supports in our benefit plans a priority during bargaining. These benefits – including access to counselling, employee assistance programs, etc. – provide practical and critical supports to members in times of crisis.

In keeping with the IFJ recommendations outlined above, specifically that media unions should negotiate collective agreement provisions establishing support and prevention programs, Unifor is continuing to develop our bargaining strategy on this front. As noted above, there are examples of collective agreement language bargained recently between Unifor media local and media employers at the end of this discussion paper, in the section called "Sample Collective Agreement Language."

Finally, as noted above in our Action Plan, media unions can and should use their resources and political power to lobby governments to pass legislation that protects media workers from harm and holds digital platforms and other stakeholders accountable.

The Role of Journalism Schools

Journalism schools have an important role to play, especially when it comes to supporting victims of harassment. There is already a push underway to promote a more trauma-informed approach to education in journalism, in recognition of the mental health impacts of reporting on challenging subjects and the often-toxic and harassment-filled work environments journalists and media workers face.

As noted above, the report *Taking Care: A Report on Mental Health, Well-Being & Trauma Among Canadian Media Workers*, produced by Matthew Pearson and Dave Seglins for the Canadian Journalism Forum on Violence and Trauma, underscores how media workers are experiencing mental health challenges arising from exposure to trauma and harassment on the job. The report finds that 90% of survey respondents did not receive trauma training in journalism school.

Pearson and Seglins recommend that,

> *Journalism schools and educators should build and incorporate training on journalist mental health and trauma-aware reporting into the core curricula of post-secondary college, undergraduate and graduate level programs. This training should practically address the specific challenges journalists-in-training will face, including newsroom culture issues. The primary goal should be to enhance each program's literacy around mental health and prepare students for real-world reporting scenarios.*

Reporting to the Police

One option available to victims of harassment and abuse is to file a formal police report, with the hope of using the criminal justice system to help enforce existing anti-harassment laws. Unfortunately, for many victims it can seem like the police treat incidents of harassment the way they would a bike theft: a one-off and random incident, with little chance of finding the perpetrator.

> **Employers, colleagues and advocates working to support victims of harassment must recognize that not all complainants have the same perception or history of experience with the police.**

> **Since we know the attacks on journalists are often coordinated and networked, a comprehensive reporting and tracking tool is an essential part of the solution**

Unifor's "Help is Here" online toolkit lists reporting to the police as an option, but we are also careful to note that, for many journalists and media workers, this option is a fraught one. This subject came up repeatedly in the roundtable discussion that underpinned the *Poison Well* report.

> *Speaking on behalf of the Canadian Association of Black Journalists, discussant Julie Sobowale noted that many of the organization's members have expressed that they do not trust the police enough to come forward when they experience harassment because of the well-documented history of misconduct and abuse from police in Black communities across the country. When Black journalists do approach the police, she said, "they're retraumatized." In addition, "there really isn't sufficient explanation of the process."*

The Chilling survey made the same important observation, noting that, "only 11% of the women journalists surveyed had reported instances of online violence to the police, and very few interviewees had made a complaint to law enforcement agencies, highlighting a general lack of confidence in prosecution." It is clear that more work needs to be done by police services to build trust in racialized and marginalized communities.

Employers, colleagues and advocates working to support victims of harassment must recognize that not all complainants have the same perception or history of experience with the police. As a best practice, the victim themselves must guide the decision-making regarding this option.

The creation of an online database that allows for the reporting and tracking of harassment and abuse, discussed in more detail above, could be an important resource for the police. Since we know the attacks on journalists are often coordinated and networked, a comprehensive reporting and tracking tool is an essential part of the solution. Media unions and advocacy groups must work in partnership with governments and the police to develop these kinds of tools.

In addition, police services should prioritize specialized training on the issue of the harassment of journalists and media workers. This training should emphasize the intersectional and coordinated nature of this harassment, while also providing tools and resources to properly investigate incidents.

