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Violence Against Media Personas: A Comparative Study of Women Journalists in Pakistan and England

By Iqra Iqbal¹

Abstract

Gender is a critical tool for studying power dynamics within various organisations. The primary objective of this study is to examine how gender-targeted assault against females has increased in the profession of journalism. Below is a comprehensive picture of the extent of dangerous situations to which many women working in news media of England and Pakistan were subjected to. This research presents the insidious coercion endured by female journalists and considers how these incidents affect their ability to conduct their work on a professional level in the media industries of each country. It is important to note that the objective of this study is not to assess the number of women journalists who experienced these incidents, but rather to gauge the nature and frequency of these types of violations. The research is drawn from feminist theory, specifically, social feminist perspectives comprising discrimination of various levels in workplace with regards to gender. The data is collected using quantitative survey research techniques through purposive sampling utilising the snowball approach. Questionnaires were distributed amongst 50 women journalists from Pakistan and England. This research emphasises the consequences of psychological, verbal, technological, physical and sexual abuse as experienced by female media correspondents. The outcomes highlighted the cumulative proportions of incidents of various forms of violence experienced by these women.

Keywords: harassment, violence, threats, security, female journalists, media personas, Pakistan, England, violence against women.

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Introduction

Women possess a unique history in the field of journalism. From as early as the First World War women have risked their lives to provide reports from the most dangerous regions of the world. They have been subjected to the violation and assault that pervades most workplaces. Female journalists face constant risks of sexism and sexual violence, with 40 countries identified as “dangerous” or “very dangerous” for women journalists, according to a RSF report (2021). Reporters Without Borders (RSF), a non-governmental organisation committed to journalistic freedom, published its 37-page report ‘Sexism in Journalism’ on International Women’s Day. The report reveals the extent of gender-based violence against female reporters and how it impacts journalism as a whole. RSF provided questionnaires in three languages to 150 correspondents and journalists in 120 countries throughout the world. Their findings are based on responses from 112 of these journalists, 43% of whom were women. The report defines “sexism” as “all forms of gender-based violence, including discrimination, insults, sexual harassment, unwanted touching, verbal and physical sexual assaults, threats of rape and even rape itself”.

Jamil (2020) identified in his research that Pakistan is usually considered a very dangerous region for the journalism profession, yet it is not the only country in which danger primarily for women in this particular field lies. Other countries highlighted include Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Of course, men, too, have experienced severe and lost their lives while working as journalists.

The following research is centred on female journalists from Pakistan and England. It is required to mention the general position of working women in the field of journalism from these two countries. The research below details the occurrence of assault and harassment encountered by woman journalists. This section will elaborate upon the lack of security for women in these countries.

Status of Women in the Media Industry

Society is constantly evolving. Journalism was once a taboo profession for women in many countries. In many cultures, women are still considered inferior to men physically, intellectually, spiritually and emotionally. Women today who participate in historically male-dominated professions, like journalism, face enormous challenges. It was observed that though the educational level of both men and women has increased in most areas, a conservative mind-set still prevails, barring the majority of educated women work and earnings. It was noted that even if a small number of women work, society generally has pre-defined roles for them. Nevertheless, the culture of Asian countries progressively acknowledges women in the profession of journalism. After much campaigning by women activists and supporters of women's rights movements, the media is now encouraging discussion of this subject and highlighting the problems and struggles encountered by women. This helps to give voice to women’s issues.

UNESCO has offered to promote the objective of women's contributions in the media by utilising several projects over many years. The Women Make the News database is a tool for advancing gender equality in the media and in society. It provides journalists with a list of contacts for female expert sources in order to feature more women in news media. According to the annual report of Women Make the News (WMN) the project provides two objectives to empower females. First, it promotes the equality of gender in mass media functions across all organisational systems. Second, it is designed to ensure that news coverage of and by both genders is equal (Sztó, 2015).

The current situation for woman journalists is improving. Journalism has become a profession choice for several women. Many females are working in print and electronic media effectively. Women now feature as a news anchors in broadcast media. Nevertheless, it is evident that the combination of systemic prejudice against female journalists in addition to the various complicated

traditions of different cultures tends to make journalism a hazardous career for women. No doubt a significant transformation has been seen in the media industry but the workplace is still considered by many as problematic for women.

Violence Against Women Journalists

Violence towards women results in serious and long-lasting physical as well as psychological damage. Ferrier and Garud-Patkar (2018) reveal that any form of violence towards female correspondents is a critical matter which regrettably is seldom presented. It is proposed that there are four methods utilised when assaulting women media correspondents in the workplace. One is to place a woman in hazardous situations such as wars and conflict zones secondly there is sexual harassment. Women journalists confronted by sexual nuisance and sexist behaviour from male colleagues (Sreberny, 2014). There is also state-sanctioned violence to consider. This particular type of assault consists of arbitrary capture, confinement and torture. The fourth method involves online abuse and sexualised hate speech, all of which is frequently encountered by female media correspondents.

