

M|SA

Media and Law Studies Association
Medya ve Hukuk alıřmaları Derneđi

**JOURNALISM IN TURKEY:
I DON'T
FEEL SAFE**

VIOLENCE FACED BY JOURNALISTS, ITS CONSEQUENCES, AND JOURNALISTS' SECURITY PERCEPTIONS



ABOUT MLSA

The Media and Legal Studies Association (MLSA) started its activities as a non-profit organization in December 2017, when the pressure on fundamental rights and freedoms in Turkey reached an alarming level. Through our work, we aim to respond to an urgent and growing need to defend freedom of expression, press freedom, and the right to information. We provide a holistic response to threats to media freedoms by combining legal support and advocacy for journalists, as well as academics, activists, lawyers, and other professional groups, regardless of their popularity or ideology.

Our core activities are combined with the following specific projects:

- Trial monitoring program focusing on freedom of expression trials
- Human rights workshops for lawyers
- Professional journalism workshops
- Creating of publishing opportunities for independent and unemployed journalists
- Monitoring Internet censorship and advocating for Internet freedom

TEAM

Prepared by

Elif Akgül, Laura Kunzendorf

Editor

Ali Safa Korkut

Consultant

Deniz Tekin

Design

Pikan Ajans



This report has been prepared with the support of the Global Media Defence Fund administered by UNESCO to contribute to the implementation of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout this report do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city, or area, or its authorities or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The author(s) are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in this report and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

CONTACT



+90 212 983 41 92



info@medyavehukuk.org



mlsaturkey.com



twitter.com/mlsaturkey



instagram.com/mlsa.turkey

CONTENTS

CONTENTS	3
INTRODUCTION	5
HIGHLIGHTS	8
METHODOLOGY	9
FINDINGS	12
CONCLUSION	23
SUGGESTIONS	25
RESOURCES FOR JOURNALISTS	26

“ ”

INTRODUCTION

Just as freedom of the press is vital for a democratic society, it is equally important for ensuring that journalists are able to practice their profession independently, without harm and fear. Yet, journalists around the world are subjected to various forms of violence, including murder, prosecution, battering, insults, and threats.

The number of killed journalists increased in 2022

According to UNESCO data, 1602 journalists have been killed since 1993 due to their professional activities or while reporting. In 2022, the number of journalist killings, which had decreased in previous years, reversed and saw an increase. Again, according to UNESCO data, 86 journalists were killed in 2022 compared to 55 in 2021. As reported in the same data set, 22 journalists were killed in 2023 as of June 15.

In Turkey, 68 journalists were killed between 1909 and 2022, according to the Turkish Journalists' Association (TGC). However, even when considering the period since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, there is no case in which a judicial process following the killing of a journalist has been carried out in a sense that brought about justice or could ease the public conscience. Neither the Abdi İpekçi, Uğur Mumcu, and Ahmet Taner Kışlalı murders which happened before the 2000s, nor the Hrant Dink assassination in 2007 have been fully illuminated. As for murders involving perpetrators who were either public officials or associated with state structures, the Metin Göktepe case was the only one barely coming close to holding the perpetrators accountable.

Physical violence: Beating, stalking, insulting...

Although killings of journalists come to mind when we think about violence against media workers, violence takes various forms. Monitoring and reporting conducted by international organizations often focus on murders, enforced disappearances or detentions, and arrests. Detailed data on forms of violence such as battering, beating, stalking, insulting, and targeting is hard to find.

However, in the case of Turkey, these forms of violence are methods used frequently against journalists to “deter” them from doing their jobs.

The number of journalists who are being investigated or tried due to their professional activities is unknown. However, according to MLSA's trial monitoring data, at least 318 journalists stood trial in Turkey in the judicial year between 1 September 2022 and 20 July 2022. Most of these journalists were tried under terrorism-related charges, whereby their news reports, articles, photographs, and social media posts constituted the majority of the evidence cited against them.

According to the 2022-2023 Press Freedom Report of the Journalists' Union of Turkey (TGS), at least 96 journalists have been physically assaulted and 43 verbally threatened in the last year. The most striking and latest example of physical violence is the attack against Sinan Aygül, the President of the Bitlis Journalists' Association, who was attacked by two armed individuals on 17 June in Tatvan in Eastern Turkey. Security camera footage shows that as the Tatvan Municipality Mayor Mehmet Emin Geylani's bodyguard assaulted Aygül, a police officer actively prevented citizens from intervening. The attackers hit and threatened Aygül, saying, “If you write about the mayor again, you will die.” Previously, Aygül had reported irregularities concerning the Tatvan Municipality. The Bitlis Governor's Office, in a statement, announced that the municipality employee who assaulted Aygül as well as the police officer involved, were suspended, and a legal and administrative investigation was launched. The two perpetrators were later detained as well.

Aygül was also the first journalist to be arrested, prosecuted, and sentenced on the grounds of the Disinformation Law that Turkey's parliament adopted in October 2022 for a Tweet he wrote related to allegations about a child abuse case. Aygül was arrested on 14 December 2022 and released on 22 December. On 28 February 2023, Tatvan 1st Criminal Court of First Instance sentenced Aygül to 10 months in prison on charges of “openly disseminating information misleading the public.”