Finally, police services should be encouraged to coordinate more across jurisdictions. This kind of coordination is common for other criminal investigations, including money laundering, child pornography and organized crime. Increased cross-jurisdictional coordination would be especially powerful when paired with an online reporting and tracking database.

Legislative and Regulatory Solutions in Canada

Legislative and regulatory responses to the online harassment and abuse of media workers, or to the problem of online harassment and toxic behavior in general, have proven to be fraught with challenges. In Canada, the federal government's efforts to pass the so-called *Online Harms Bill* have stalled, as experts have failed to find consensus on some key aspects of the draft legislation. The fundamental challenge for legislators revolves around the interplay between potentially dangerous, toxic or illegal activity online, and concerns over *Charter*-protected free speech.

" Legislative and regulatory responses to the online harassment and abuse of media workers, or to the problem of online harassment and toxic behavior in general, have proven to be fraught with challenges. "

The proposed *Online Harms Bill* was not meant to specifically address the problem of online harassment. Prior to an initial round of consultation, the government proposed the Bill with the intention of defining and targeting, "five categories of harmful content: hate speech, terrorist content, incitement to violence, child sexual exploitation and the non-consensual sharing of intimate images."[14]

As we noted above, Unifor's Action Plan includes lobbying goals that would require governments to: put more resources into addressing and ending the harassment and abuse of journalists; make it a more serious offence to attack a journalist, verbally or physically; and pass legislation that makes digital platforms responsible and accountable for the content posted on their websites, through a variety of mechanisms.

At the same time, we recognize that many of these demands are complex and challenging, and the balance between preventing harassment and protecting free speech is not an easy one to legislate. It is clear that we need to continue to develop our legislative options, in partnership with media employers, journalism advocates, and other groups.

The Unifor Action Plan includes a proposal to lobby government to pass legislation that would, "make it a more serious offence to attack a journalist, verbally or physically." We acknowledge this is a fraught proposal, but we are adamant that individual journalists and the "fourth estate" must be protected from coordinated, weaponized harassment and abuse meant to undermine democracy.

Looking to Other Jurisdictions

The harassment of journalists and media workers is a global problem, and we have the benefit of learning from other jurisdictions when looking for solutions. Unfortunately – but perhaps unsurprisingly – the same challenges around the intersection of free speech protections and the need to regulate and address online harms have bogged down legislative efforts in other jurisdictions. Most recently, after stalling in the House of Commons, the UK's *Online Safety Bill*[15] finally passed Third Reading and has moved on to the House of Lords.

> **The harassment of journalists and media workers is a global problem, and we have the benefit of learning from other jurisdictions when looking for solutions.**

According to the UK government, the *Online Safety Bill* will, "make social media companies more responsible for their users' safety on their platforms."[16] The Bill establishes a new duty of care for online platforms towards their users, requiring them to take action against both illegal and "legal but harmful" content, and gives new regulatory powers to the Office of Communications (Ofcom), the national communications regulator.

According to one legal analysis, "*The Online Safety Bill* introduced into parliament is wide-ranging and would, if given effect in its current form, impose extensive obligations on online service providers regarding illegal and harmful content that appears on their platforms."[17] However, as with Canada's *Online Harms Bill*, critics have expressed concerns about regulatory overreach, arguing that the Bill dangerously limits free speech and would not actually reduce the dangerous online behavior it seeks to address.

While this legislative initiative slowly moves forward, the National Union of Journalists, a union representing 35,000 journalists and media workers in the UK and Ireland, has partnered with the UK's Society of Editors to create the [Journalists Safety Toolkit]. This online resource was created "to help journalists work safely and to collectively combat behaviour and actions that serve to put journalists at risk and undermine the vital role journalism plays in our society."[18] The Toolkit provides information and advice for journalists facing harassment, and provides access to other important resources.