Effects of Violence on the Work Capability of Women Journalists

It is verified by medical experts that physical, verbal and sexual assault can have long term psychological effects on the victim. With the aid of stress management and counselling it is possible to improve mental as well as physical health (Seely, 2019). According to Adams (2018), the symptoms of long-term mental health problems caused by assault include depression, anxiety and post-traumatic disorder (PTSD). Legal protection has been provided for working women in both Pakistan and England. The following study investigates how often female journalists evoked their rights for personal safety. The Equalities Act 2010 in the United Kingdom was established on the principles of anti-discrimination policies such as the Unequal Pay Act 1970, sex discrimination, race relations and disability discrimination (Hussain et al., 2021). In Pakistan the Workplace Act was approved in 2010. According to this law sexual nuisance is “a punishable criminal offence” (Khan & Ahmed, 2016, p. 91).

Literature Review

Frontline journalism is globally considered to be the most dangerous method of reportage but it is by no means the only one for women. For a long period, Pakistan was considered to be a place to avoid for journalists.

With regards to sexual misconduct in newsrooms a study was conducted in order to contribute to a survey in main-stream newspapers in Indianapolis (Flatow, 1994). In previous research Flatow discovered the pervasiveness of this kind of misconduct. The degree of nuisance she reported was substantially higher than that reported in the APME study (Brown & Flatow, 1997). Nearly 70% of the women surveyed stated that they had experienced some form of sexual abuse while working as a journalist (North, 2016).

Sixty percent of women working as journalists in the Capital who responded to the survey stated that intimate harassment had taken place. 80% of respondents claimed that sexual nuisance is an issue for female journalists generally (Idås et al., 2020; Kasianenko, 2019; Rego, 2018).

Delisle et al. (2019) believe that these responses ignore gender awareness. He provides extracts from a debate forum which contain such epithets as ‘bitch’, ‘dumb broad’ and ‘ignorant little slut’ but describes these as simply ‘name-calling’. Yet this study shows that most female journalists are confronted with verbal violence all over the world (Delisle et al., 2019).

According to Vickery and Everbach (2018) American Indian women journalists experienced wide-spread harassment that ranged from character assassination to demands for sexual favours. While some newsrooms have adopted anti-harassment policies, the professional and personal implications of workplace misconduct, means that some victims will under no circumstances report the abuse. While risks, misconduct and assault are components of many journalists' encounters, the majority of these incidents are directed at women. The perpetrators of assault and abusive conduct toward female journalists range from federal government regulators to co-workers and bosses (Chen et al., 2018).

In Pakistan the role of media reporter for women is not considered secure employment and thus recruitment is minimal (Malik & Hussain, 2020). In cities such as Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtoonkwa there are generally few women appearing in the mass media. They are typically allocated stereotypical assignments regardless of qualifications in covering sports events or state politics. For a large number of women journalists, negative comments for perceived neglect of wifely or motherly duties is a daily occurrence.

In the southern region of Asia women journalists are struggling with discrimination with regards to work allocated, promotion opportunities, sexual harassment, lack of maternity benefits and poor support for working mothers (Sakha & Shah, 2019). However, these journalists continue to strive for fair and gender-sensitive reportage. They put their lives at risk seeking the humanitarian aspect of the issues they cover. They survive courageously against great odds (Sakha & Shah, 2019).

Shu et al. (2018) demonstrate in “The Kids Who Lie About Their Age to Join Facebook” that when feedback is flagged as inappropriate, or in any other case brought to the attention of trust and protection groups, those accountable for the offensive content may be subject to actions ranging from short-term restrictions to long-term bans. They further show that female journalists have received intimidation and numerous abusive comments on social media platforms, including threats of kidnap and rape, which leads to extreme psychological stress.

The following section details the rationale behind the decision to research the ‘Violence against Women Journalists of Pakistan and England’.

- What forms of violence are recorded by Pakistani female journalists as opposed to those in England?
- What sort of protection training is offered to the female journalists of Pakistan and England in cases of violence?
- What is the level of awareness of women's rights as journalists in both Pakistan and England?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Feminist Theory

Socialist feminists aim to challenge the supposed differentiation between sex and gender roles in society through consideration of social constructs and how such ideologies may be subverted. Gayle Rubin remarks that gender is “a socially obligatory division of the sexes” (Rubin, 1997, p. 40), which in turn points to the designations of “masculine” and “feminine” being human

constructs rather than monolithic concepts. According to this perspective society has assigned a predetermined role to each gender. The female voice is rendered silent. Women are not treated equally either in the home or the working place. The following research focuses on the context of social feminist theory in highlighting the issue of equal rights for female journalists in their profession. The objective of socialist feminism is the modification of unequal associations between men and women in the field of journalism (Kutunis & Bayraktaroglu, 2003). Women are victimised inside workplace as well as outside. They encounter various types of violence ranging from verbal to physical. Even in 21st century women face injustice in society. This study follows a comparative approach in discussing experiences of women journalists from England and Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative research was the basis for the methodology of this study. Primary data was accumulated via two questionnaires. The Cross-National data collection technique was utilised. Data was collected from respondents through emails and online surveys. The use of survey analysis facilitated large samples of individual responses to be collected from participants and media organisations were used for the distribution and collection of the questionnaires.

Population of The Study

The study focuses on female journalists from England and Pakistan. Therefore the data collected from the respondents included details of age, experience, education and referral resources.

Sample Size

The sample size for this study was 50 female journalists from of each target country. Snowball sampling was applied as part of the selection process of participants for the study alongside Purposive sampling. Survey questionnaires were used as a tool for data collection. In this study two questionnaires were generated due to the difference between the laws of each country regarding harassment and violence against working women.