Non-prosecution for police applying violence, lawsuit against journalist subjected to violence

Another example of violence against journalists is the violent detention of AFP photojournalist Bülent Kılıç while he followed the 19th Istanbul Pride on March 26 June 2021. Police officers hit Kılıç with his camera and threw it to the ground before pinning him to the ground, pressing their knees on his back and neck. Following the ill-treatment, MLSA's Legal Unit filed a criminal complaint on 4 August 2021 against the two identified police officers for "damaging property" and "intentional injury through the use of excessive force." MLSA also filed a compensation lawsuit on behalf of Kılıç. In January 2023, the Istanbul 8th Administrative Court ruled that the police officers who detained the journalist "used disproportionate force" and ordered 30,095.58 Turkish liras to be paid to Kılıç for the damage.

However, prosecutor Aysel Daşkıran did not consider the administrative court's decision that "disproportionate force was applied." Arguing that the police officers did not exceed their authority to use force as defined in Law No. 2559 on the Duties and Discretion of the Police, the prosecutor decided on 16 March 2023 not to prosecute the police officers. An objection filed by Kılıç's lawyers against the decision of non-prosecution was rejected by an Istanbul judge who found the non-prosecution decision to be "in accordance with the procedure and the law." On the same day on which she decided on non-prosecution, the prosecutor indicted journalist Kılıç with "preventing officers from performing their duty" and "publicly insulting a public official because of their duty." The Istanbul 19th Criminal Court of First Instance accepted the indictment.

Digital violence

In addition to physical threats, harassment, stalking, and beating, online attacks, which have been increasing with Web 2.0, added to the many shapes that the violence against journalists takes.

Online threats, targeting, "doxing" (spreading personal information on public platforms), disclosure of news sources, and cyber attacks have become the most common forms of digital violence against journalists. In addition to these, methods such as denunciation to public authorities, investigations, and trials, or, as regularly observed in Turkey, tagging the social media accounts of, for example, the General Directorate of Security or the Ministry of Interior, stand out as the forms of violence journalists are exposed to in the digital sphere.

With the effects of digitalization, violence, which was witnessed in the past in public spaces such as the street, the workplace, or in the field, has now entered the "pockets" of journalists and invaded their privacy. Aside from failures in preventing violence against journalists, there are also legal and practical deficiencies in punishing the perpetrators.

Digital violence targets women journalists

Violence against LGBTI+ and women journalists due to gender inequalities has to be considered under the headings of both physical and digital violence.

There are barely any global or Turkey-focused studies on violence against LGBTI+ journalists. However, the Sir Lenny Henry Center for Media Diversity at Birmingham University did research on the abuse and harassment of LGBTI+ journalists in England. In the survey conducted among 40 LGBTI+ journalists, 86 % of the participants stated that they were exposed to abuse and harassment. 62 % of them did not file a complaint.

When it comes to digital violence, women journalists are among the most frequent targets. Therefore, global studies in that area mainly cover online violence against women journalists.

UNESCO and the International Center for Journalists (ICJ) conducted a joint study on online violence among 1,100 women journalists from 15 countries. According to the report titled "The Chilling: A global study of online violence against women journalists," published in November 2022, nearly three out of four women journalists (73 %) have experienced online violence due to their professional activities.

One out of four survey participants said they had received threats of physical violence, including death threats, through online channels, while 18 % experienced threats of sexual violence. 13% of the women surveyed also reported threats of violence against those close to them, including their children. 15 % faced image-based abuse such as manipulated photos or videos, stolen images, or publicly shared explicit images. Notably, nearly half of the participants indicated having been exposed to online violence through unwanted, private messages on social media. According to the report, this underlines the fact that much online violence happens in the shadows.

A major concerning finding of the study is that online violence is correlated with physical violence. In that sense, online abuse can be a predictor of physical violence. For example, the public sharing of personal data such as the address, increases susceptibility to offline violence. One out of five survey participants reported that they believed that offline abuse and attacks they experienced were rooted in previous online violence.

Due to this association of physical threats with online violence, 13% of the women surveyed stated that they increased their offline security measures. Some even moved following online attacks. Among the impacts of online violence identified in the research are mental health impacts. While those were reported by 26% of survey participants, 12% stated to have sought medical or psychological support in response to online violence they were subjected to.

The chilling effect of violence also revealed itself in the report. Almost one in three women stated that they self-censor on social media, while one in five women described having withdrawn completely from online communication.

A comprehensive study on digital and physical violence against journalists is missing in Turkey. The present survey report aims to contribute to closing this gap by providing an idea about the extent and impact of the violence that journalists working in Turkey face.



