

Why do we have to search for a line here and there on safety for women journalists?

Nonee Walsh, Abeer Saady IAWRT & Fiona Martin, Department of Media & Communications, University of Sydney

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1,010 journalists have been killed in the last decade, according to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, with nine out of ten those cases remaining unresolved (Guterres, 2018). Imprisonments alone total more than three times the annual death toll, and the number of journalists in jail across the globe in 2017 hit a new record (Beisner, 2017). Yet while men represent the majority of those killed and detained, the percentage of women killed in the last five years has more than tripled from four per cent of total deaths in 2012, to 14 per cent in 2017 (UNESCO, 2018a). Reports by Reporters Sans Frontiers (2018) and the International Women's Media Association (Barton & Storm, 2016) tell us many more women have been attacked, detained or threatened.

At the International Association of Women in Radio & Television (IAWRT) we have been deeply concerned about the many more, and how to better ensure the safety of women working in the media at a time when governments and armed forces are becoming more open in their threats to shut down media freedom.

As part of our mission to advance the presence and influence of women in media globally, late last year the Association produced *What if? ... Safety Handbook for Women Journalists*, which addresses the diverse cultural contexts in which women are reporting across the world. Written by renowned Egyptian journalist and war correspondent Abeer Saady, and edited by former ABC news journalist Nonee Walsh, the handbook provides practical advice based on personal experiences designed to keep female practitioners alive and out of harm's way.

In a UNESCO session at the 2017 International Association of Media and Communications Researchers conference, Nigerian journalist Nancy Mbaya said she was impressed by the practical character of the book and supported the pedagogy of using many women's personal stories to illustrate broader safety concerns (UNESCO, 2018b). She underlined the importance of guiding women journalists on how to report

safely from conflict zones and urged men in the media to recognize the specific threats facing their female colleagues.

Already the handbook, a free resource, has been widely adopted and partially translated into Arabic to accompany training in Iraq. In Afghanistan work has begun to translate it into two local languages and recently in Cameroon there were calls for a French translation.

The work was conceived by Abeer Saady, who has long drawn attention in international forums to the disproportionate prominence given to international, European and North American journalists from major outlets who are killed or targeted in the line of duty. In fact, the bulk of attacks on journalists happen to the fixers who assist international reporters and the freelance and local journalists who operate in conflict zones (UNESCO, 2018a, pp 11-12). We wanted the handbook to respond to that imperative, the risks to women working as fixers, as freelancers, or reporting in the field in their home countries.

In this handbook, we consider the needs and practices of diverse categories of media women: the international journalists who operate in countries with cultures that differ from their own; the regional journalists who travel to a neighbouring country, but are still outsiders, and the local and citizen journalists whose discriminatory treatment often reflects the gender norms of their own society. We acknowledge that risks and suffering are higher for the latter group during the reporting of conflicts and wars, as they happen in their home-towns, involving people they might know. We address journalists who work in media houses as well as stringers – and the vastly different financial and support resources available to them.

After a long career as a former Middle East war correspondent for Egyptian and international outlets, Abeer knows personally about attacks on women journalists from all angles: the injuries that all correspondents face in dangerous conflict zones, injuries from choosing to protect equipment before self, or being beaten after failing to project the right persona in a foreign culture (a problem we term profile management) as well as the direct and deliberate targeting of women journalists.

In interview with IAWRT web journalist Nonee Walsh, between training sessions and talks, Abeer discussed the origins of the handbook in her training work with women:

I have specialised in peace reporting and safety training for nearly two decades. My training always has a practical focus, grounded in my belief

in what women can bring to conflict reporting. I share the available resources with my trainees [and] usually refer them to the best safety sites like Committee to Protect Journalists, UNESCO's handbook with Reporters Without Borders, the Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma, the Rory Peck Institute and Front Line Defenders.

However, it was a training session in Sudan for UNESCO in 2014 which sparked my idea of creating a simple practical safety resource. The Sudanese women asked 'why are we searching for the issues relating to women on these best practice sites? For a line here, a line there? When can we have one source that will speak to us?' The women were interested in information that was easy to understand and apply in their local context.

When I searched, I found advice for women journalists was there, as I acknowledge in the handbook introduction, but it was fragmented and not easy to navigate, and not always culturally or geopolitically relevant:

We are not reinventing the wheel but gathering collective experience and knowledge together. We are being selective, concentrating more on situations where women journalists face situations because of their gender in addition to the dangers which all journalists (male, female or other gendered) face. (Saady, 2017 p.9)

Feedback from an IAWRT session at the 2017 NGO Commission on the Status on Women (CSW) conference in New York reinforced the call for better safety advice for women. The IAWRT board, which I had joined in 2015, approved a training brochure that would speak to their concerns, and those of their sisters round the globe. However, I couldn't fit it all in a brochure, so I approached UNESCO, which provided financial support as did the Norwegian Journalists Union. Ultimately their cooperation added to the original idea of covering conflict zones and danger in the field.

I was happy that UNSECO wanted the safety of the journalists in the workplace included as it was often raised in workshops. So, the guide provides suggestions on how managers should ensure their female workers' safety, including their opportunities to safely raise issues of discrimination, abuse and other forms of violence. (Saady, 2017, pp 26-29, 83-86).

'It's not your fault' is the principle in dealing with gender-based violence. Despite wanting to provide a service to women who work on their own,

we were concerned that the handbook should not only promote the idea of individualised responses to gendered attacks on female media workers. We encourage women to hold their employers to account for developing safety strategies, including systems to assist reporting of sexual harassment, peer support groups and penalties for offenders. The handbook is also a collective effort, a synthesis of safety lessons incorporating the experience of many women journalists, of many media outlets, from Nepal to the Middle East.

