



NUJ Members' Safety Survey

November 2020

Introduction

Journalists in the UK have been physically assaulted; they have been punched, threatened with knives, forcibly detained, kicked and spat at. NUJ members have received online or offline death threats, rape threats and other threats to physically harm them, their families and their homes.

Respondents to the NUJ members' survey on safety commend the union's track record on supporting and campaigning for journalists and journalism. Members also call on a variety of stakeholders to take further action to protect and safeguard journalists.

This research initiative was prompted by a debate and motion agreed at the union's last delegate meeting (DM) in 2018 and we have combined this work with other initiatives including the establishment of the UK government's National Safety Committee and programme of work.

This report is based on the responses to an online questionnaire sent to all UK-based NUJ members in September/October 2020. The survey asked questions about different types of abuse and harassment and asked for suggestions and recommendations on how to tackle the problems identified. In addition to the survey responses, various meetings and discussions with NUJ members have been held and have fed into the recommendations presented in this report.

Some of the details provided by NUJ members in response to the survey are linked to working outside of the UK and where these issues have been identified they will be raised with the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ).

Key findings

- 98% of respondents agreed those in public office, including politicians, have a leadership role to play in maintaining high levels of public discourse and should avoid dismissing journalistic work as fake news and should not restrict media access
- 97% of respondents agreed that disinformation and fake news undermines trust in journalism and increases hostility towards journalists
- 96% of respondents said that abuse and harassment risks silencing journalists and censoring debate
- 94% of respondents agreed that the current polarisation of debate and public discourse in the UK has impacted adversely on the safety of journalists

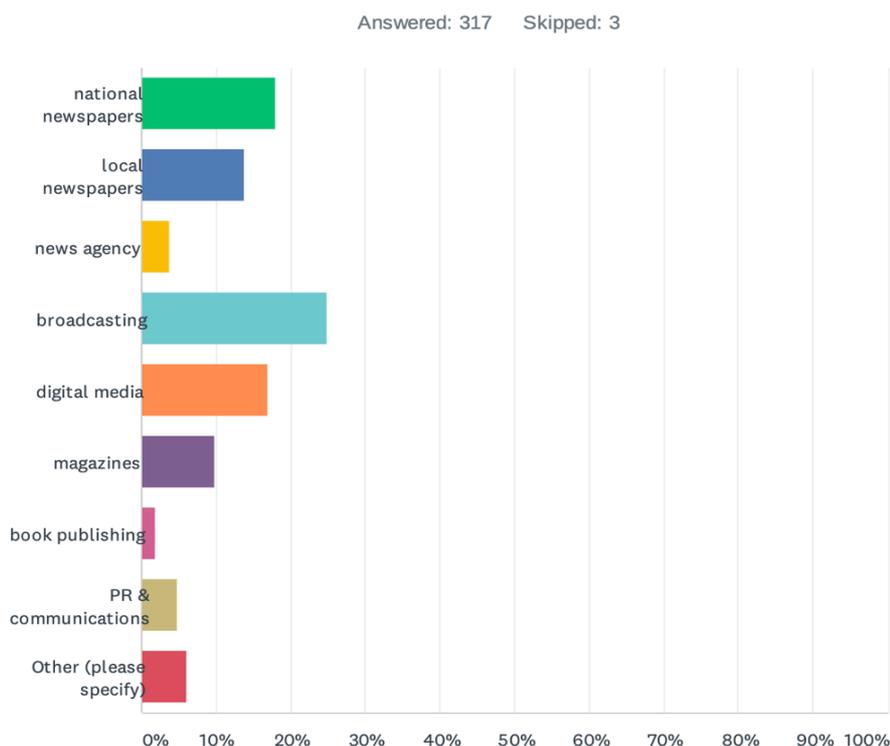
- 93% of respondents said social media platforms do not robustly implement their own policies intended to deter and stop abuse
- 89% of respondents said their employer had not provided any training to deal with harassment and abuse
- 88% of respondents said that social media platforms should do more to combat abuse and harassment
- 78% of survey respondents agreed that “abuse and harassment has become normalised and seen as part of the job”
- 64% of respondents said they had not reported abuse to their employer
- 56% of respondents when asked about policies in place to deal with safety and protection issues said they did not know if their media employer had any safety policies
- 51% of all respondents said they had experienced online abuse in the last year

The survey respondents

The NUJ safety survey was sent to all UK based members and 319 people completed the survey, the respondents were split nearly equally between staff/employees (48%) and freelance (52%) workers.

NUJ members from across different sectors of the media industry responded to the survey questions, the highest number of respondents were from the broadcasting sector (25%) followed by national newspapers (18%) and digital media (17%). The full breakdown of respondents per sector is included below:

Q2 What sector of the industry do you largely work in?