HIGHLIGHTS

- 57 journalists from 13 cities participated in the survey. 55 of the participants are from Turkey, one from the United Kingdom, and one from Germany.
- 46 of the 57 journalists surveyed indicated to have been physically attacked or threatened within the past five years. The rate of journalists who experienced physical violence is 80 % both among women and men. Both LGBTI+ journalists who participated in the survey, one non-binary and one trans, stated to have been physically attacked or threatened.
- The five forms of threats that the survey participants expressed the most concern about were: detention or arrest, unemployment, trial, physical violence, and racist attacks.
- Most survey participants have been subjected to physical violence or threats more than once. One out of five journalists said they were attacked more than ten times.
- Freelance journalists are particularly vulnerable to physical violence or threats. 22 out of 24 participants (91.7 %) who work as freelance journalists or both as freelancers and for a news organization stated that they had experienced physical violence or threats.
- The most frequent form of violence that journalists face is insults and hate speech. This is followed by pushing/pulling and assault with tear gas, pepper spray, or other gas.
- The identity of 18.7 % of the perpetrators of threats and physical attacks was unknown to the survey participants. 17.6 % of the perpetrators were public authorities, and 28.6 % were police officers.
- The main impacts that the experienced violence in the physical realm had on the surveyed journalists were safety concerns and anxiety.
- 78.9 % of the survey participants faced digital violence within the last five years..
- The majority of journalists have been exposed to digital violence more than once. One-fourth of journalists were attacked online more than ten times.
- The online medium in which journalists were most exposed to threats was Twitter, where 70 % of the participants have experienced attacks.
- The identity of 35.4 % of perpetrators of digital violence was unknown to the survey participants. 19.8 % of perpetrators were “troll armies,” and another 19.8 % were “politically affiliated groups.”
- While 31.6 % of the survey participants who experienced physical violence filed complaints, only 11.4 % of the journalists filed complaints when the violence that they experienced had occurred online. “Distrust in the justice system” has been identified as the main reason for journalists not filing complaints about violence against them.
- **87.7 % of the surveyed journalists feel unsafe practicing their profession in Turkey.** 50.9 % of the journalists stated that they felt “very unsafe,” while 36.8 % said to feel “unsafe. Among the results of the survey, this is one of the most striking ones. It shows that almost 9 out of 10 surveyed journalists feel unsafe.

METHODOLOGY

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVE

The survey was conducted by the Istanbul-based non-profit Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA) with the support of the UNESCO-administered Global Media Defence Fund under the umbrella of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity.

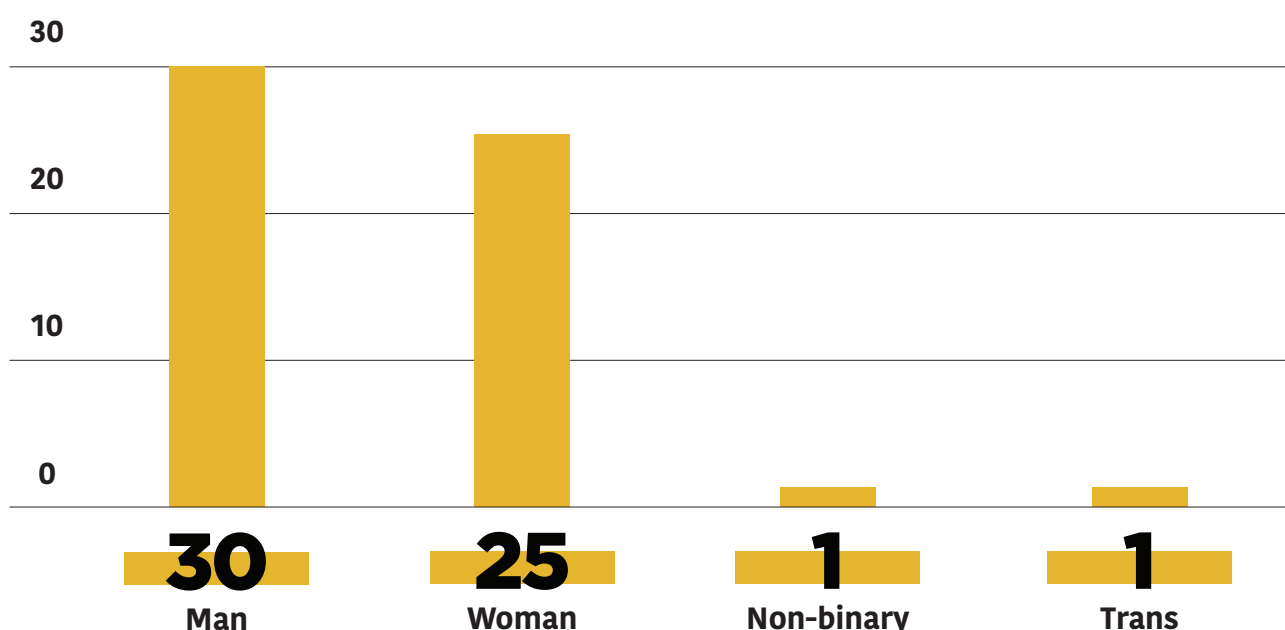
The purpose of the survey was to learn about the kinds of and the extent of violent threats to which journalists working in Turkey are exposed. Further, we aimed to better understand how journalists' well-being, safety, and professional activities are affected by those threats. The survey has focused, in particular, on online and physical violence, whereby violence is understood - in line with the definition of the World Health Organization - as the intentional threat of or the actual use of force or power that has a high likelihood of resulting or results in physical or psychological harm.