Study Area

The questionnaires were distributed in different cities and towns in England with the help of multiple organisations. In Pakistan surveys were distributed to multiple media organisations through personal visits, emails and post.

In Pakistan surveys were distributed across five cities: Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Faisalabad and Multan.

The five cities of England which were chosen were London, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol and Cambridge due to their large media industries.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The following section presents the results concerning the demographic characteristics and different kinds of violence faced by women journalists in England and Pakistan via a survey carried out on 50 respondents from each country.

Types of Violence

This section illustrates the high frequency of the various sort of assault encountered by women media correspondents from the chosen countries.

1. Physical Violence

This data concerns the proportion of physical violence experienced by participants from Pakistan and England.

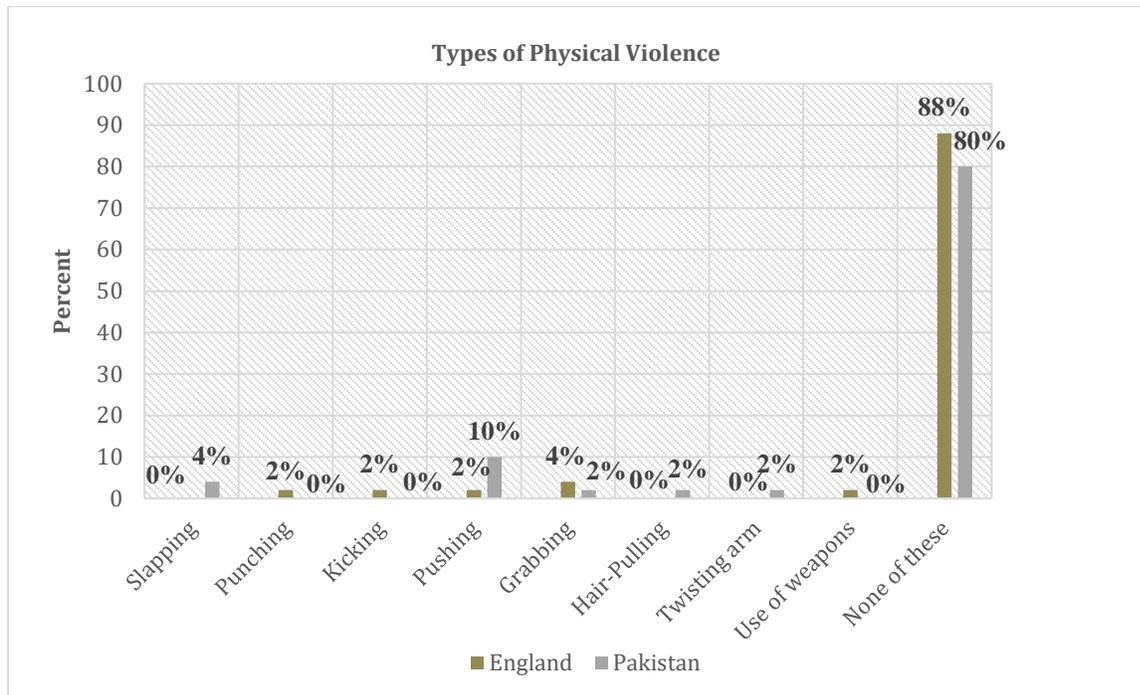


Figure 1: Physical Violence

The following graph demonstrates the ratio of victims of physical violence gauged by intensity. It is evident that the majority of participants from both countries selected the “None of these” option with 88% British female journalists and 80% Pakistani female journalists. 10% of Pakistani participants reported “Pushing” incidents. Other types of physical assault recorded include “Slapping” with 4% and incidents of “Grabbing”, “Hair Pulling” and “Twisting Arm” recording 2% each. Severe physical assaults such as “Punching”, “Kicking” and “Use of weapons” recorded 2%.

According to the final result it is apparent that participants from England experienced more serious physical attacks at work time than the Pakistani respondents.

2. Verbal Violence

The table below records the relative proportion of various kinds of verbal violence encountered by women journalists from both countries.

Types of Verbal Violence

Countries			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
England	Valid	Name Calling	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
		Insulting	8	16.0	16.0	20.0
		Yelling	3	6.0	6.0	26.0
		Using Degrading Language	3	6.0	6.0	32.0
		Bullying	3	6.0	6.0	38.0
		None of these	31	62.0	62.0	100.0
		Total	50	100.0	100.0	
Pakistan	Valid	Name Calling	8	16.0	16.0	16.0
		Insulting	13	26.0	26.0	42.0
		Yelling	4	8.0	8.0	50.0
		Using Degrading Language	9	18.0	18.0	68.0
		Bullying	4	8.0	8.0	76.0
		None of these	12	24.0	24.0	100.0
		Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Verbal violence

The category of “Insulting” recorded a response of 16%. All other categories recorded 6% each. Only 2% of respondents selected “Name Calling” as an option. A large number of participants chose “None of these”, approximately 62%.

In Pakistan “Insulting” was the most selected option, 26%. Following this was 18% of respondents citing “Using Degrading Language”. Instances of “Name Calling” recorded 16%. “Bullying” and “Yelling” recorded 8% each. 24% of participants selected “None of these”.

The study shows that female journalists from England encountered verbal violence considerably less than Pakistani women journalists.