The types of work conducted by the respondents included:

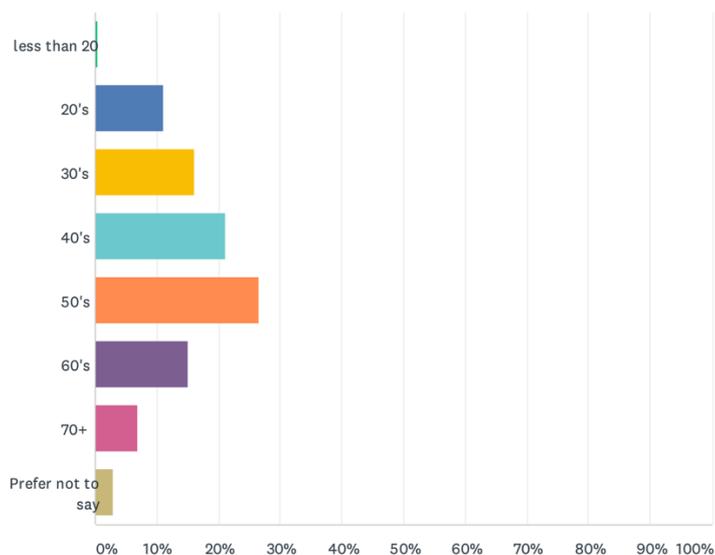
Photography	11.91%
Videography	1.57%
Reporting	32.60%
Presenter	3.13%
Editing	8.78%
Writing	21.94%
Content curator	1.88%
Sub-editor	5.33%
Communications	2.19%
Design	0.31%
Other (please specify)	10.34%

The predominate category of work listed as ‘other’ in the above table was identified as a producer role. Respondents were also asked to provide information about their gender, ethnicity and age. Out of all the respondents: 62% identified as male and 35% as female.

Most identified themselves as British (39%) or English (24%), then as Scottish (8%), Irish (4%) and Northern Irish (3%). A significant number of respondents identified as other (11%). The survey had 5% of respondents preferring not to identify their ethnicity and there were small numbers of respondents from a large range of ethnic backgrounds. Those representing more than 1% of respondents included Arab and Welsh ethnicities. The age range of survey respondents included:

Q44 What is your age range?

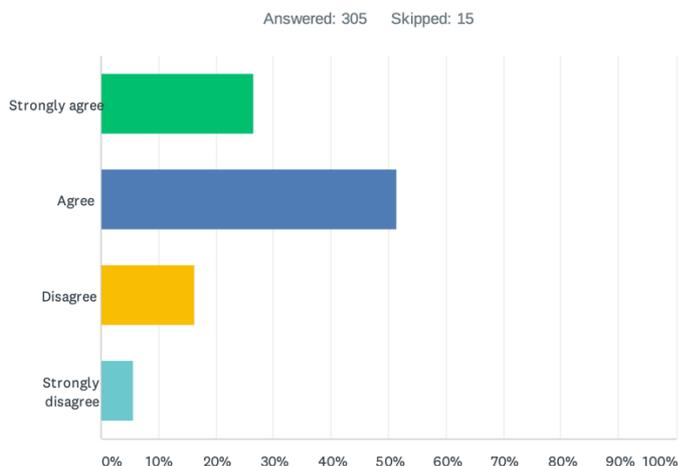
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Part of the job?

An overwhelming number of respondents (78%) agreed that “abuse and harassment has become normalised and seen as part of the job”.

Q13 To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Abuse and harassment has become normalised and seen as part of the job."



Changing levels of harassment and abuse

The survey asked about changes to levels of harassment over time: 62% of respondents said levels of harassment had stayed the same over the last year and 30% of respondents said levels of online harassment had increased (slightly or greatly) over the last year.

Social media - harassment and abuse

In response to a question about social media usage: 75% of respondents said they have a work-focused social media presence with 87% of respondents having a Twitter account, 49% with a Facebook account and 54% have a LinkedIn account.

When asked about online harassment and abuse within the last year and connected to work: 51% of all respondents said they had experienced online abuse in the last year and out of those 31% of respondent experienced it infrequently and 20% experienced it on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Violence, assault and on/offline physical threats

The overwhelming number of respondents (96%) strongly agree or agree that abuse and harassment risks silencing journalists and censoring debate.

A small proportion of NUJ members reported a shocking range of threats and attacks: 21% of respondents reported physical assaults or attacks and 27% of respondents said they had experienced physical threats.

NUJ members reported physical attacks and said:

"Got attacked on a number of occasions, had shots fired at house, have had pets killed."

"Knife held to my throat"

"Punched, pushed, kicked"

"Threatened with knives, hit with glass bottles, all sorts."

"Was held prisoner on an isolated farm"

"I was stalked and beaten up."

"Assaulted and equipment damaged."

"My house was firebombed twice in 2017. I had to move."

"Mugged quite a few times when on assignments alone."

"Several assaults when I was a tabloid crime reporter."

"Punched in the face and camera damaged on 'Yorkshire patriots' demonstration"

"Assault at 'statue defenders' protest, admitted to hospital"

"Assaulted at a march in London requiring hospital treatment"

"A woman assaulted me at the scene of an incident in front of police, who did nothing if not deterring me from reporting her."

"Spat at during demonstration in London."

"Spat at by angry person on a door knock"

"Eggs thrown while filming"

"I have a scar on my face from covering a riot situation and on one occasion had to be escorted from a court building by security because I was surrounded by a mob."

"Attacked by the mother of a fire victim when I was sent on a 'death knock' as a junior reporter on a weekly paper."

NUJ members reported threats of violence and said:

“There was a person jailed for stalking me who used my public profile as part of the campaign of intimidation against me. I have had to leave home on occasions due to death threats and my house has had to be fitted with extra security measures such as cameras and a reinforced door”

“Threatened at crime scene by father of killer. Threatened at court by his relatives”

“Not recently but we’ve had threats to set fire to the office and we’ve had angry people in reception.”

“I work as a court reporter and have received threats from people I’ve reported on.”

