

## Chapter 4

# Threats and Attacks on Women Journalists in the Philippines

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Due to continuing threats and attacks on the media, journalist safety has been the subject of increasing scholarly research in the Philippines. A gap in the literature, however, is research on safety issues affecting Filipino women journalists in particular, despite reports on specific challenges they face. In a country where not only women in media but females in general are subjected to catcalling, sexually offensive remarks, and harassment, there is a need for more focused research in order to bring such issues to public attention and propose relevant protection policies and mechanisms. This case study research reveals the types of threats and attacks Filipino women journalists experience, as well as their responses and policy recommendations for media owners and editorial managers.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Threats and attacks on journalists in the Philippines have been the subject of reports and studies not only by Filipino scholars and organizations, but also by international researchers and groups. Global attention on journalist safety in the country appears to have increased after the 2009 Maguindanao massacre—the “single deadliest event for the press in history” where 58 people, of which 32 were journalists and media workers, were killed (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2019, para. 6). Journalist killings have continued in the country, alongside other forms of physical assault, as well as verbal, legal, and digital attacks (Tuazon & Torres, 2019; Jamil, 2019).

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As the world pays close attention to journalist safety issues, there appears to be a need for greater focus on gender-based threats and attacks that plague women in media. Women journalists around the world are subjected to attacks often hidden from the public eye. They are exposed to multiple forms of threats, intimidation, and abuse (Barton & Storm, 2014), including harassment over the phone, via email, and through text message (Høiby, 2016), threats of sexual violence, sexual touching, and rape (Wolfe, 2011), and death threats (Barton & Storm, 2014; Ferrier, 2018). There are also attacks in public, such as catcalling (Barton & Storm, 2014) and being groped in a crowd while covering events (Wolfe, 2011).

Sexual harassment, in particular, has been found to be “a common experience” early in women journalists’ career (Philippine Social Science Council as cited in Chocarro, 2019, p. 38), but veteran journalists are not exempted from harassment (Posetti, 2017). Such attacks and abusive behavior come from bosses, colleagues, and sources/subjects, including government authorities (Barton & Storm, 2014; Wolfe, 2011). The damage caused reaches beyond the victims. Apart from the psychological and emotional effects on the journalists themselves, these types of attacks may result in a chilling effect, restricting freedom of expression and endangering press freedom (Ferrier & Garud-Patkar, 2018).

In a country where not only women in media but females in general are disrespected through catcalling and rape jokes (Agence France Presse, 2016), and three in five women have experienced sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime, based on 2015 data (Social Weather Stations as cited in Bartolome, 2016), there is a need to bring such issues to public attention. In order to develop initiatives and propose policies that can address these issues, more information must be gathered about such threats and attacks. Through in-depth interviews with Filipina journalists, this chapter uncovers the dangers they face, the stories often kept off the record, and mechanisms for addressing threats and attacks on women in media.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Threats and Attacks on Women Journalists Worldwide**

In a 2013 global survey on harassment and violence against female media workers, conducted by the International News Safety Institute and the International Women’s Media Foundation, almost two-thirds of the 977 women respondents reported experiencing intimidation, threats or abuse as part of their work as journalists. The most frequent acts were categorized as “abuse of power or authority,” “verbal, written, and/or physical intimidation (including threats) to you,” and “attempts to damage your reputation/honour” (Barton & Storm, 2014, p. 7). Threats received including threats of sexual violence and rape (Wolfe, 2011) and death threats (Barton & Storm, 2014). Other forms of verbal abuses include degrading comments (Walsh-Childers et al., 1996), catcalling (Barton & Storm, 2014), and “unwanted comments on dress and appearance,” “suggestive remarks or sounds,” and “jokes of a sexual nature” (Barton & Storm, 2014, p. 9). Among the physical threats are “invasion of personal space,” “unwanted physical contact” (Barton & Storm, 2014, p. 9), sexual touching, groping, and rape (Wolfe, 2011).

Threats and attacks on women journalists have also reached the digital realm. They are often targeted with “some of the most severe forms of online harassment, such as rape threats, death threats, and hate speech” (Ferrier & Garud-Patkar, 2018, p. 323). Women journalists may also receive threatening messages through “phone calls, e-mails and SMSs” (Høiby, 2016, p. 85). The findings of the 2013 global survey revealed that most of the incidents happened in the workplace, and primarily came from “bosses,” while other perpetrators cited include “supervisors, co-workers, interviewees, government officials,

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