PROCEDURE AND ANONYMITY

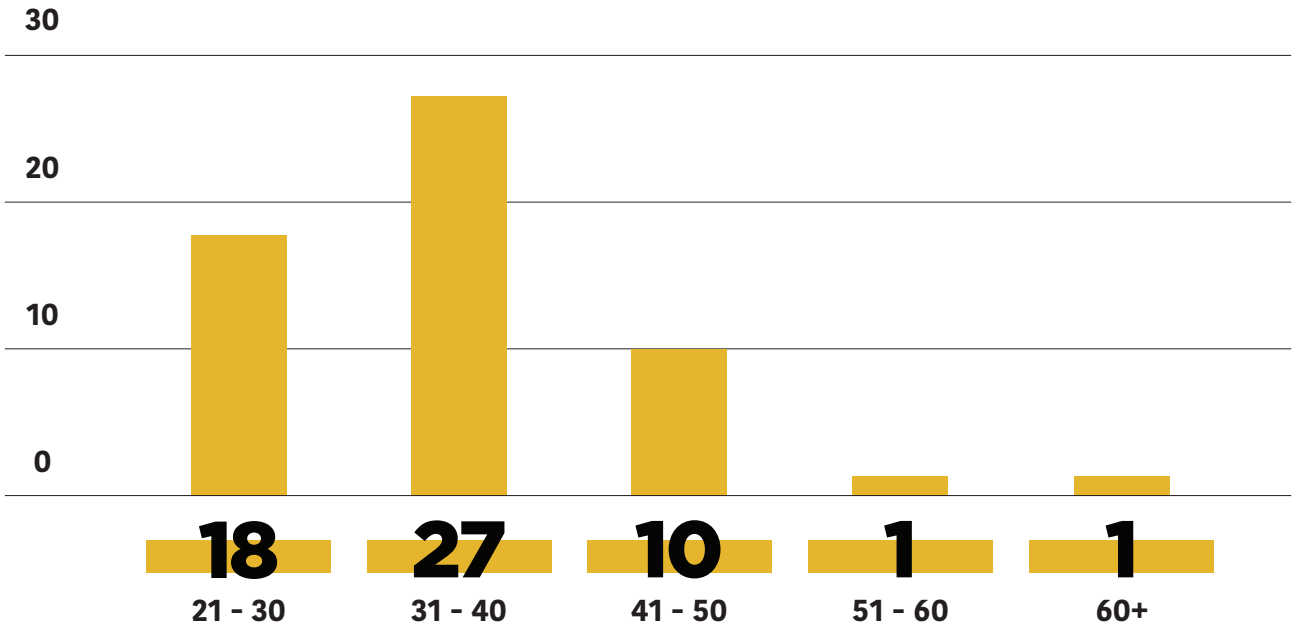
The survey, which was carried out anonymously, was sent to journalists via email, news groups in messaging applications, and telephone. The survey asked participants about their experiences with digital and physical violence. The survey included a content advisory indicating that some survey questions contained references to harassment and violence.

PARTICIPANTS' PROFILES

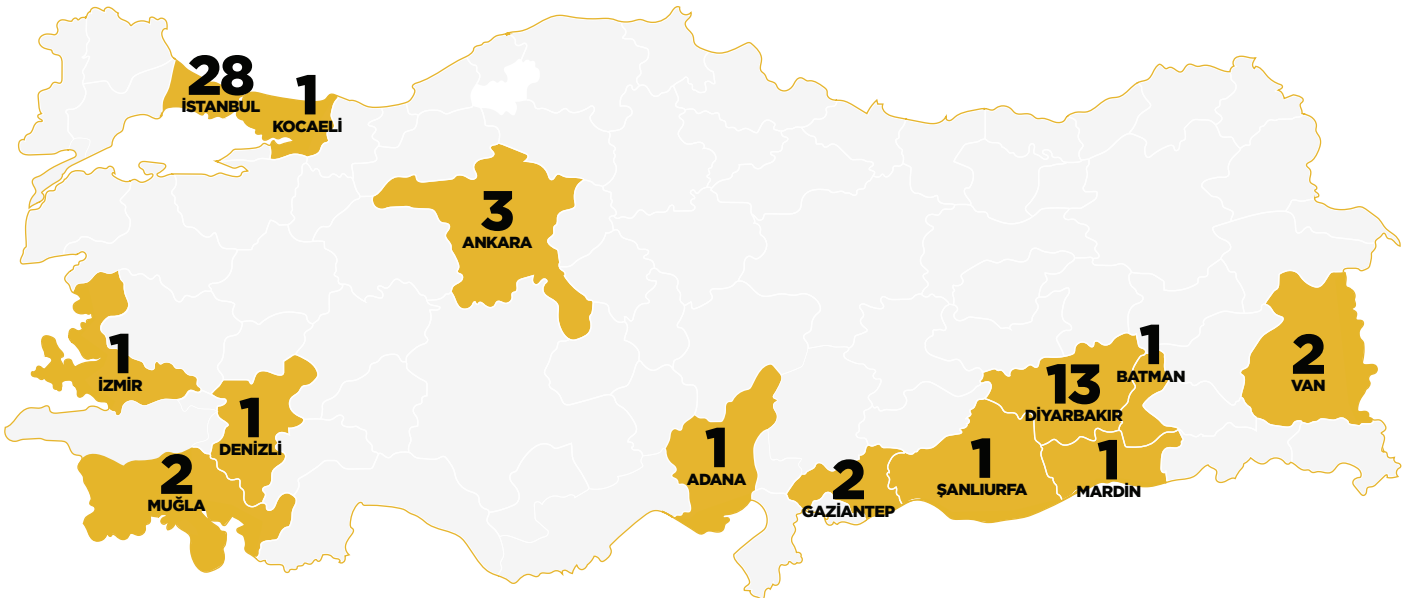
57 journalists, including 30 men, 25 women, one non-binary, and one trans, participated in the survey, which was prepared in Turkish and English. 55 participants are from Turkey, one from the United Kingdom, and one from Germany. Journalists from 13 different cities in Turkey participated. 22 are located in Istanbul, 13 in Diyarbakır, 3 in Ankara, 2 in Gaziantep, 2 in Van, 2 in Muğla, 1 in Adana, 1 in Kocaeli, 1 in Mardin, 1 in İzmir, 1 in Şanlıurfa, 1 in Denizli and 1 in Batman. Most of the participants (31) work in a media outlet, while two work in a non-governmental organization. 17 participants work as freelancers, while 7 work both as freelancers and for a media outlet.