3. Psychological Violence

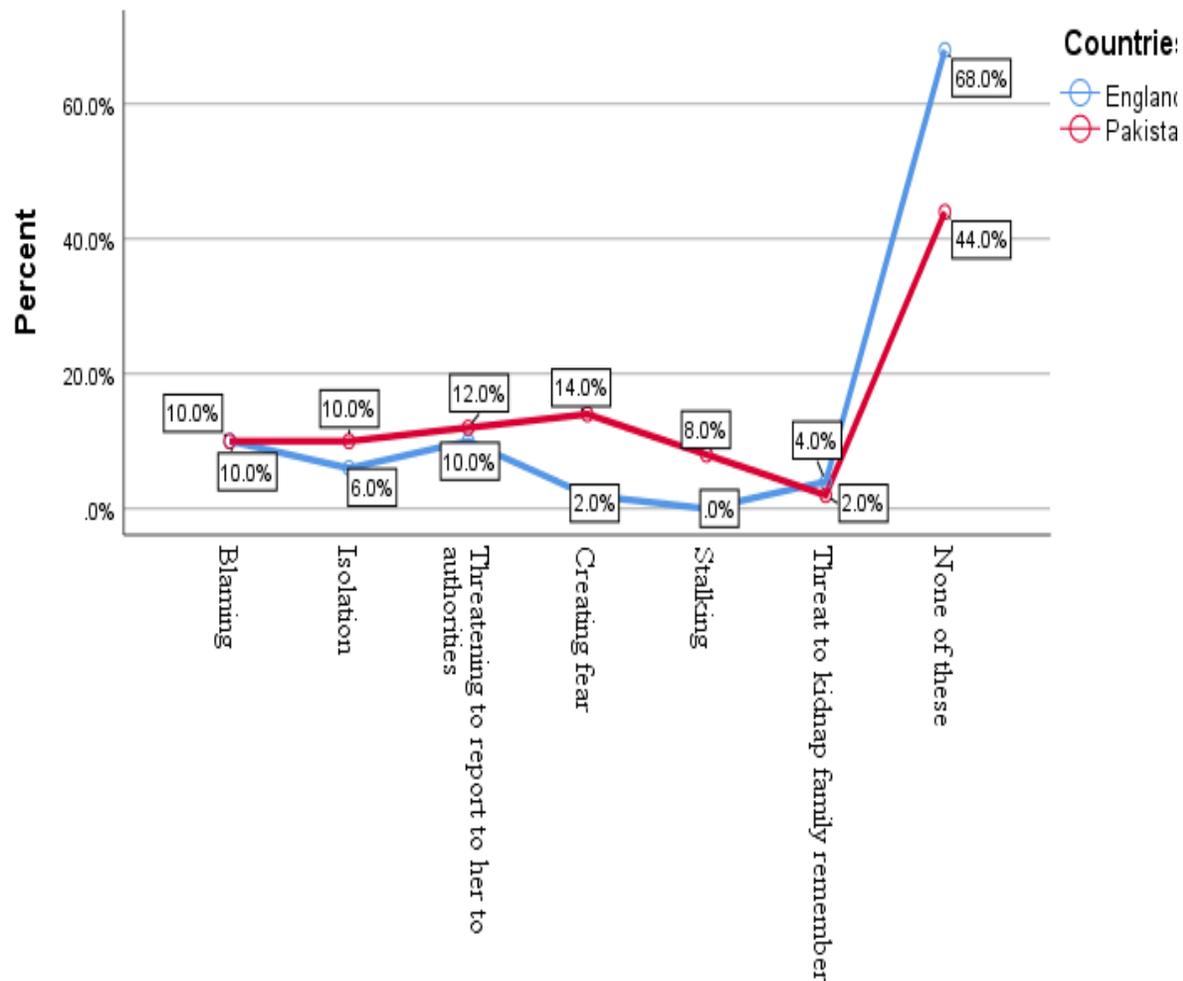


Figure 3: Psychological Violence

The line graph represents a relative analysis of multiple forms of psychological violence experienced by women journalists from both countries. Female journalists from England stated that the top two types of psychological abuse were "Blaming" and "Threatening to report to her to authorities", with each recording 10%. 6% of participants selected "Isolation". "Threat to kidnap family" and "Creating fear" recorded 4% and 2% respectively. 68% of respondents answered with "None of These".

Women journalists from Pakistan were confronted with much psychological violence at different stages of their career. 14% of respondents cited "Creating Fear". 12% of participants recorded "Threatening to report her to authorities". The additional two categories named "Blaming" and "Isolation" each recorded 10%. 8% of women journalists cited "Stalking". Only 2% of respondents picked "Threat to kidnap family". 44% of respondents answered "None of these".

Therefore, the result demonstrates that Pakistani women journalists were confronted with instances of psychological violence more regularly than their English counterparts.

4. Technological Violence

In this category a comparative analysis of various types of technological violence is presented.