“I was reporting from a crown court trial. A witness sent me a threatening message. I had to report the incident to the police.”

“One person who appeared in court found my address and made threats.”

“Police warning of paramilitary threat”

“I’ve been doxed and threatened to be shot.”

“My photograph has been circulated on far-right websites with threats to assault me.”

“Call for me to be killed in newspaper’s comments.”

NUJ members also described threats to their homes and families:

“My home address was posted on the wall in pub toilets by football hooligans.”

“I experience online stalking, and the stalker repeatedly attempts to contact my family, friends and children. If blocked on social media, they just change the account name or set up a new one and carry on.”

“My home address has been published online, I had to move after my house was targeted by the far-right.”

“Letters to my home threatening family members.”

“I got a call to say ‘I know where you live’.”

“I was told to be careful about what I said on social media because what I say may affect my husband.”

When questioned about physical assaults or attacks the following examples were provided by NUJ members:

- Grabbed by the throat, threatened with a knife
- Detained and threatened
- Spat at, bottled, stones/eggs thrown
- Slapped, punched, pushed, grabbed, kicked and/or beaten up
- Home attacked and/or targeted, pets killed
- Assaulted in a pub toilet, on a train, outside court and/or in the street
- Stalking/being followed in the street
- Chased out of a pub and/or removed from a building
- Attempts to physically block photos and/or break camera
- Mugged while out on assignment
- Police baton injury, police rubber bullet injury
- Vehicle rammed by police, hit by police car, grabbed by police
- Assaulted at demonstrations and requiring hospital treatment

The types of threats NUJ members have experienced included:

- Death threats and/or rape/gang rape threats
- Threats to punch, shoot and physically assault a journalist
- Stopped near home and threatened
- Threatened in local shop and/or local event
- Threats to follow the person home
- Threats linked to perpetrators knowing a journalists' home address
- Advertising journalists' home address online and/or in public places
- Threats to specific family members including husband and children
- Attempts to contact family members and friends
- Death threat to family and/or letters sent to home address threatening family
- Screenshots of home address taken from google maps and circulated on social media
- Threats to set fire to the office and/or threats to come to the office
- People turning up at the workplace
- Threats outside court or linked to court reporting
- Threats at demonstrations
- Threats at a murder scene and/or crime scene
- Threats in response to taking photos
- Threats via calls or letters to the office
- Threats via emails or social media
- Online stalking and doxing
- Circulating photographs accompanied by threats via far-right networks and websites
- Identified by photo meta data, contacted and threatened
- Note left on car
- Threatened with message sent via colleague
- Allegations of involvement in child abuse
- Threats of retribution linked to exposing criminal activity

Identifying the perpetrators

NUJ members said:

“We tried to ignore a drunk whilst conducting an interview at a railway station, he grabbed me by the throat. I have also twice been manhandled out of the way by minders to leaders of political parties. Both minders went on to become MPs.”

“When I was working at a local newspaper on several occasions councillors would try to intimidate me into not reporting their wrongdoings.”

“People or ‘minders’ being photographed or being shot in the street or other public places who attempt to spoil or disrupt the photography process or even try and smash the camera.”

“Policeman grabbed me and removed me from scene I was filming despite identifying myself”

When survey respondents were asked about working in public spaces: 56% said the public were the most likely perpetrators to attempt to deter journalists from their work, 56% said security guards and 51% said police.

NUJ members testimony highlighted paramilitaries, criminals, managers at work, politicians and political party activists as perpetrators involved in attacks or threats. Others who have attempted to deter journalists from working also included lawyers, celebrities, politicians or political minders, PR staff or press officers, businesspeople, firefighters, court clerks and far-right activists.

The impact of violence and threats

“When I had death threats and rape threats for one piece I wrote, nobody understood how bad it was. The abusers found me on every platform, there were thousands of abusive messages and I was afraid for my family that I would be doxed (have my address posted online). The editor and my desk editor didn’t even ask if I was ok and they obviously knew how bad it was because they were getting messages calling for me to be sacked. I felt completely alone. There was nobody to talk to and no procedure to follow. This was a few years ago now. I’m good at advising young reporters who suffer the same thing and I hope that I help but I shouldn’t have had to learn the hard way.”

More than half (55%) of the respondents said the abuse had affected their wellbeing and mental health and 48% said the abuse had made them fearful or anxious.

Just over a quarter (26%) of respondents said they had made changes to the way they work in response to violence, threats, abuse and/or harassment. In addition, 19% of respondents said they had made changes to their home and/or personal life.

NUJ members said:

“The impact has profoundly affected my relationships with my family and friends - shock, anxiety and depression caused by this abuse.”

“Family members approached (daughter at school gates) asked if her dad had been arrested.”

“I was doxed by a men’s rights activist who included details of my family members in their post, this caused a lot of worry for my family. I’ve recently had a prominent far-right activist try to add my brother on Facebook, presumably so they could find photographs of me.”

“My partner had suffered online abuse. My children have a heightened awareness of privacy on social media and are unable to have a public presence on it in the way their peers do, or publicly have their achievements celebrated. We do everything possible to prevent the stalker from knowing where we live or being able to contact our children.”

“I was sent an anonymous letter when my baby was born saying horrific things about me and my child.”

“Family had to care for me after an assault.”

“I have grown up children who have seen some of the more graphic sexual abuse and my daughter had to stay in a hotel with me during her exams because I was under a death threat.”