Despite these challenges, there have been some positive attempts to promote online safety and address harassment and abuse. Australia's *Online Safety Act* passed in 2021 and came into effect at the beginning of this year.[19] The *Act* strengthens the role of the so-called "eSafety Commissioner," a position only introduced by earlier legislation in 2015, and gives the Safety authority new powers to enforce online standards and hold digital platforms accountable. Like the proposed legislation in Canada and the UK, Australia's *Online Safety Act* covers much more than just online harassment. According to the office of the eSafety Commissioner,

> *The Basic Online Safety Expectations are a broad set of requirements that apply to an array of services and all online safety issues. They establish a new benchmark for online service providers to be proactive in how they protect people from abusive conduct and harmful content online.*
>
> *eSafety now expects online service providers to take reasonable steps to be safe for their users. We expect them to minimize bullying, abuse and other harmful activity and content. We expect them to have clear and easy-to-follow ways for people to lodge complaints about unacceptable use.*[20]

In the U.K., recognizing the scope and complexity of these issues facing journalists and media workers, The National Committee for the Safety of Journalists was formed. Their purpose is to, "bring together representatives from government, journalism, policing, prosecution services and civil society to work in collaboration to make sure journalists in the U.K. are able to operate free from threats and violence." The purpose of the committee is," to develop a National Action Plan for the Safety of Journalists. This will set out how the safety of journalists in the U.K. can be protected."[21]

ILO Convention No. 190 is "the first international treaty to recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment.

One recent piece of good news has been Canada's ratification of the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190), which took place on January 30, 2023.[22] ILO Convention No. 190 is "the first international treaty to recognize the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment."[23] The agreement requires signatory nations to enact the necessary laws and policy measures to prevent and address violence and harassment in the world of work.

ILO Convention No. 190 applies to the whole world of work, including online harassment and violence, and it covers all workers regardless of their employment status (freelance, interns, part-time, volunteers, apprentices). As noted by the IFJ, ILO Convention No. 190 makes violence and harassment a health and safety issue, meaning that, "Media employers will need to include violence and harassment when managing occupational health and safety issues."[24]

Another interesting initiative, this one international in scope, is the Worlds of Journalism Study (WJS), a collaborative research project whose goal is to help media workers, academics and policy makers, "better understand the worldviews and changes that are taking place in the professional views of journalists, the conditions and limitations under which journalists operate, and the social functions of journalism in a changing world."[25] There are 120 countries represented in the WJS survey work, including Canada.

The WJS is currently engaged in its third wave of research, which focuses on journalists' safety, deteriorating editorial freedom, influences on news production, the impact of technology, and the increasing precarity of employment in journalism.

Conclusion

The harassment of journalists and media workers is becoming an increasingly toxic problem, and as we've explored above, not only do individual journalists suffer harm, but our very democracy is undermined and at risk when journalists are targeted with abuse. All workers – including journalists and media workers – have a fundamental right to work and live free from harassment and abuse.

It is no longer acceptable to excuse or minimize the harassment of journalists and media workers, arguing it is "just part of the job." We all have an obligation to support and protect victims of harassment, to hold perpetrators and facilitators accountable, and to work toward eliminating the harassment. Media employers, unions, digital platforms, governments, politicians, the criminal justice system, Courts and Tribunals and members of the public all have a critical role to play in addressing the problem.

It is clear from our own survey of Unifor media members, and from numerous surveys of media workers undertaken by other groups around the globe, that journalists and media workers are experiencing an increase in hate, harassment and abuse, especially online. It is also clear we have more work to do to develop better responses and supports, and to improve access to these supports through training and education.

Further, these surveys reinforce what we already know – that much of the harassment and abuse of journalists and media workers is based in white supremacy, racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia, Islamophobia, and other systems of oppression. We must acknowledge the intersectional nature of this abuse, and avoid one-size-fits-all solutions.

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In our responses, we must also recognize some tough but obvious truths about much of this harassment: it is meant to silence the press through fear, intimidation, and acts of violence; this silencing is designed to undermine the ability of media workers to publish accurate news and information for the public good; many harassers work in coordination with formal and informal networks that are often politically motived and right-wing in nature; and a key goal of the harassers is to protect and promote these systems of oppression.