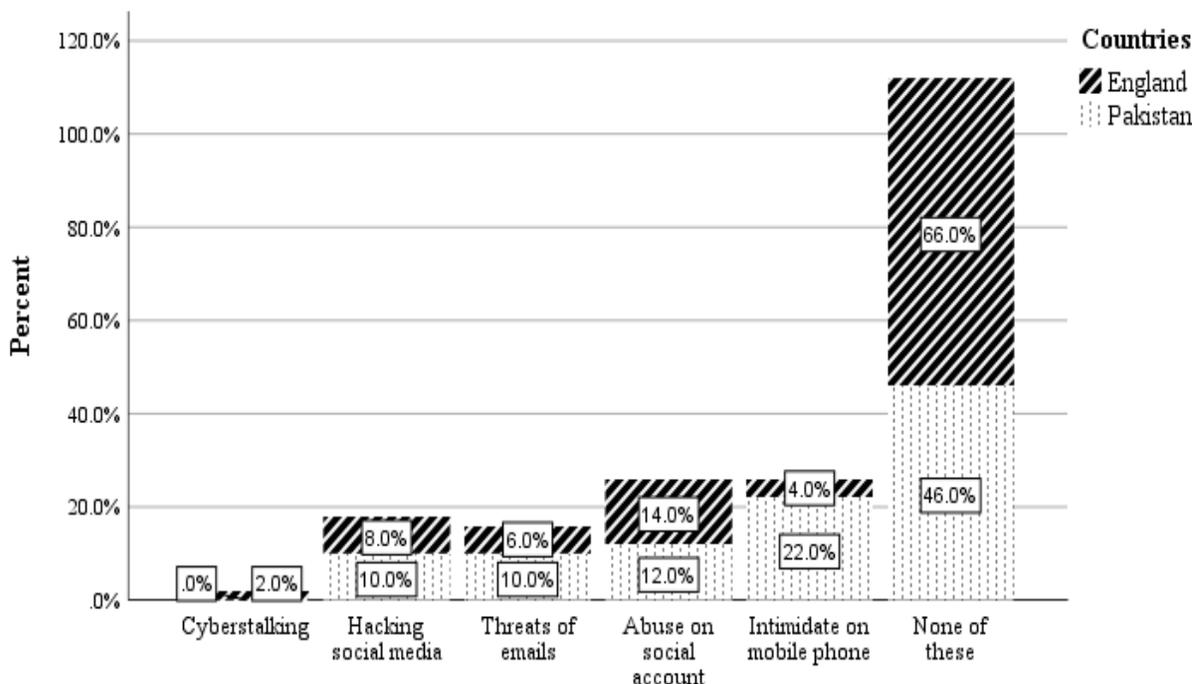


Figure 4: Technological Violence

With regards to incidents of “Cyber Stalking” female journalists in England recorded 2% whereas for Pakistan the figure was 0%. Threats such as “Hacking social media accounts” were relatively equal in each country with 8% in England and 10% in Pakistan. The category of “Abuse on social account” also records similar statistics within each country: 14% in England and 12% in Pakistan. Threatening emails were recorded by 6% of participants from England with Pakistan recording 10%. Large numbers of female journalists in Pakistan recorded “Intimidation via mobile phone”: 22%; compared to this only 4% of female journalists in England cited incidents of this form of technological abuse. Of all participants 66% in England recorded “None of These” while 46% of Pakistani respondents responded in the same manner.

5. Harassment

The following chart demonstrates the cumulative proportions of harassment experienced by women journalists from both England and Pakistan.