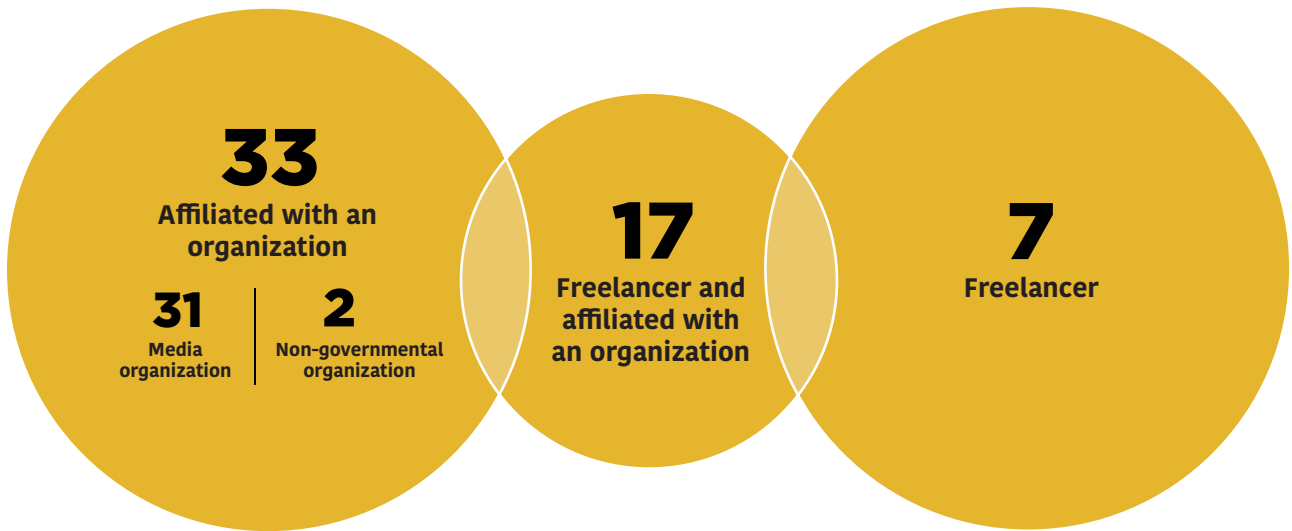
Graph 1.1: Gender distribution of the participants