Journalists and media workers have always faced hate, harassment and abuse. There is no single solution or quick fix to these problems. Individual victims of harassment must receive urgent support and care, and all workplaces should have robust and well-promoted policies and systems in place prior to individual incidents. This response must be immediate, practical, trauma-informed and flexible, providing the victim with empathetic care and a variety of options for support.

This means, of course, that employers must play a critical role in protecting and supporting their workers when harassment occurs. In an era of cost-cutting and deep structural change, we must ensure that media employers invest appropriately in these protections and responses.

Media unions can create a plan of action, an expectation we also place on media employers, including commitments to negotiate clear and robust health and safety language in their contracts, and make worker supports and harassment prevention a key bargaining goal. Governments must strengthen employment and labour legislation and standards regarding workplace harassment abuse. At the same time, governments must hold digital platforms accountable – through legislation and regulation, competition policy, and tax policy – for facilitating and even profiting from the online abuse and harassment of journalists and media workers.

In closing, we would like to speak directly to journalists and media workers who have been victims of harassment or abuse. As noted on Unifor's "Help is Here" website:

You are not alone.
Online harassment is not part of the job.

No one should face abuse for doing their job.

Friends, family and colleagues can provide great support, and they want to help.

Visit "Help is Here" at www.uniformedia.ca/helpishere to find a practical guide laying out options for what you can do *right now* to help yourself or a co-worker.

Help is Here: Confronting Harassment in Journalism

In order to provide immediate practical support for journalists and media workers when they experience abuse and harassment, Unifor's Media Sector Anti-Harassment Working Group developed an online toolkit called Help is Here. This web-based tool, developed by rank-and-file Unifor media workers and union leaders, is drawn from best practices developed in our own workplaces and by anti-harassment advocates in other jurisdictions.

Help is Here provides anonymous, confidential support for journalists and media workers when they experience abuse or harassment, whether they are Unifor members, non-union workers or freelancers. The site also provides helpful and practical advice for victims of abuse and harassment on documenting the incident, and on better protecting yourself from future harassment.

Please visit www.uniformedia.ca/helpishere to read the detailed toolkit.

Help is Here

Help for those facing harassment right now

You are not alone. Online harassment is not part of the job. No one should face abuse for doing their job. Friends, family and colleagues can provide great support, and they want to help. Sometimes, too, you also need to talk to someone anonymously. The choice is yours.

Harassment is on the increase, and often involves sexism or threats of sexual assault. Most goes unreported. This site is here to help journalists facing harassment.

What to do if you have been harassed:

You are not alone. The entire journalism community stands with you.

If you want to talk to someone anonymously. Your confidentially is guaranteed.

More help is available:

> **If you are a Unifor member, help is here.**

> **Non-union members, help is here.**

> **If you are a freelancer, help is here.**

For tips on documenting the incident, click here

For tips on preventing future harassment, click here

What you do, or don't do, is up to you. We are here to help.

Documenting the Incident

Unifor members

Talk to your shop steward, bargaining unit chair or local president. Your choice. Talk to the person you are most comfortable talking to.

If your newsroom has a protocol for addressing online harassment, please refer to it and follow its steps for taking action. This protocol is there to help you. Your union can help guide you through it.

You are in control. The protocol and your union are there to help you access the supports you need or want.

With or without a formal protocol for online harassment, your union will be there to help you.

Approach any union representative you like, whether a steward, bargaining unit chair, local president or member of your women's or Black, Indigenous, People of Colour committee.

They will make sure you have the help you deserve and talk to the right people.

Bring a friend for support, if you like.

If your workplace has an Employee Assistance Program, or EAP, it can provide anonymous help, including access to a therapist. Neither your employer nor your union will ever know that you contacted the EAP, or why.

If your Unifor Local or Bargaining Unit has a Women's Committee or Black, Indigenous, People of Colour Committee, you can contact them. Contact information should be on your Local's website.