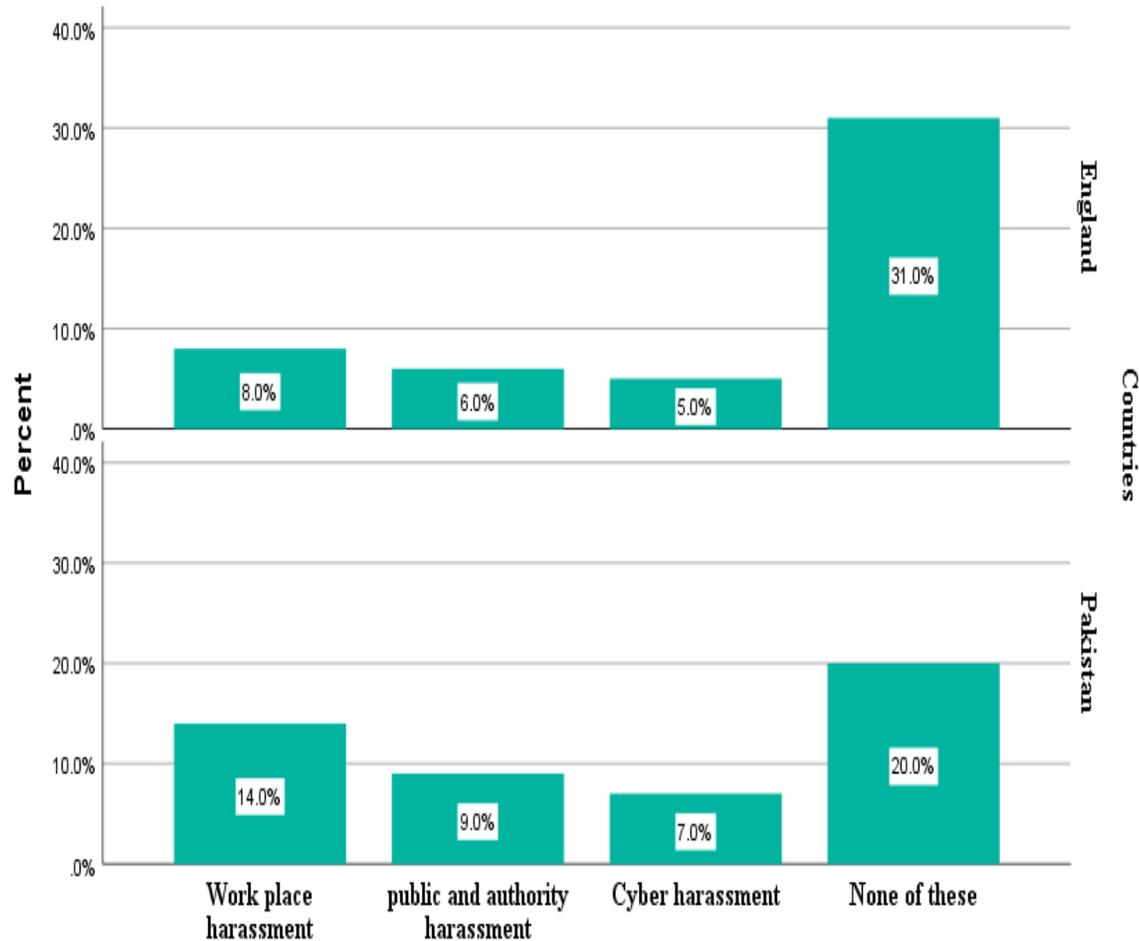


Figure 5: Types of Harassment

The chart illustrates three different types of harassment and the responses of women journalists from Pakistan and England.

“Workplace Harassment” was cited by 14% of Pakistani participants and 8% of English participants. “Public and Authority harassment” affected 9% of Pakistani respondents and 6% of English respondents. “Cyber harassment” was experienced by 7% of Pakistani interviewees and 5% from England. Far more English respondents selected the “None of these” category: 31%. 20% of Pakistani women journalists made the same selection.

6. Spiritual Violence

The chart below illustrates the multiple expressions of religious violence suffered by women journalists from both countries.

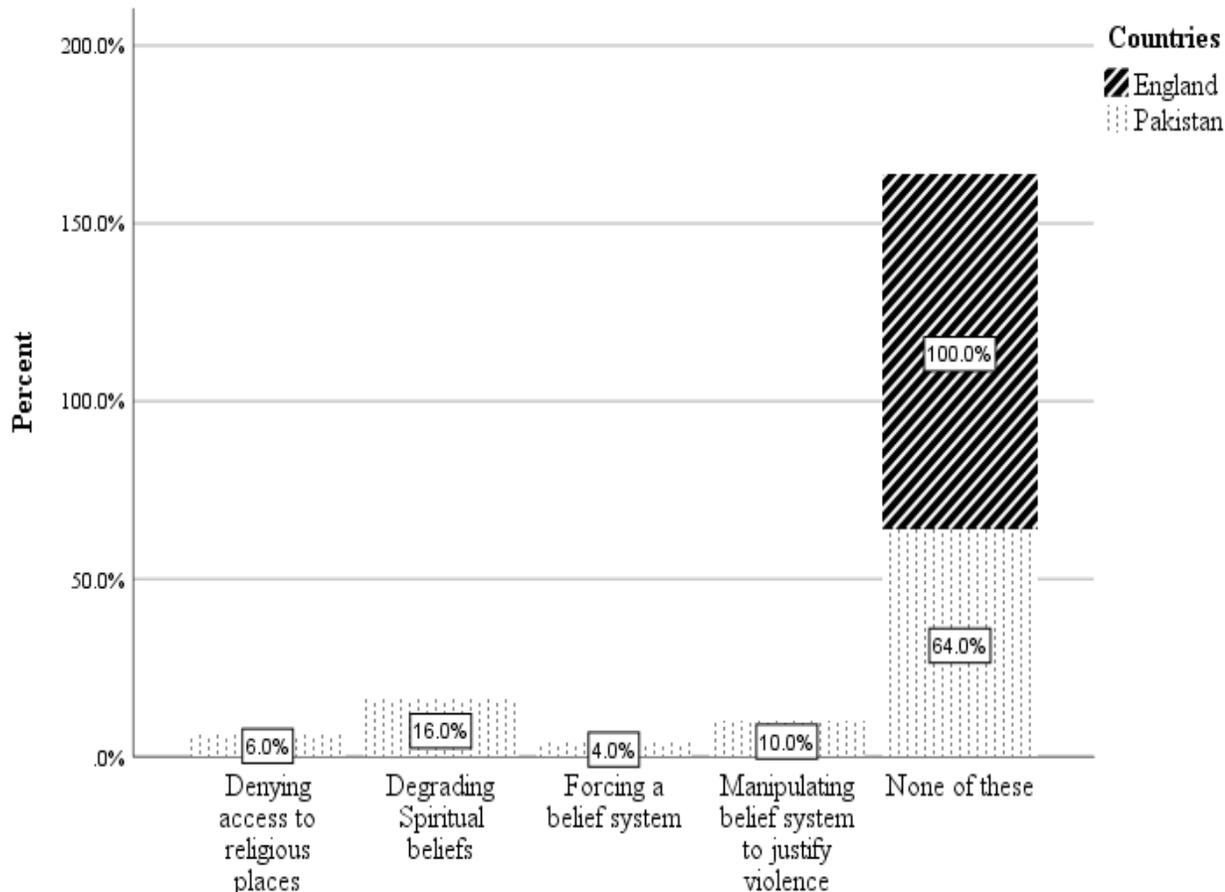


Figure 6: Spiritual Violence

The bar chart illustrates that all participants from England selected the “None of these” option. More than half of respondents from Pakistan selected this option: 64%. 16% of women journalists from Pakistan cited “Degrading spiritual beliefs” and “Manipulating belief system to justify violence” recorded 10%. The rest of the participants responded to “Denying access to religious places” with 6% and a minority of survey takers (4%) chose “Forcing a belief system”. It is evident from data collected that only Pakistani female journalists were victims of religious assault, with 0% being recorded in England.