The abuse and harassment had an impact on 22% of respondents’ families and when asked if the harassment and abuse had ever made respondents feel like leaving the industry 15% said yes and 15% said sometimes.

Themes of media coverage linked to abuse

Nearly half of the survey respondents (47%) reported experiencing abuse or threats related to the subject or content of their work.

NUJ members said:

“Covid reporting is getting much more difficult, with targeted abuse and ‘fake news’ accusations.”

“If you tweet about Brexit you get loads of abuse and get accused of bias, whichever way the story is looking”

“I have been specifically targeted for my work uncovering racism in football”

“When I reported on Dominic Cummings cottage not having planning permission and it went viral, I received hundreds of threats. When I report on the mask protestors I’ve been inundated with threats and abuse”

“Covering political events in Northern Ireland”

“Even weather stories I get horrendous messages”

“People of certain political persuasions dismiss your reporting as fake news”

“The idea that anyone who works for the BBC is fair game”

NUJ members highlighted themes that are linked to online or offline threats, violence, abuse and harassment:

- Politicians (local and national), parliamentary candidates, local councils, politics, political events, the US president and Scottish nationalism
- Criminal activity, terrorism, paramilitaries, rogue trading and drugs
- Court and inquest reports
- Lobbyists
- Allegations of child abuse
- Exposing sexual predators, sexual violence, domestic violence and sexual abuse
- Racism, islamophobia, sexism and homophobia
- Sports including football and football fans
- Brexit
- Coronavirus and face masks
- Parenting
- Pornography
- Trans issues
- Fracking and the climate crisis
- Video games
- Israel and Palestine, Syria, Iraq and the Middle East
- Science, scientific drug trials, vaccinations, genetics, scientific fraud, medicines
- Religion
- Local community disputes
- Sectarianism
- White supremacy and the far right
- Colonial history
- Reviews or opinion/comment pieces
- Taking photographs
- Covering protests
- Accusations linked to bias, irresponsible reporting and working for the BBC

Changes to ways of working

Examples were provided by NUJ members about the changes they have made at work, at home or in their personal life as a result of violence, threats, abuse and harassment included:

- Change route to work and/or route to court, vary routine and timetable
- Checking vehicles in the street
- Park closer to event/work
- Avoid certain locations, don't work in public
- Moved home and/or moved away from Northern Ireland
- Conceal identity, conceal home address
- Work via company so to conceal identity
- Carry less equipment
- Wear protective clothing, stab vest, carry safety equipment
- Using long lens, use phone instead of camera, hide microphone
- Hide BBC badge and/or press card
- Decline TV appearances, don't accept invitations to speak at public events
- Don't put CV online
- Stopped reporting on certain subjects
- Stopped going to events
- Stopped lone working
- Dropped byline, use pseudonym
- Don't work for titles with noxious commenting communities
- Change phone and/or email address
- Delete social media accounts, stop posting on social media, change social media account, change/tighten privacy settings, don't tweet locations
- Employ private security, increased home security (e.g. alarms, doors and windows), CCTV and security cameras installed
- Anti-firebomb devise and firearm
- Get specialist insurance
- More cautious of taking photos and doing vox pops
- Taken voluntary redundancy, quit/leave job
- Going ex-directory and off the electoral roll
- Withholding consent for photographs of journalists' children and/or publishing children's names
- Self-censorship

In terms of the threats that are linked to protected characteristics: 18% of respondents said they had experienced abuse or threats related to their gender, 13% experienced abuse or threats related to their age, 10% of respondents had experienced abuse or threats related to their ethnicity and 8% of respondents had experienced abuse or threats related to their sexuality.

Reporting abuse to employers, police and social media platforms

Most respondents (64%) said they had not reported the abuse to their employer. Reasons why the abuse had not been reported included:

- Was not worth the bother, they won't listen
- There is nothing they can do
- They won't take any action
- There are no procedures in place
- They can't police social media platforms
- I just dealt with it myself
- Wasn't serious enough/wasn't too bad
- Freelance status, self-employed and/or precarious employment

NUJ members said:

"I'm a freelance reporter and there is no legal obligation for the outlets I write for to support me."

"I felt unable to discuss personal matters with them [the employer] and there has been no clear chain of reporting. I had reported online stalking to previous management and tech support, but not to the new management since the takeover of the company. As one of few staff working remotely, I've felt my job has been more precarious, and did not wish to add further complications."

"Invariably what I've suffered is standard when you're a woman in sports journalism."

"They know that abuse on Twitter is widespread and toxic, but my employer is concerned that replying to abuse often makes it worse. Also virtually everyone in our organisation who is on twitter is subject to it. It's part and parcel of audience interaction."

When asked if an employer was supportive when an NUJ member had attempted to report abuse: 23% of respondents said yes and 5% said no. Examples of supportive action taken by media employers included:

- Referral to the mental health team
- Circulated information about the support available
- Complaints were submitted to the social media platform
- They were interested in monitoring what was happening
- Legal letter issued by the BBC threatening prosecution of the perpetrator

Comments from respondents linked to action by employers that was not supportive included:

- Online abuse is seen as inevitable
- Threatened with the sack as the trolls were seen as affecting the reputation of the company
- I was forced to leave my job
- I was made redundant as a result of voicing my concerns
- My next contract was cancelled

When asked about reporting abuse to the police: 11% of the survey respondents said they had reported incidents to the police and when asked if the police were supportive and helpful 4% said yes and 4% said no.