Non-Unifor members

If your newsroom has a protocol for addressing online harassment, please refer to it and follow its steps for taking action. This protocol is there to help you.

If your workplace has an Employee Assistance Program, or EAP, it can provide anonymous help, including access to a therapist. Your employer will never know that you contacted the EAP, or why.

If your workplace has a Women's Committee or Black, Indigenous, People of Colour Committee, you can contact them.

Freelancers

You are not alone. Reach out to a friend or colleague.

Get in touch with the Canadian Freelance Union. Through the CFU, freelancers can access support services and advice about how to handle online hate. Email president@canadianfreelanceunion.ca with the subject line: Online Harassment - help! You do not need to be a member of the CFU to seek their help or advice. To learn more about the organization, please visit www.canadianfreelanceunion.ca

Consult the Global Cyber Alliance toolkit, which provides information and tools to protect your sources and reputations, particularly for freelancers and small newsrooms.

Stress while working alone. Freelancers do not have newsrooms resources to draw upon. Journalist Stuart Hughes and Prof. Anthony Feinstein offered tips and discussed the challenges faced by freelancers during the 2020 Global Media Freedom Conference.

Step One: Documenting an Incident

Taking action can sometimes help. That is your choice. Here are some tips for what you can do. Please follow any and all of these tips that you are comfortable with:

If you can, take screen shots, or ask a friend to do this for you.

Consider having a trusted colleague take over your social media accounts so you don't have see the harassing messages. This person can document the harassment for you.

Save all the offensive materials received, including phone calls, voice and text messages and letters.

Step-by-step guide. The Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma has a practical guide for what to do when facing harassment or abuse.

Tell your union shop steward and/or Bargaining Unit Chair and/or Local President

If your union has a committee that deals with harassment, talk to them. They will know what to do next.

Tell your editor.

Your union can do this for you. It's your choice

Working with your union and editor, tell police.

Again, the choice is yours. When it comes to safety and protection, we acknowledge that not all journalists are comfortable with police involvement, particularly those who come from racialized or marginalized communities.

Visit the Canadian Press Freedom Project and submit an incident or online threat. Your submission can be kept confidential

Step Two: Document/gather information

Don't delete any harassing or threatening messages. They are evidence!

Thoroughly document everything, including any of your responses, before blocking the attacker. Save, print and screenshot everything. Print hardcopies and save to a folder that's easy to access.

If the harassment is in email form, try to locate the IP address if possible and ensure that's documented. Use this guide: https://aruljohn.com/blog/howtofindipaddress/ Do NOT forward the email to anyone, as you may lose the originating IP address. If you need to share it, copy and paste the contents or send screenshots instead.

For Unifor reps and Local officers: Ensure the member starts a log of harassment activity, including the following:

❑ Date and time.

❑ Type of electronic communication (direct message, posted image, social media comment, etc.)

❑ Location (name of the website or app.)

❑ Nature of the online incident (a threat of sexual violence, a racially-motivated attack, etc.)

❑ If the attacker's identify is known, assess who they are and whether they can access the reporter either in person or online. Attempt to shut them out if possible.

❑ Write down as much as possible about the source of the threat, identify if known etc.

Protecting Yourself

Prevention and Mental Health

The primary responsibility for protecting journalists from online harassment and harm lies with the employer, working with your union and representatives of your newsroom, but you need not wait to ensure you have all the protections you deserve.

The need is just too great. An Ipsos poll released in November 2021 found that 73% of journalists polled reported that harassment has increased over the last two years.

Below are some resources you can access to shield yourself from as much of the abuse as possible. A special shout out to the Canadian Association of Journalists, who compiled resources journalists can draw upon immediately and over the long term.

Protecting your personal information

- A step-by-step guide to finding and removing your personal information from the internet, by the New York Times. How to Dox Yourself on the Internet

- Field Manual from Pen America offers concrete strategies for how to defend yourself and others

- For those working at home, whether freelance or due to COVID-19, some tips on securing your home office from the Committee to Protect Journalists

- Know your trolls. The International Women's Media Foundation developed a course to help journalists contextualize and deal with online abuse. Read the course materials here.