Graph 1.2: Age distribution of the participants

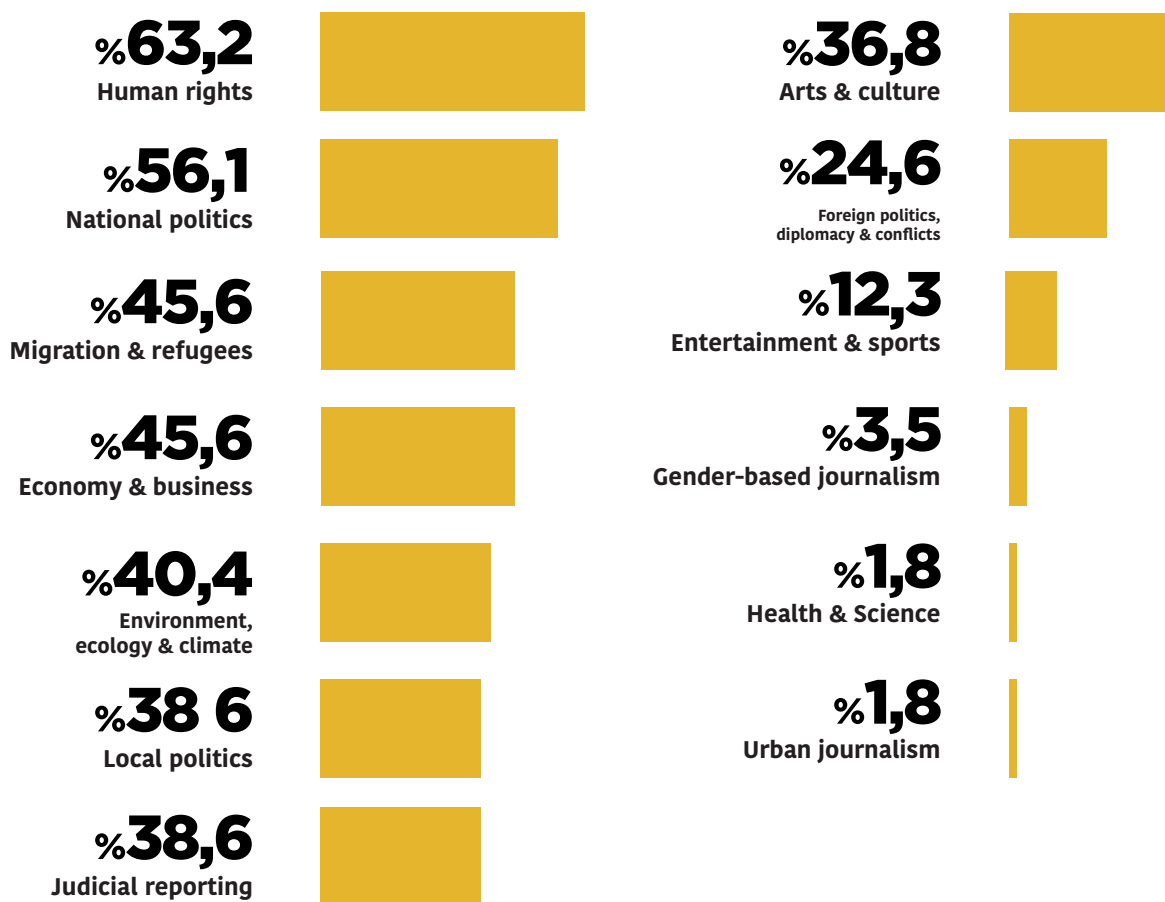


Graph 1.3: Distribution of participants according to provinces



Graph 1.4: Employment types of the participants

According to the answers of the journalists, most work in more than one field. Most of the participants report on human rights. This is followed by national politics, migration and refugees, economy and business, environment, ecology and climate, local politics, and judicial reporting as the most covered fields by the survey respondents.



Graph 1.5: Rates of the participants working in the specified fields

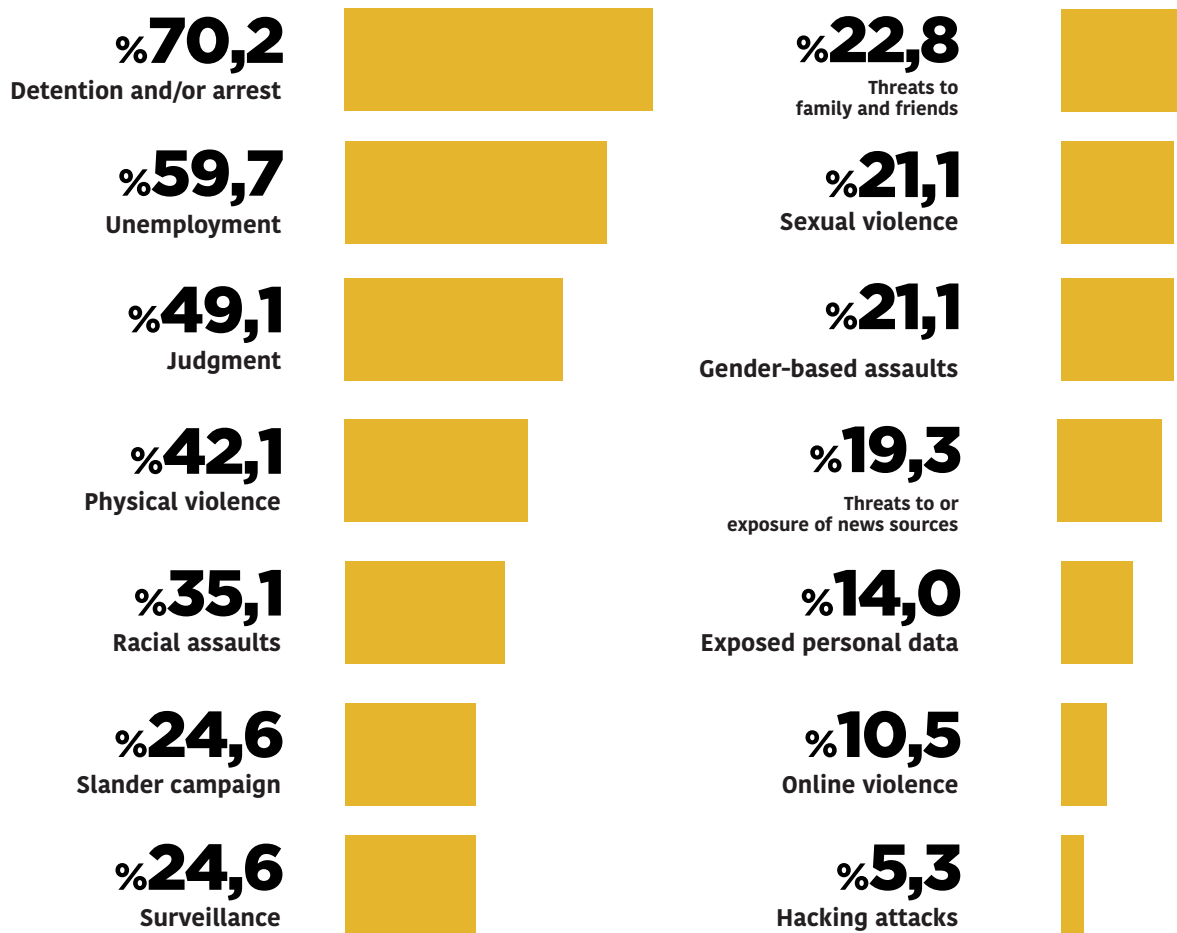
Since most participants work in more than one field, the percentages show the proportion of participating journalists who produce news in that particular field.