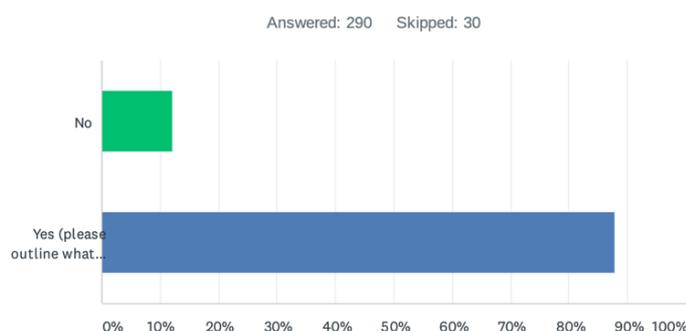
“Police Scotland told me if I’m going to write about politics or my religion, I should expect a strong reaction and [they] told me I should consider what I write about”

Responses related to reporting incidents to the police included:

- Officers seemed helpful but the system is not
- There is no consistent policy
- I was told to expect it, the police can be dismissive
- I was told they have no powers of enforcement
- The usual response is they just log the incident
- They brought one perpetrator to court, others were questioned, another was arrested

The survey found that 34% of respondents had reported abuse to social media platforms and 80% said that reporting the abuse had not made any difference. Furthermore, an overwhelming number of respondents (93%) said social media platforms do not robustly implement their own policies intended to deter and stop abuse, and an overwhelming number of respondents (88%) said that social media platforms should do more to combat abuse and harassment.

Q25 Should social media platforms be doing more to combat abuse and harassment of users?



Suggestions from respondents about what social media platforms could do to tackle abuse and harassment included:

- Be more proactive, investigate accounts
- Faster response rates
- Stop anonymous accounts and stop people hiding behind fake names
- Ban repeat abusers
- Pay more attention and offer support to women and people of colour
- Better admin, moderation and monitoring including tackling racist, extremist or hateful content
- Stop the spread of fake news
- Stop the creation of accounts set up to attack journalists
- Provide verification status for journalists on twitter
- Permanent ISP bans
- Stricter rules/code of conduct that is enforced
- Any accounts linked to threats to kill should be removed
- Warning and then removing abusive accounts and content
- Make account users sign a code of practice/behaviour
- Provide a direct route to identify and fast track media complaints
- Use more human moderators and have the staff available to deal with complaints
- Track and trace repeat offenders
- Referral to local police and provide evidence
- Allow comments to be switched off on newspaper posts on Facebook
- Social media platforms should have to adhere to the same legal obligations as publishers

NUJ members said:

“Just taking reports of harassment or abuse seriously to begin with would be a start. People think they can say what they like as there will be no comeback.”

“Ideally they should be prepared to lose users/traffic in the interests of maintaining a safer environment for all.”

“Twitter are hopeless, they have very good guidelines regarding abuse but they simply don’t follow them. Even after there was a person prosecuted for abusing me the threats, abusive and sexual content remained and still remains online.”

“If you are a journalist you should be able to register as a journalist, with an easier way of being ‘accredited’ with a blue tick which should then afford your account closer monitoring for harassment.”

“Employ real people rather than artificial intelligence, ability to escalate to a real person, get smarter people on the ball with the ability to see the wider picture of how a certain tweet or comment constitutes abuse.”

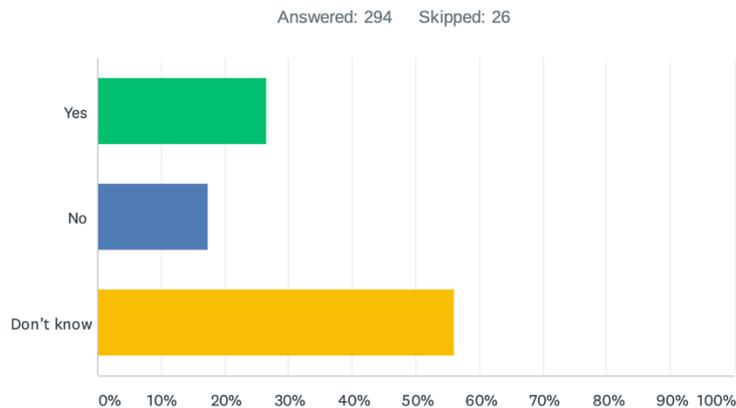
Employer policies and practices

“Trolls in the reader’s comments section are becoming bolder, more threatening and more vicious and it is having a detrimental effect on the confidence of reporters, particularly trainees and newly qualified reporters who may lack experience. The issue is compounded by the fact that many big corps such as Newsquest, have laid off many of their more experienced sub editors and sports/feature writers meaning there are less experienced hands in the newsroom to deal with this level of aggression.”

“I bet I’m not the only woman journalist to have unthinkingly agreed to meet an unknown source in an isolated place, alone, only to realise later that colleagues have died like that.”