- Students. The James W. Foley Legacy Foundation developed safety strategies for journalism students and those new to the profession, available here.

- Freelancers and small newsrooms. The Global Cyber Alliance toolkit provides journalists with information and tools to protect their sources and reputations. Particularly for freelancers and small newsrooms.

- Device specific. The Citizen's Lab at the University of Toronto has a number of resources, including a guide to protecting your identity on your devices.

Mental Health:

Stress and Trauma. Tips on preventing and addressing the stress and trauma of reporting the news. An overview of research and studies, from The Journalist's Resource.

Freelancers. Journalist Stuart Hughes and Prof. Anthony Feinstein discussed the challenges around mental health faced by freelancers during the 2020 Global Media Freedom Conference. Their presentation offers tips for bolstering emotional wellbeing while covering difficult stories, traumatic events, civil unrest and conflict.

Sample Collective Agreement Language

The following language was added to the collective agreement between Unifor Local 87-M and Torstar in the most recent round of bargaining at the Toronto Star:

Harassment Policy

"The Employer shall maintain and post a policy to address abusive comments, threats, incitement and harassment toward journalists and other employees who produce content. The Employer shall consult with the Union on the development of, and changes to, such policy."

In June 2022, the following language was added to the collective agreement between Unifor Local 240 and Postmedia during bargaining at the Windsor Star:

Postmedia condemns the recent industry-wide increase in online bullying and harassment of journalists; recognizing the importance of safeguarding our employee's health and safety, the Postmedia has partnered with other Canadian media on a number of initiatives, including a working committee tasked with providing information, tools and support and educating journalists so they are better able to protect themselves from online harassment and bullying.

This joint task force will provide journalists from their companies with virtual and in-class sessions to better protect themselves from online harassment and bullying, including training on how to protect their identity, doxing, setting up a VPN, etc. The first of these sessions will be held for a small test group in June or July of 2022. Sessions will be made available to all newsroom employees in an online format upon finalization of the course materials, expected by September 2022.

In addition to the above-mentioned resources, Postmedia is committed to supporting you through incidences of online harassment or bullying. If you are subject to online harassment or bullying:

- Report the incident to your manager immediately;

- Incidents of bullying and harassment will be tracked in a national directory including the name/ address of sender and the nature of incident;

- Your manager will provide you with contact information for the Employee Assistance Program;

- Where an overt threat has been made, your manager will file, or assist you in filing, a police report;

- Your manager will follow up with you and provide additional support as needed.

Postmedia will continue to work with its unions and employees to increase awareness of this issue and protect its journalists.

Further Reading

"The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists"
Julie Posetti, Nabeelah Shabbir, Diana Maynard, Kalina Bontcheva, Nermine Aboulez
UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists (April 2021)
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377223

"Online Harm in Journalism"
Sanyam Sethi, Ipsos Public Affairs (November 2021)
https://site-cbc.radio-canada.ca/documents/media-centre/Ipsos-Online-Harm-in-Journalism-Report.pdf

"Online Trolling: You Are Not Alone"
International Federation of Journalists Campaign
https://www.ifj.org/actions/ifj-campaigns/online-trolling-you-are-not-alone.html

"IFJ Survey - State of Play of Unions' Initiatives to Combat Online Harassment and Media Best Practices – 2022"
International Federation of Journalists
https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Online_abuse_Q1-_Final.pdf

"IFJ Survey - Union's Initiatives to Combat Online Harassment – 2022"
International Federation of Journalists
https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Online_abuse_Q2_Final.docx.pdf

"Poisoned Well: the results of a roundtable on journalists and online hate"
Kat Eschner, Canadian Association of Journalists and the Canadian Journalism Foundation (2022)
https://s35990.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Poisoned-Well.pdf

"Guides & Training"
(A directory of digital security trainings to news organizations, freelance and citizen journalists, and other at-risk groups)
Freedom of the Press Foundation
https://freedom.press/training/

Notes

1   https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/workplace-health-safety/harassment-violence-prevention.html

2   "Internet Harassment or Cyberbullying." Canadian Centre for Occupational Health & Safety. (from https://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/cyberbullying.html).