FINDINGS

In the survey, journalists were asked about their threat perceptions, physical violence and threats they have faced, their experiences with digital violence, precautions and measures they have taken with regard to threats of violence, and the effects of violence on their mental health and on their personal and professional lives.

To learn about how different threats are perceived by journalists, the survey participants were asked to select the five potential challenges and threats they are most concerned about among 14 options. This has brought to light that the surveyed journalists were most concerned about “detention and arrest.” 70.2 % of journalists work under the shadow of the possibility of being detained or arrested. This is followed by the fear of unemployment, which 59.7 % of participants identified as being among their biggest concerns. Nearly every second journalist is worried about being prosecuted. Among journalists’ top five potential threats are further physical violence and racist attacks.

It is further noteworthy that when considering only the answers of participants who identify as woman, non-binary or transgender, both sexual violence and gender-based violence are among the biggest concerns for 44.4 %



Graph 2.1: Challenges and threats that concern participants most

The following questions of the survey were divided into the two sections of “physical safety and judicial threats” and “digital threats” to allow for more nuanced analysis and better comparability between the responses.

PHYSICAL SAFETY AND JUDICIAL THREATS



When following the 2014 Kobani protests, I suffered a cerebral hemorrhage as a result of the police attack on the Birecik border in Urfa. For about a year, I was in a life-threatening situation. After I survived, epilepsy began due to the blow I suffered. I have been receiving treatment for years.

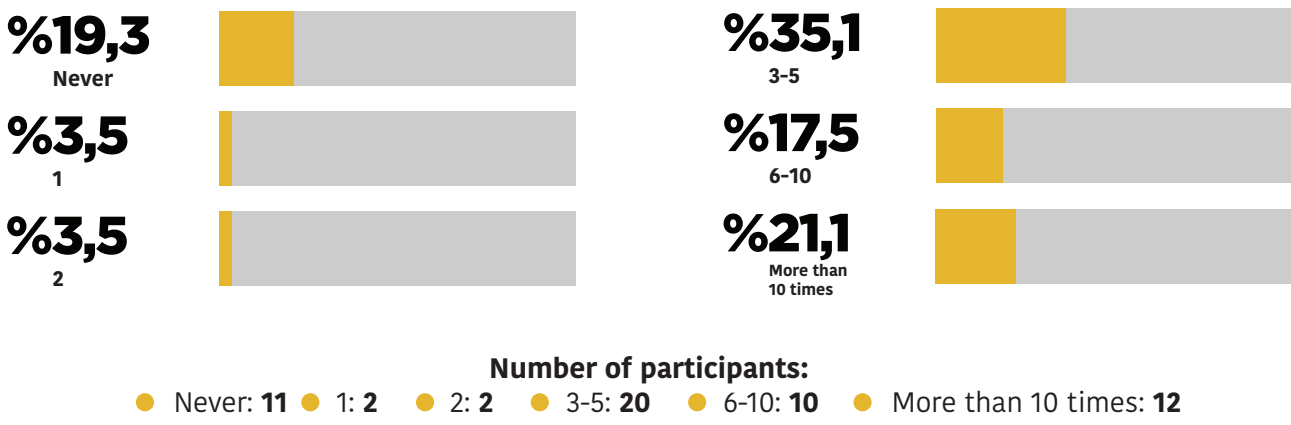


In the survey, participants were asked about the cases of physical violence and threats they have been subjected to in the last five years. The data shows that 46 of 57 journalists were physically attacked or threatened. The rate of journalists who experienced physical violence is 80 %, both for women and men. Both LGBTI+ journalists who participated in the survey, one non-binary and one trans, stated to have been physically attacked or threatened.



Graph 2.2: Participants who were exposed to physical violence or threats in the last five years

In the survey results, it became evident that the violence and threats journalists face are neither isolated nor one-off cases. Instead, threats appear to be a part of journalists' professional life, as most respondents indicated to have been exposed to violence several times. When asked about how often they have been threatened or attacked, 35.1 % of journalists answered "3-5 times." One out of five participants (21.1 %) even indicated to have been subjected to physical violence or threats more than ten times.