7. Organisation-Provided Training

In this section multiple methods of training are available to female journalists from both the countries.

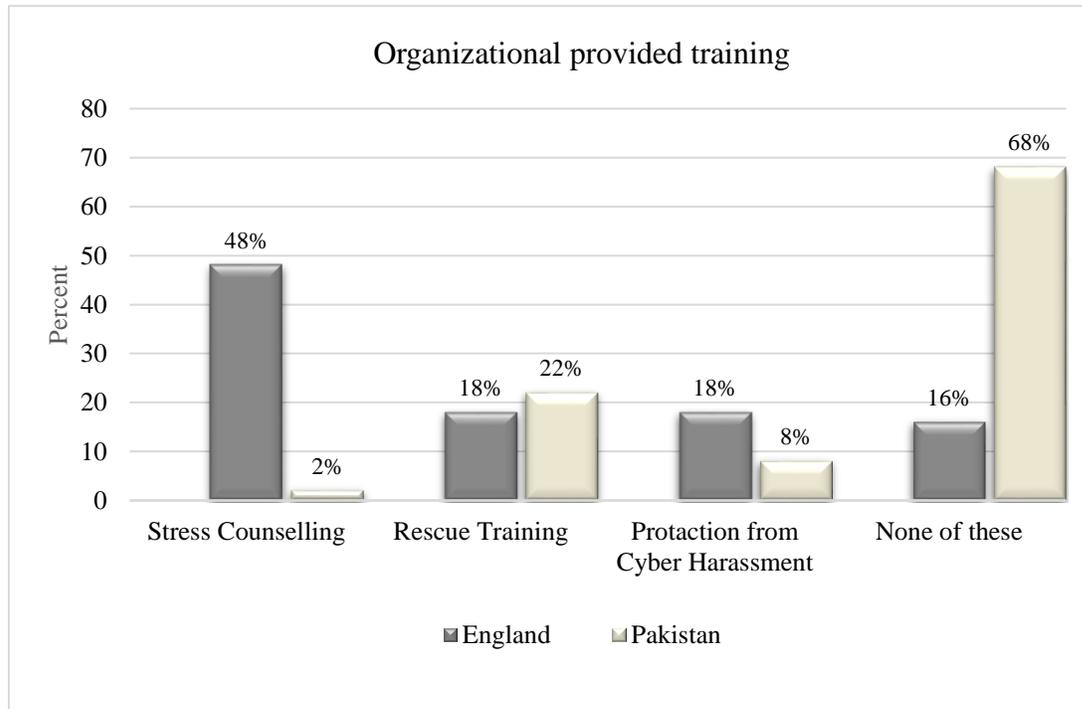


Figure 7: Organisational Provided Training

The bar graph displays data regarding different types of organisation-provided training in England and Pakistan. As shown in graph 48% of female journalists in England have been provided with “Stress counselling “compared with only 2% in Pakistan. While 18% of survey participants from England received rescue training, the number in Pakistan was slightly higher with 22%. The second most common type of training provided by organisations in England was protection from cyber harassment, with 18%. However only 8% of respondents from Pakistan received this kind of training. The majority of the respondents from Pakistan chose “None of these”: with 68%. This is considerably higher than those in England where only 16% of female journalists selected this option.

8. Sexual Harassment

The following illustrates the number of sexual harassment incidents experienced by women journalists in Pakistan and England.