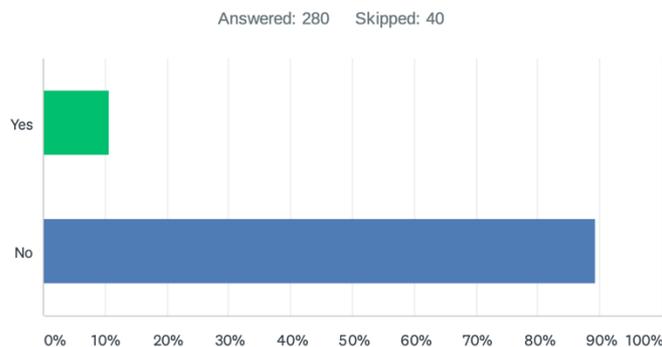
When asked about policies in place to deal with safety and protection issues, the majority of respondents (56%) said they did not know if there was a safety and protection of journalists policy in place at work.

Q19 Does your employer/engager have a policy in place to deal with your safety and protecting you from threats or abuse?



Most respondents (65%) said they felt that their line manager had safety at work as part of their job responsibilities but an overwhelming majority of respondents (89%) said their employer had not provided any training to deal with harassment and abuse.

Q21 Has your employer/engager provided training in how to deal with harassment/abuse?



Cultural factors impacting on the safety of journalists

The overwhelming number of respondents (94%) strongly agree or agree that the current polarisation of debate and public discourse has impacted adversely on the safety of journalists.

The overwhelming number of respondents (97%) strongly agree or agree that disinformation and fake news undermines trust in journalism and increases hostility towards journalists.

In addition, an overwhelming number of respondents (98%) strongly agree or agree those in public office, including politicians, have a leadership role to play in maintaining high levels of public discourse and should avoid dismissing journalistic work as fake news and should not restrict media access.

Legislative and commercial threats

Respondents were asked to identify issues that have undermined or prevented journalistic work: 38% of respondents highlighted FOI exemptions or delays, 34% of respondents identified libel and defamation issues, 18% of respondents highlighted national security legislation, 13% identified investigatory powers and surveillance and 11% of respondents said official secrets legislation undermines or prevents journalistic work. In addition, 8% cited data protection and/or subject access requests and 2% identified strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPS).

Other examples of threats to journalism provided by respondents included the problems encountered at FOI tribunals, court reporting restrictions, cease and desist notices, officials citing electoral rules, commercial interests of employers that prevented reporting on specific areas, ignoring requests and/or restricting access to events, threats and/or complaints submitted to editor, attempted injunctions and/or emergency injunctions issued by the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), section 97(2) of the children act 1989 (relating to identifying parents/children in care cases), false allegations of being a spy/government agent and requests for sight of copy prior to publication.

NUJ members said:

“Went to a first-tier tribunal over an FOI request, which is supposed to be a cost-free tribunal. The authority said it was hiring a QC and refused to give an undertaking that it would not seek costs. The first-tier tribunal refused to give an undertaking that it would not award costs. I had to abandon this tribunal, which I felt was absolutely in the public interest. The cost-free tribunal is fiction and the threat of costs is used to suppress challenges to wrongful FOI rulings.”

“Claims from police officers that we ‘do not have the permit’ to film/record in a location, when we either demonstrably do, or a permit is not needed. Police officers have threatened to confiscate our recordings or tried to force us to delete them in these circumstances.”

When respondents were asked if they had problems linked to the encroachment of advertising into editorial 11% said yes. Examples provided by NUJ members included:

- Suggestions for including a specific company in a story as the advertising department wanted to get them onside
- Told to drop a story because those named in the story were advertisers
- Insistence on commercial tags in editorial stories
- Pop-up online ads covering editorial pictures on every story
- Clients feeling able to bully journalists into tweaking editorial to save them money on paid-for pieces
- Advertising teams trying to get a story pulled
- Reports on food safety being deleted due to sponsorship from supermarkets
- Sponsors not approving of reporting on alternative sources of energy
- Pressure to include certain types of sport stories in news bulletins so that sponsorship messages can be broadcast
- Freelance's copy sent by editors to advertisers or potential advertisers after it has been submitted and then asked to incorporate comments from those companies
- Asked to write story that is an advertorial and/or advertorial that looks like reports
- PR agencies aggressively pushing case studies or editorial comment that is commercial
- Not always labelling advertiser or sponsor copy as advertising/promotional

NUJ members said:

"Being told by editor it would be 'helpful' if I featured a particular company in a story as advertising as they wanted to get them onside."

"In my former role as a production editor, new owners were keen to place adverts in particular positions to receive favourable coverage. I refused although it still happened."

When asked about production orders (a means by which the police/authorities can formally request the production of information and/or material from a journalist or media organisation) 4% of respondents said they have had a production order issued against them in the last 5 years. Respondents also reported attempts to access information or material via informal requests or 'chats' as an alternative to a production order.

Recommendations for the NUJ

NUJ members were asked to make suggestions about what the union could do to further support members and increase safety and protections for journalists. In response there were a range of positive comments about the union's track record:

"Something like this is commendable, to learn where the main issues are and to debate the best way to counter the problems"

“I know the NUJ does a lot already”

“The union is doing a good job of making sure we have a voice”

“union chapel reps and organisers have done a good job in sticking up for staff”

The following suggestions and recommendations were made by survey respondents:

