

Chapter 19

Female Journalists and Safety Challenges in Selected Media Organizations in Kano State, Nigeria

Hadiza Jummai Ibrahim

Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria

Binta Rabi'u Spikin

Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Journalism schools have been witnessing an increase in female enrollment in Nigeria, but this is not proportional to the number of women who work in media organizations. For the women who eventually get employed as journalists, they experience various safety challenges which affect their advancement and continued presence in journalism. This chapter looked at safety challenges faced by female journalists in selected media organizations in Kano state of Nigeria. The study was hinged on spiral of silence theory to show how female journalists keep mute about the challenges they experience and prefer to report the so-called soft news. The study used focus group discussion and in-depth interview as the research methodology. Four sessions were held with each group consisting of eight female journalists. Findings show that majority of the participants had experienced threats, attacks, harassments, marginalization, and discrimination. In addition, most media organizations do not have laid down safety policies except for a few safety measures when the need arises.

INTRODUCTION

Journalism is an important profession. It is seen as a skill, talent and a passion to tell the truth, to inform, to reach others, to communicate news and information to the public. Journalists are also expected to report corruption, human rights abuses and hold government accountable on behalf of the public. Journalists

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have a vital role to play because they report issues of public interest. In performing these functions, intimidation and assault against journalists are inevitable. According to Isola (2015), journalists in Nigeria constantly face risks and threats from hostile operating environment, especially when they are working on sensitive, political, security or crime assignments. The assault on journalists deprives them their fundamental right to seek, receive and impart information without fear, favour and fear of consequence. It also denies them the right to freedom of expression as enshrined in various international and regional instruments, including Section 39(1) of the Nigerian constitution. Many decades ago, the journalism profession was considered as a male profession. Women all over the world were discouraged from becoming journalists and those who broke the barrier were seen as an exception to the rule (Thompson in Ibrahim, 2006). However, in recent times, more women are gaining entry into the profession though their male counterparts still outnumber them (Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 1995; 2000; 2005; 2010 & 2015). According to the GMMP (2015) in Africa, only 35% of journalists were females and in Nigeria, 75% of reporters were males while 25% were female reporters in radio, television and newspaper organizations in the country. This shows that journalism is a gendered profession and women are seen as playing a marginal role. But despite a female boom in journalism education, out of those who work in media organizations, very few last (Ibrahim, 2006). This is connected with their working condition, societal perception and above all, their safety.

In Nigeria, female journalists face many problems in the course of their effort to report stories of public interest. Culture and tradition are two factors that aggravate and make the problems more severe in Northern Nigeria (Ibrahim, 2006). Working in these patriarchal and conservative societies, the danger to women journalists is always present. Sometimes, they (women journalists) become the specific target for harassment (Sreberny, 2016). As such, female journalists who cannot cope with the situation quit from the job. Consequently, media organizations have lost good and dedicated female journalists, (Ross in Ibrahim, 2006). In this situation, Grachie (2013) laments that many media organizations are more concerned about assets like hardware, buildings and installations than about the safety and protection of their workers. The problems of discrimination, threat and harassment are on the increase as a reflection of the general insecurity in the society. Therefore, there is an urgent need to promote the safety of female journalists and end impunity against them (Mijatovic, 2016; Pate, Oso, & Jibril, 2017; Sreberny 2016; Yusuf, 2013).

Safety challenges against journalists is a global issue and Nigeria is not left out of the phenomenon. In the global impunity against journalist index, Nigeria was ranked 13th globally and 3rd in Africa after Somalia and South Sudan (CPI, 2015). This implies that there is a high level of impunity against journalists in Nigeria. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (2017), 368 journalists have been killed since 2012 while pursuing stories. Therefore the objectives of this chapter are to investigate the safety challenges experienced by female journalists in reporting news events in Kano State and to highlight the safety measures, if any, their media organizations have taken to protect them.

BACKGROUND

Historically, journalism globally used to be men's domain, hence the common phrase; 'gentlemen of the press'. According to Sanusi and Adelabu (2015), the history of journalism practice in Nigeria can be traced to attempt by missionaries' printing activities first by the Presbyterian Church in Calabar and later in Abeokuta by the late Reverend Henry Townsend. Townsend's attempt paid off when he started

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