3   https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/racial-harassment-know-your-rights-brochure

4   Posetti, Shabbir et al. "The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists." UNESCO. (April 2021). (from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377223).

5   Sanyam Sethi. "Online Harm in Journalism." Ipsos Public Affairs. (November 2021). (from https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/Online_Harm_in_Journalism).

6   "Canada: Right-Wing Populist Leaders Weaponize Social Media to Silence Journalists." Coalition for Women in Journalism. (October 2021). (from https://www.womeninjournalism.org/reports-all/canada-right-wing-populist-leaders-weaponize-social-media-to-silence-journalists).

7   Kat Eschner. "Poisoned Well: the results of a roundtable on journalists and online hate." Canadian Association of Journalists and the Canadian Journalism Foundation (2022). (from https://s35990.pcdn.co/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Poisoned-Well.pdf).

8   "Survey on Harassment – Online and In The Field." Unifor Media Sector. (May 2022). (from https://www.unifor.org/sites/default/files/documents/Harass%20Survey%20FINAL_0.pdf).

9   Matthew Pearson and Dave Seglins. "Taking Care: A Report On Mental Health, Well-Being & Trauma Among Canadian Media Workers." Canadian Journalism Forum on Violence and Trauma. (May 2022). (from https://static1.squarespace.com/static/60a28b563f87204622eb0cd6/t/6285561b128d0447d7c373b2/1652905501967/TakingCare_EN.pdf).

10   https://pressfreedomtracker.us/about/

11   "J-Source launches Canada Press Freedom Project questionnaire." New Media Canada. (April 13, 2021). (from https://nmc-mic.ca/2021/04/13/j-source-launches-canada-press-freedom-project-questionnaire/).

12   "Online Trolling: You are NOT alone." Campaign Website. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). (from https://www.ifj.org/actions/ifj-campaigns/online-trolling-you-are-not-alone.html).

13   "IFJ Survey - State of Play of Unions' Initiatives to Combat Online Harassment and Media Best Practices – 2022." International Federation of Journalists. (from https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Online_abuse_Q1-_Final.pdf).

14   Raffy Boudjikanian. "Heritage Department restarting consultations on online harms bill." CBC News. (July 8, 2022). (from https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/online-harms-heritage-pablo-rodriguez-1.6514081).

15   "Online Safety Bill." UK Parliament. (from https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3137).

16   https://www.gov.uk/guidance/a-guide-to-the-online-safety-bill#:~:text=The%20Bill%20will%20make%20social,removing%20content%20promoting%20self%20harm

17   "Online Safety Bill will be taken forward, Truss confirms." Out-Law News. Pinsent Masons. (September 8, 2022). (from https://www.pinsentmasons.com/out-law/news/online-safety-bill-taken-forward).

18   https://www.nuj.org.uk/advice/journalists-safety-toolkit.html

19   "Online Safety Act 2021." Federal Register of Legislation. Australia Government. (from https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2021A00076).

20   "Learn about the Online Safety Act." eSafety Commissioner. Australian Government. (from https://www.esafety.gov.au/whats-on/online-safety-act).

21   https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/national-committee-for-the-safety-of-journalists#:~:text=The%20National%20Committee%20for%20the,free%20from%20threats%20and%20violence

22   https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/violence-harassment/news/WCMS_866892/lang--en/index.htm

23   https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/violence-harassment/lang--en/index.htm

24   https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/article/five-things-you-need-to-know-about-the-ilo-convention-190.html

25   https://worldsofjournalism.org/#1568220036153-600f5fea-8bdf

If you are a journalist or media worker facing harassment, HELP IS HERE by scanning this QR code.

uniformedia.ca/helpishere