Develop new NUJ resources

- Provide a union contact point so members can report violence, threats, harassment and abuse, create a central database of all threats to NUJ members
- Establish a new helpline for members, provide/fund a national helpline in conjunction with employers including advice on online threats, digital hygiene and personal safety
- Provide a helpline for women and other marginalised groups
- Promote the 24hr legal support line for emergencies, for example put the information on the press card and/or the accompanying information card
- Circulate best practice for online safety
- Provide guidance on lone working in the field
- Insist on minimum staffing levels for outside broadcasts
- Provide more guidance on safety and provide safety checklists
- Provide guidance that includes information on the legal support available, contacts and signpost mental health support services
- Provide constant reminders for members to be vigilant, circulate tip sheets and guidance regularly
- Provide regular and/or local and/or online safety training, safety training for photographers
- Organise online meetings to discuss what action to take if experiencing problems or witness it happening to colleagues
- Organise a Facebook and/or Whatsapp group to support those who are affected
- Give members the chance to share information and ideas on how to combat abuse
- Enable journalists to connect with one another and enable support networks
- Raise awareness that safety issues are not just about national newspapers, they can also impact on community-based outlets and magazines
- Information should be tailored to different types of work and include young members, volunteer editorial staff as well as paid employees and freelance workers
- Organise collective action taken by freelance workers to force media companies to take their safety more seriously
- Find a way to supply affordable safety equipment for freelance journalists
- Create and offer an NUJ tabard and badge that members can pay for - like they have at sporting events such as UEFA and the Champions league
- Have a four-way conversation about training, prevention, identifying risks and tackling abuse with the union, journalism schools, employers (including those who commission freelance workers) and journalists themselves

NUJ action against perpetrators

- Raise awareness about the existing codes and laws to protect journalism
- Campaign/shame politicians who attack journalists
- Individuals who promote the abuse of journalists should be named and shamed
- Advise people and/or organisations to desist from making threats
- Campaign for the government to introduce/implement stricter laws that protect journalists from abuse
- Push for legislation to increase convictions of trolls and abusers
- Campaign for public interest defence in legislation
- Fund/support defamation cases
- Take legal action on safety, support legal action dealing with harassment and stalking including support with injunctions and prosecutions

NUJ action relating to employers

- Research and highlight media outlets that pressure journalists to do dangerous reporting without sufficient training and support
- Ask industry leaders about what they are doing to monitor and tackle abuse and harassment
- Training for news desks and picture desks to protect freelance workers as they can be asked to cover assignments that national newspaper staff won't do because of the dangers
- More joint work with media companies, insist on more workplace training and lobby/negotiate with media organisations to introduce and/or implement systems to respond to/manage abuse
- Campaign to get news outlets to tackle/remove abusive online comments

NUJ action relating to the authorities

- Organise joint work with media outlets
- Campaign/lobby for journalists to improve access to councils, civil service departments and government
- Engage with first ministers in devolved administrations
- Lobby for increased training for police, politicians, security guards, NHS, fire service, local authorities and other public bodies
- Have a dialogue with police, protest movements and political parties
- Ask the police for a public statement about respecting the right to report and official recognition of the importance of journalism and provide copies to members so they can carry it when out at work
- Campaign for improvements to the policing of demonstrations
- Campaign for the police to take these issues more seriously and act on threats against journalists

NUJ action relating to social media

- Launch a campaign to get the social media platforms to change how they deal with online abuse
- Establish a direct line of communication with various social media platforms and law enforcement
- Work with social media companies to develop improved anti-abuse policy and enforcement
- Put pressure on social media platforms to monitor abuse in different languages, not just European languages, including Farsi and Afghan languages

General suggestions for the NUJ

- Keep this work high profile
- Highlight individual cases
- Take a more public stance against abuse
- Promote a change in culture and/or a safety culture
- Campaign for harsher penalties for those who attack journalists
- Create clearer policy about those who fund disinformation and/or the far right, highlight and react to disinformation
- Campaign for free speech and freedom of expression
- Create a professional charter that pledges to offer support and safety without fear or favour to all who work in journalism, ask for support from politicians, local authorities, political parties, community groups, charities, police, court service and all those who interact or communicate with the media, the organisations would have the right (under NUJ license) to use this charter in their own promotional materials if they sign up and adhere to it
- Launch an educational campaign to explain the various types of quality journalism, and explain the different journalistic roles, educate the public on the importance of public service journalism, raise money for a public advertising campaign, educate the public on separating facts from fake news
- Organise a national demonstration calling for safety at work for all

Recommendations for media employers

When asked, 33% of respondents agreed that employers could do more to protect journalists at work.

NUJ members said:

“I would like to see them take more responsibility when they knowingly send us to report on issues that will draw abuse. I was sent to a week-long trial with a well know far-right figure about a year ago, and it was in the afternoon that my editor phoned me to say that the last time we had reported the case the journalist who did had received death threats. I feel like that information should have been given to me

before I went as I was in that situation, and it might have altered my decision to go in the first place.”

“Outside broadcasts are now undertaken with minimal staffing - usually just a reporter and camera operator. No floor manager, no-one to watch your back when you’re broadcasting. It is an open invitation to anyone who wants to make a name for themselves by having a pop at a presenter, live on air.”

“I’ve had that with one title, where the senior staff (not the commissioning editor, people above them) have said it was expected that contributors don’t view the finished piece as the end of the commission, and that it’s by now an understood part of a commission to continue to add to the published story by engaging with comments etc... I think this is actively dangerous, as well as being exploitative (rates have not risen to reflect the extra work involved, never mind the stress accrued, from checking and re-checking expanding screeds of comments, and responding to them). Making it clear that it’s voluntary whether or not to do this and stressing explicitly that anyone not doing so won’t be penalised by losing out on future work, would be welcome.”