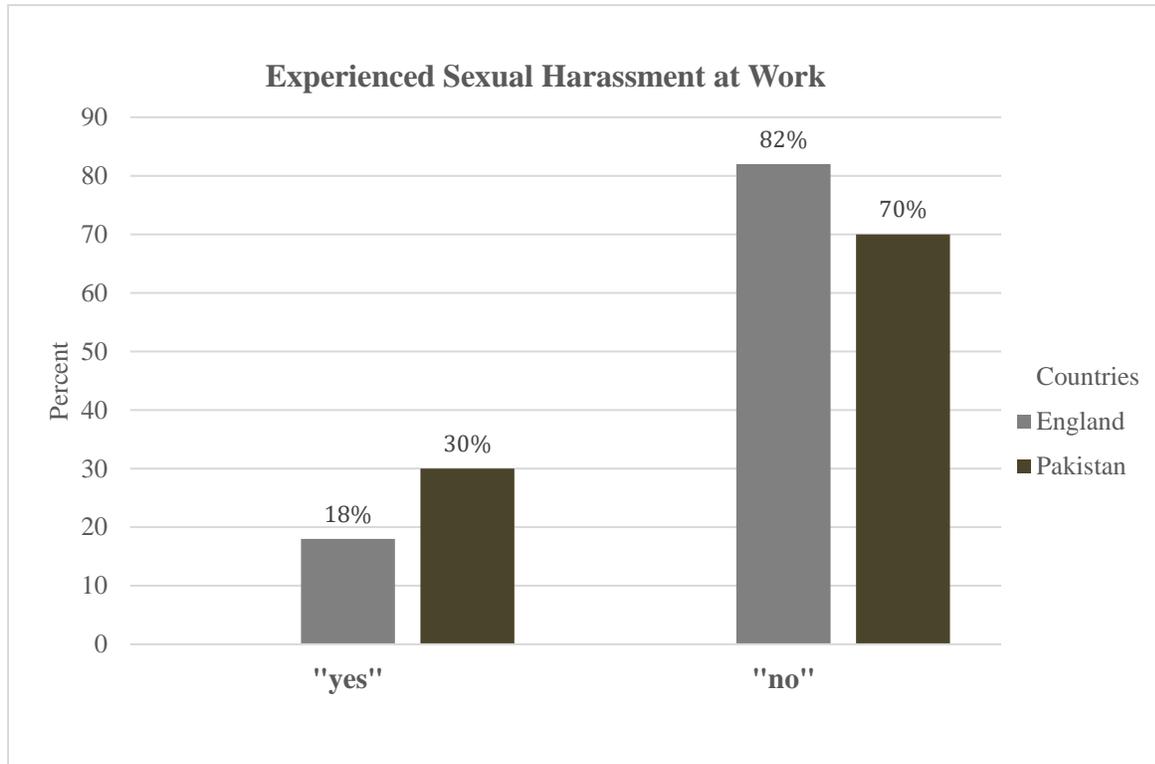


Figure 8: Sexual Harassment

This bar chart shows that 30% of respondents from Pakistan suffered sexual harassment. This is in comparison with 18% of women journalists in England. Most respondents denied having experienced sexual harassment.

9. Knowledge of 2010 Gender Acts in Pakistan and England

The table below presents the level of awareness of the “Sexual Harassment Act 2010” of Pakistani women journalists and “Gender Equality Act 2010” of English women journalists.

Group Statistics					
	Countries	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Knowledge about the Equality Act 2010/Harassment Act 2010	England	50	1.0600	.23990	.03393
	Pakistan	50	1.2400	.43142	.06101

Table 9 a: Knowledge about Equality/Sexual Harassment Act 2010

The mean values comparison from the both countries, i.e. 1.06 for England and 1.24 for Pakistan. It is evident that the mean for both groups is different in values.

Independent Samples Test						
of Variances	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	
Knowledge about the Equality Act 2010/Sexual Harassment Act 2010	Equal variances assumed	33.460	.000	-2.578	98	.011
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.578	76.658	.012

Table 9 b: Knowledge about Equality/Sexual Harassment Act 2010

As can be seen above the P value (0.11) is lower than 0.5. Therefore, there seems to be an equal awareness of the Equality Act 2010 in England and the Sexual Harassment Act 2010 in Pakistan among female journalists from both countries.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to record the instances of violence and harassment experienced by female journalists within both Pakistan and England's media organisations. It is evident from the evidence

provided above that Pakistani women journalists on the whole encounter various forms of assault much more often than their English counterparts. While England seems to be a safer country for women to practice journalism, many still encounter various forms of abuse in their chosen profession.

Most senior female media reporters are collaborating with the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) of Europe. Every year new analyses are conducted in order to gauge and address the levels of harassment and violence towards women journalists in England. Moreover, the journalism departments of several universities and colleges actively seek the protection under law of women journalists. There are many NGOs and organisations operating to assist women journalists with regards to safety and defence. These organisations arrange workshops, seminars and conferences explicitly focusing on violence against women journalists. In comparison only a few organisations in Pakistan represent the rights of female journalists. The digital right foundation is one such organisation but unfortunately most female journalists are not aware of this resource. Such organisations would benefit from working with media organisations in order to highlight the challenges facing female journalists in Pakistan.

This study demonstrates the lack of stress coaching, among other potentially useful interventions, available in Pakistan at present. Stress therapy is not a concept generally recognised within Pakistani society. Sexual harassment is considered as a taboo in Pakistan, to the extent that women are often advised to remain silent on this issue. With the support of counselling many women in Pakistan would have the opportunity to build the self-confidence needed to discuss such important issues. Cyber-harassment is a serious challenge to women in this profession. Appropriate assistance from information technology specialists would enable women journalists to protect themselves from cyber-harassment. This should be a concern at government level as well as organisation level in the media industry of Pakistan.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following are suggestions for securing a safe workplace for female media correspondents. Employers need to conduct routine research to gauge the extent of any harassment problems against women in the workplace. Suitable policies need to be developed which effectively address sexual harassment cases. A zero-tolerance culture must be promoted in order to promote self-esteem and civility.

There should a helpline service provided by the government to support women seeking redress against violence in all its forms. There should be the option to remain anonymous and governments should still be able to take legal action against offenders. Moreover, it is recommended that a government monitoring organisation is formed to regulate media organisations accordingly.

The journalism departments of educational institutions should train female students in self-protection in order to combat cases of abuse. Such training should be delivered to students upon enrolment at each educational establishment. This will help to make a positive impact on their professional goals. Training and information is always valuable in creating a positive workplace environment.

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