We recognise that journalism is a dangerous occupation, so in collecting stories for this manual it was not always easy to tease out where, or why, extra danger relates to gender or gendered responses to reporters. Sometimes, however, it is clear, and we did not shy away from three gender safety issues for reporting in the field – pregnancy, menstruation, and going to the toilet. In covering battles in Kabul, for example, Galina Sidorne found herself separated from the safety net of her team when she had to go to the toilet (Saady, 2017, pp. 17-18). We also reveal how authoritarian Middle Eastern countries have subjected arrested journalists to virginity or pregnancy tests, as told to us by two women who wished to be anonymous because of the social stigma this abuse would attract. The military police in their countries claim that they do these humiliating procedures to counter any claims that the women were raped during detention (Saady, 2017, p. 68).

Women need to have managers recognise variations to their safety needs without penalty to their career opportunities – or their chance to take on high risk reporting assignments:

Women journalists wage a war on two fronts: the war to survive, and the war against the system. They are under pressure to prove themselves, and as a consequence, they may subject themselves to greater danger. A Sudanese journalist told me she visited a conflict zone despite being at a high-risk stage of her pregnancy, to prove to her boss that she deserved the job. She had a miscarriage (Saady, p7)

Abeer called the guide *What If?* because it uses the same basic questions that journalists use to structure their reporting: Who, what, where, when, why and how? We advise journalists to apply those same questions, with gender considerations, to form a security plan.

1. What are the possible threats and risks?
2. Where are the possible threats?
3. When can danger occur?

4. How can danger turn into threat?
5. Who can be a threat?
6. What if something goes wrong? (Saady, 2017, pp. 11-12)

The advice in the handbook is structured around the concept of the safety pyramid, a schema Abeer adapted from IREX Safe training materials, which note that physical, psychosocial and digital safety factors are connected, and consideration of each is required to thoroughly assess the risks of any situation or environment (IREX, 2018). For example, the profile management section, which details how journalists should present themselves and how to control how they might be perceived, covers dress, actions and gestures, as well as attitudes and reactions to specific social and cultural conditions (Saady, 2017, pp 14-23), while the online harassment section notes how they can manage their online presence and interactions. (Saady, 50-52). Chapters 9 ‘Your Stories and Psychosocial Safety’ and 10 ‘Ethical Safety Decisions’ further expand the intersection between a journalist’s aims and her mental and physical safety (Saady pp. 70-81).

Real stories accompany all the advice, as there simply is no ‘one-size fits all’ guidance. Unexpected problems bring new knowledge of risk. For example, a Jordanian investigative journalist had her information stolen *“when a waiter at her regular café offered to charge her telephone. The waiter connected the phone to a laptop and easily synchronised the data”* (Saady, p 50). Abeer was injured by men at an ISIS checkpoint because her body language, visible even under full coverage Muslim clothing, gave away her anger at her religious practice being questioned (Saady, 2017, pp 47-8).

One of ethical dilemmas in preparing the book was gauging whose experiences could be safely told, who could be named and what the consequences of naming and revealing specific circumstances might be. As we advise reporters: *“No story is worth dying for, and that applies to your sources as much as to you, the reporter”* (Saady, p78). Some stories could not be told to illustrate safety advice, as the danger to the reporter remained very much alive. The ones which have been told, were all told with permission.

IAWRT’s handbook was launched at the 2017 IAWRT biennial conference in the Philippines, one of the most dangerous places in the world for journalists. It couldn’t have been more relevant as Manila prepared for an ASEAN security shutdown as world leaders arrived. At the conference, three generations of women reporters covering politics,

Indigenous affairs, land conflicts and the 'war on drugs' told us about the threats, bashings, rapes and murders, they had witnessed, or been subjected to, under the regimes of leaders from Ferdinand Marcos to Rodrigo Duterte (IAWRT, 2017).

One of the Filipino reporters later noted how relevant the handbook was to her daily experience. In reviewing the manual, Ronalyn Olea made a surprising observation about journalism education in the Philippines, given the threats to media workers:

Security and safety for journalists (especially for women journalists) is something that's not taught in schools and rarely discussed in newsrooms. We learned the principles of journalism, the basics of newsgathering and other reporting skills and the tools for critical thinking and analysis but never how to prepare ourselves for threats and challenges we might encounter as women journalists. (Olea, 2017)

She too found the personal stories valuable: "The handbook's main strength is its compilation of experiences, not only of Saady's as a journalist for 27 years but also of other women journalists who faced different situations."

If you have your grab bag of preparation techniques - risk assessment, profile

management, situational and digital awareness and a safety plan along

with your physical grab bag - your ability to survive dangerous

situations is enhanced. (Saady, 2017, p 88)

The handbook comes to life through journalism training, train the trainer sessions and IAWRT's website safety section. Abeer and IAWRT chapters have conducted workshops in countries such as Sudan, Iraq, Libya, Cameroon, Uganda, Nepal, The Philippines and India. Every year, Abeer runs workshops on the Turkish/Syrian border where Syrian citizen reporters make their way past various militias to be trained in peace reporting and safety techniques. A key focus is to ensure that she creates 'safety ambassadors', journalists who take the knowledge into

their own countries and regions. In Iraq, journalists who trained with her have rolled out the program to 800 other media workers.

That is Abeer's mission. It is also a critical part of IAWRT's mission, empowering media women to fight gender inequality by helping them to stay safe at work. Our handbook is free to download from iawrt.org and we are adding more resources such as short videos to a new safety section of our website designed for journalists and journalism educators to share.

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