

Chapter 11

Gender Mainstreaming in the Media: The Issue of Professional and Workplace Safety of Women Journalists in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

Media sector, in Nepal, has been vibrant and it is flourishing across all media outlets with about 1,000 newspapers, 600 radio stations, about five dozen television channels and more than 2,200 online news portals currently in operation across the country. Despite such an impressive figure, the reluctance of media houses to spend on embracing the key dimensions of gender sensitivity including professional safety of women journalists at workplace has had a dropping effect on the entire sector. Women remain cut out of the key decision-making levels in media. Media houses do not have any comprehensive prevention, support, complaints, and redress system with regards to sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace. This chapter assesses the state of gender sensitivity in newsrooms of Nepal with reference to professional safety of women journalists. Observations indicate that media houses should give due priority to professional safety of women journalists.

INTRODUCTION

The term gender is a logical means for creating awareness about inequalities perverted due to institutional structures in many societies across the world. It focuses not only on women as an isolated and homogeneous group, but on the roles and needs of both men and women. As women are usually in disadvantaged positions compared to men due to the patriarchal structure in most of the cases, promotion of gender equality implies an explicit attention to women's situations (Jamil, 2020, 2015, 2016; Claudia et al., 2018). The aim then is the advancement of the status of women in society, with gender equality as the ultimate goal.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-6686-2.ch011

Gender Mainstreaming in the Media

Gender mainstreaming in media goes beyond increasing women's participation in all types of media outlets; it means discussing issues, experiences and interests of women and men to bear on the development agenda. It may require changes in goals, strategies and actions so that both women and men can influence, participate in and benefit from development processes. Hence, the goal of mainstreaming gender equality in media is the transformation of unequal social and institutional structures through collection, selection, verification, editing and dissemination of the news in equal and just manner. Scholars have analyzed that gender dimensions have been excluded in the media content due to regulatory and patriarchal setback. The lack of gender mainstreaming policy in the media is the outcome of regulatory bodies and the state based historically on patriarchal cultures, the dominance of profit-oriented media systems over public service media and media with public service remit and ingrained cultural beliefs of gender superiority/inferiority (Katharine, 2014). Women are usually stereotyped as sexual objects or even as mere body parts. Some past examples show that: female nudity in magazine advertisements increased significantly around the world between 1983 to 1993; teen female TV characters used to be hyper-gendered. Consequently, female sexuality was represented not as the sexual liberation of women but as the availability of women for male consumption (Holden, 2012). Women in these cases were, thus, used to showcase glamour in the products.

The Constitution of Nepal ensures women's rights and gender equality in principle, e.g. political parties have to ensure that at least one third of their total representation is women. However, women's low status remains in the control of resources and political decision making. This is also reflected in the exercise of media activities (i.e., preparation of media content and participation of women in decision making). Over the years, especially during the last decade, Nepal has developed a fairly extensive communication infrastructure. The subject of portrayal of women, in Nepalese media, has drawn the attention of media critiques in the present times when Nepalese society is going through a period of social and political change. Women have been portrayed as men would like to see them - beautiful creatures, submissive mothers of their children, efficient house keepers and so forth. The positive sides of women's progress and their contribution for national development have not been adequately discussed in the media. The emphasis on stories about women, about their struggle for recognition is only the surface decoration. The actual message to audience is that society still opposes the liberation of women. This remains an obstacle to mainstream gender in the newsrooms of Nepal thereby preventing women to be at the leadership role in the media.

Several concerns raised and discussed in successive subsections of this chapter show that women in media are more vulnerable to gender-based violence too, which poses a serious threat to safety of women journalists in Nepal. The country has introduced with more than a dozen media laws that address media freedom, inclusion, equality and gender sensitivity but as far as the situation women in media is concerned; there are still multiple barriers that have prevented women to give their best in the media sector in Nepal. Despite Nepal's laws guarantee press freedom and women's equal rights, right to freedom of expression, equal work and wage through the constitution and commitments to several international human rights instruments, women journalists face multiple obstacles in journalism.

The United Nations (UN) Plan of Action for the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity, which was implemented by UNESCO along with stakeholders as a pilot plan in Nepal also called for a gender-based approach. Several activities were carried out among state and non-state actors on gender and safety needs of women journalists. Safety threats to women journalists are not limited to attacks in hostile situation; they appear in several forms such as sexual misconduct and sexual harassment, gender

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