



## **NUJ EQUALITY COUNCIL – SAFETY OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS**

Everyone needs to be aware of health and safety issues when carrying out their work and journalists are no exception. In a small number of cases women journalists may be more at risk when carrying out assignments. By taking a few precautions with regard to personal safety these risks can be reduced. Members should also urge employers to make sure that they minimise risk for all employees where possible.

### **Alone in the workplace**

If you work in a small workplace, sometimes you may find yourself working alone. If this is the case your employer should make sure your workplace is secure and that access to the office can be controlled.

Never agree to meet a visitor whilst you are alone in the building and if this should ever happen, be careful not to reveal that you are alone. If necessary make a telephone call after the visitor has arrived, telling someone at the other end of the line that you will get back to them at a certain time after your visitor, Mr X has left. This acts as both an information call and a deterrent. You can also get someone to call you at specific times.

An itinerary of callers or meetings (both in and outside the office) is a useful way of knowing where colleagues are.

At all times avoid situations that could become difficult and never assume it couldn't happen to you.

Never be pressurised into accepting working practices that could put you in danger. These are health and safety issues and your employer has a duty of care towards you. If you are concerned, raise your concerns with your line manager or with somebody in HR. Don't suffer in silence. If you don't get any joy speak to your NUJ rep.

Even in a large workplace, you may find yourself meeting callers in a quiet area. Always make sure that someone else knows where you are and whom you are

seeing. Plan to meet first time visitors in a more public place. Meet them in reception and tell the receptionist where you going to talk to them. If you are unsure about a first-time caller, make sure you have a colleague with you.

One in ten women workers aged 25-34 have been physically attacked by a member of the public and rates for violence against women workers is generally a third higher than for men. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees. The employer has an obligation to ensure that any potential risk of violence is eliminated or controlled. Employers are required to consider the risks facing its staff and decide how these can be prevented or controlled and develop clear guidelines on how to achieve this.

Advice for women workers on working alone can be obtained from the

- Suzy Lamplugh Trust: <http://www.suzylamplugh.org>

### **Meeting someone outside the office**

It is always safer not to meet someone in their own home but if this is the only way they want to talk to you, always go with a colleague. Make sure people back at the office know where you are going and give an estimate of how long you think you will be. If you have doubts and a colleague is not available, trust your instincts and request a telephone interview.

### **Using your car:**

If you are setting out for a location that is not known to you, plan the route, keep a map or sat nav handy so you don't have to ask for directions, let other colleagues know where you are going and approximately how long it should take.

The vehicle should be checked that it has enough fuel for the journey and should be in a good condition. Make sure your mobile phone is fully charged in case of emergencies. Keep an emergency number on speed dial just in case.

Make sure you are a member of a breakdown organisation and keep the number on your mobile or on the back of your tax disc so you can find it easily.

Poorly lit car parks should be avoided and keep car doors locked even whilst driving. Keep your bag out of sight whilst driving. Make a note of where you have left your car so you can find it quickly when you return. This is particular important in multi-storey car parks, so remember the floor and where the car is parked. If the car-park is badly lit and you will be coming back at night – find another, safer place to park.

Let other people know if your travel plans change.

### **Using public transport, taxis or minicabs:**

Where possible, book a taxi or a minicab in advance. Use the same company as much as possible and ask for the name of the driver. Confirm this when they arrive. Carry

the number with you. If you are in an unusual location, dial telephone directories and ask for a local number.

Only hail a hackney carriage cab (black cab) in the street. Licensed minicabs cannot be hailed as they must be pre-booked. A driver's ID will be displayed and the vehicle will have a license displayed on it. Any other car that stops will be illegal, uninsured and potentially dangerous.

If you are ordering a cab in a public place, keep your voice down. Anyone could pretend to be your cab.

Sit in the back of the car.

If you talk to the driver don't give out any personal details.

If you feel worried, trust your instincts and ask the driver to stop in a busy area and get out of the car.

If the driver won't stop, use your mobile to call the police and wave at other drivers and pedestrians.

Do not put up with intimidating behaviour from taxi drivers. It is always advisable to get the number of the cab when you get in so you can report any disturbing behaviour. Keep the numbers for your transport booking team or the taxi firm despatcher handy until the end of your journey and don't be afraid to use it.

### **Buses and Trains:**

If you are travelling by train late at night, remain alert. Do not use your mobile phone unless absolutely necessary. Make sure the carriage you choose is busy with people. Do not stay in an empty carriage but make your way to a carriage with other people.