“Recognise that unregulated comment normalises abusive, negative attitudes and undermines trust in journalism. Moreover, the drastic reduction in staff numbers does not help - overstretched reporters working without the support of subs and experienced editors cannot be expected to produce the volume of quality news that online audiences desire.”

“Genuine statement of intent and action against perpetrators rather than acceptance that hate speech equals hits.”

“Stop employing ‘grifters’: columnists and controversialists with scant regard for the truth, who fuel hatred and corrupt the civility of public discourse.”

“I think editors have to be careful in the headline they give a piece knowing that if it’s poorly phrased the backlash will come to the reporter not them. They are there to serve as a check on anything that could unfairly expose a journalist and sometimes I think they can be a little driven by courting controversy for clicks.”

“I was given a verbal warning for blocking those harassing me via the company account. One week later I was made redundant.”

Examples of how media employers could do more to protect journalists at work included:

Organisational support

- Working with NUJ on an industry-wide safety campaign
- Listen to the concerns of employees and freelance workers
- Adopt a zero-tolerance policy towards abuse and harassment

- Create new workplace policies and statements that acknowledge abuse and offer support, introduce policy that outlines safeguards, implement stricter policy to combat harassment
- Publishers need to have a duty of care for freelance workers
- Improve mechanisms to anticipate risks, carry out risk assessments, regular safety reviews and audits
- Create a reporting system and/or make it easier to report issues to an employer
- Regularly review current procedures to ensure they are effective
- Proactively and regularly check up on staff welfare
- Automatically refer a journalist to specialist support after receiving a death threat
- Notify local police in advance that a journalist will be in a specific location when there is likely to be a hostile environment for reporting, share risk assessment with police
- The press office should publish robust defence when abuse is directed at journalists, the BBC should challenge online trolls and offer stronger rebuttals against attack by politicians and/or other media outlets, provide corporate response to online abuse
- Protect the journalists not the company, more concern for staff welfare than company reputation
- Take public action against abusers
- Identify a dedicated safety contact within the organisation and offer for guidance and support for employees and freelance workers
- Send regular emails and updates to staff and also include freelance workers
- Openly talk about abuse and harassment so workers feel safe to raise issues
- Make it clear that putting yourself in danger is not part of the job, don't dismiss fears as 'part of the job'

Practical suggestions

- Greater willingness to send out larger reporting teams
- Pay for private security
- Reduce lone working especially out on location/outside broadcasting
- Take care with travel assignments
- Create support networks, facilitate a supportive working environment
- Provide mental health resources and support
- Engage lawyers to obtain injunctions against individuals who harass journalists
- Provide technical support for blocking emails and/or rejecting correspondence
- Be supportive of journalists when they want to report crimes committed against them

Taking action against perpetrators

- Take action against perpetrators rather than accept that hate speech equals hits
- Agree and make it clear that media outlets will remove or authorise the removal of abusive social media content
- Increase monitoring and moderate social media channels and comments

- Lobby and/or work in collaboration with social media platforms to achieve stronger protections
- Secure a deal with twitter to get verified status for journalists, which would allow them to block and/or filter abuse
- Report abuse/abusers to police
- Pursue legal action where necessary, including criminal cases

Editorial suggestions

- Editors need to show more care when writing headlines and when a backlash or controversy for clicks can expose the journalist to abuse
- Do not compel journalists to work on social media
- Allow journalists to remove their byline from a story
- Allow journalists to decide not to use a byline profile picture
- Don't force journalists into situations that put their safety at risk
- Provide personal insurance cover
- Think carefully before commissioning something which a person is vulnerable in/writing from personal experience
- Don't compel freelance journalists to continue to engage on social media in connection with commissioned pieces
- Don't court controversy on social media in commissioning, make sure headlines and standfirst are representative of the piece, warn writers when a subject might be controversial and support them in the leadup and act responsibly around first-person opinion pieces knowing that the subject is likely to attract a backlash

Training

- Safety training for journalists, training people to deal with abuse, online safety training, more safety guidance including scenario specific information, written guidelines about online safety provided by employers to freelance workers
- Provide more journalistic and ethics training as a lack of ethics contributes to the decline in respect and appreciation of journalism
- Improve and increase support for freelance workers
- Train managers and editors

Addition information gathered alongside the NUJ survey

The NUJ has organised a range of meetings and events with members where the following suggestions have been made:

- When blogs or websites contain hate speech, defamation or target journalists, it is still not possible to get the material taken down
- There is a lack of consistency in the response by the police, some don't have any training or expertise, especially about online harassment, there should be standard training and training on the existing and/or new legislation

- Police have not followed up complaints or investigated instances of online threats and harassment
- There should be a dedicated team and/or contact point for journalists to report violence, threats, abuse and/or harassment, this should exist in each jurisdiction of the UK including England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- A Facebook user can create an account, send abusive messages and/or threats, then delete the account and they cannot be traced
- Young women are often encouraged to write confessional pieces and then they cannot deal with what comes back to them
- Measures put in place in terms of offering aftercare to journalists who have experienced targeting online or offline (especially if an individual has been forced to leave home/office environment because of threats)
- Staff on probationary periods, entry level journalists, temporary/contract workers and freelancers are potentially more vulnerable and lack support from media employers

The NUJ would like to thank all the respondents to the survey and the members who participated in events and discussions. The union will use the evidence and recommendations suggested to continue to organise, negotiate, campaign and lobby to achieve better protections and safety for journalists.