If travelling by bus, if possible, sit in a seat nearest the driver. If you know your stop is in a remote area, get someone to meet you or get off in a busier area and get a cab for the remainder of the journey.

### **Women reporting in war zones**

More and more women are reporting from war zones. All journalists need to make the proper preparation before taking an assignment in a war zone. Employers should provide training for staff who are likely to go into a hostile environment and this should include personal security training including battlefield training, first aid and what to do if people turn aggressive.

As well as the obvious dangers involved in the conflict areas; women may face other problems such as sexual harassment, intimidation and in some cases, physical assault. It is important to find out about local cultural attitudes. In some countries women with wet hair, for example, are considered to be prostitutes. Women will

also need to remember that in some countries men will not shake hands with women. Sanitary provisions may not be available so if you are going to be away for a while, make sure you have enough with you.

Awareness of cultural norms with regard to dress is important as well as a realisation that a woman journalist in some countries may not be given the same respect as a male reporter. Some women war reporters have experienced being pushed by young boys when trying to conduct an interview and some women have felt that they have not been taken seriously by an interviewee or have been disconcerted by a reluctance to maintain eye contact. Other female journalists have also been spat on. However, this is not always the case and many women reporters have stated that they have been able to operate as well as male journalists.

Anyone reporting in a war zone needs to be tough and resourceful and unfazed by harsh, sometimes dirty conditions without running water and a diet that may only consist of rice and beans.

At all times it is important for women journalists to consider safety and to risk-assess assignments and insist on proper training and equipment from employers. Freelancers should make sure that they obtain training and appropriate equipment before entering war zones. Insurance should be obtained wherever possible and it is important that NUJ members contact the NUJ's Freelance Department before accepting any assignment which they believe may be dangerous.

Report back with your findings and recommendations from the field in your debrief back at base. Risk Assessment teams are constantly upgrading their advice and your input makes it easier for the next reporter in the field. If you have had a particularly bad experience you may need counselling – this should be made available to you by an employer and further information can be found at the Dart Centre, details below.

Detailed information on reporting war zones can be found on the following websites:

- International News Safety Institute: (INSI) (set up by the International Federation of Journalists) - <http://www.newssafety.com/index.htm>
- Committee to Protect Journalists: <http://www.cpj.org/reports/2003/02/journalist-safety-guide.php>
- The Rory Peck Trust provides information for freelance journalists: <http://www.rorypecktrust.org/page/3023/Resources>
- Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma provides information on the impact of post traumatic stress on journalists - <http://dartcenter.org/topic/self-care>.

### **Reporting Riots and Civil Disorder**

Simple procedures can make the difference between dangerous situations and safe working.

As with reporting from war zones, the same principles of planning ahead and assessing risks apply. Just because the riot or civil unrest is in your local town, this doesn't mean that you may not be at risk. Journalists are finding that they are increasingly open to attacks from both police and demonstrators so you need to remain alert.

- Make sure you remain aware of your situation and remember that peaceful crowds can soon become dangerous. If there is ethnic conflict you may need to know about safe and unsafe areas and it is important to find out as much as possible before you set out. Before the demonstration starts it is useful to reconnoitre the area to plan routes out of the area.
- If you are working with a team you may become separated. It is therefore important to pre-arrange contact points and times in case mobile phones are damaged or lost.
- Pre-load your mobile with an emergency number on the speed dial facility.
- Carry your press ID, if you think this may attract unwanted attention, only show it when you believe it is safe to do so, but it keep it accessible so you can show it quickly.
- Wear loose clothing with long sleeves, trousers. Make sure you wear sensible footwear that will protect your toes and your clothes are appropriate for all weathers. Check the weather forecast and carry a thin mac if necessary.
- If police use a "kettling" procedure you may be stuck for hours in the same area, so make sure you have sufficient food and drink
- Carry a small backpack with your snack, water and a small first aid kit. You may want to have a small towel which you can damp with water, if tear gas is used.
- If tear gas is likely to be used, position yourself, as far as possible, upwind.
- Be careful of lanyards as these can be caught up in a crowd.
- Remain aware of what is happening around you, even if you are interviewing – sometimes crowds can surge suddenly and you can find yourself caught up in the middle of a mêlée which can be frightening and dangerous.
- Always try to attend a demonstration with another colleague. If something does happen to you, it will be useful to have a witness.