Graph 2.3: Frequency of participants' exposure to threats and physical violence

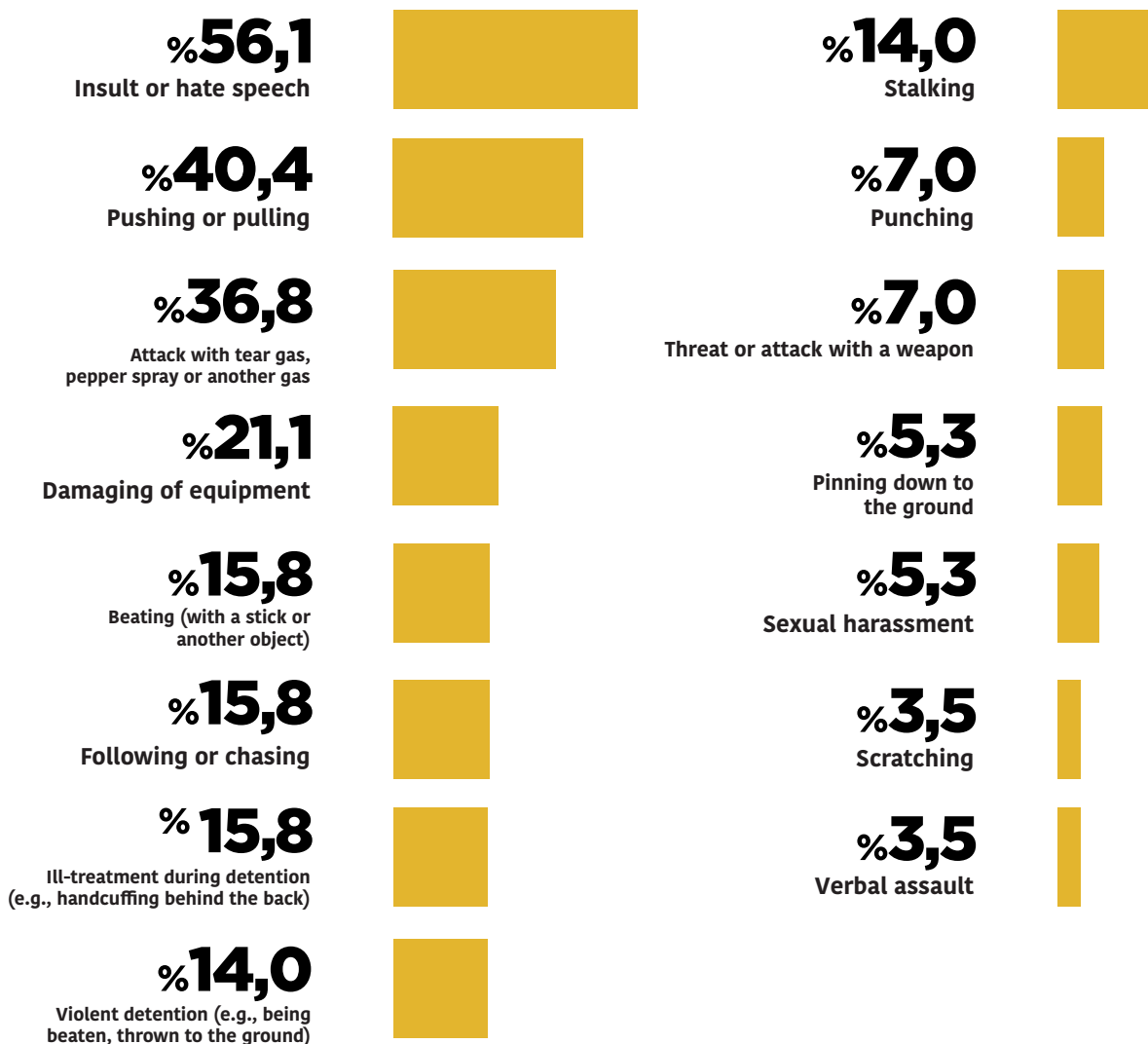
When looking at the exposure of journalists to physical violence according to employment types, it can be said that 24 out of 33 journalists (72.7 %) who are working for a media or non-governmental organization have been subjected to attacks or threats. Among freelance journalists, this rate is even higher. 22 out of 24 journalists (91.7 %) who work as freelancers or who are both freelancers and affiliated with an organization have experienced attacks or threats.

Regarding the exposure to physical violence in different positions, 80 % of those working as reporters and 78.57 % of those in editorial positions stated that they had faced attacks or threats. All eight participants (100 %) who work in the field, such as camera operators or photographers, have been subjected to violence.

When it comes to the types of attacks, the survey results show that journalists are most exposed to insults and/or hate speech, with 56.1 % of participants having experienced this form of abuse. Analyzing the exposure according to the gender distribution of the participants, it is revealed that LGBTI+ and female journalists face insults and hate speech almost twice as much as male journalists. **According to the data, 70.4 % of women and LGBTI+ journalists have become subject to “insult and hate speech,” while this rate amounts to 43.3 % for men.**

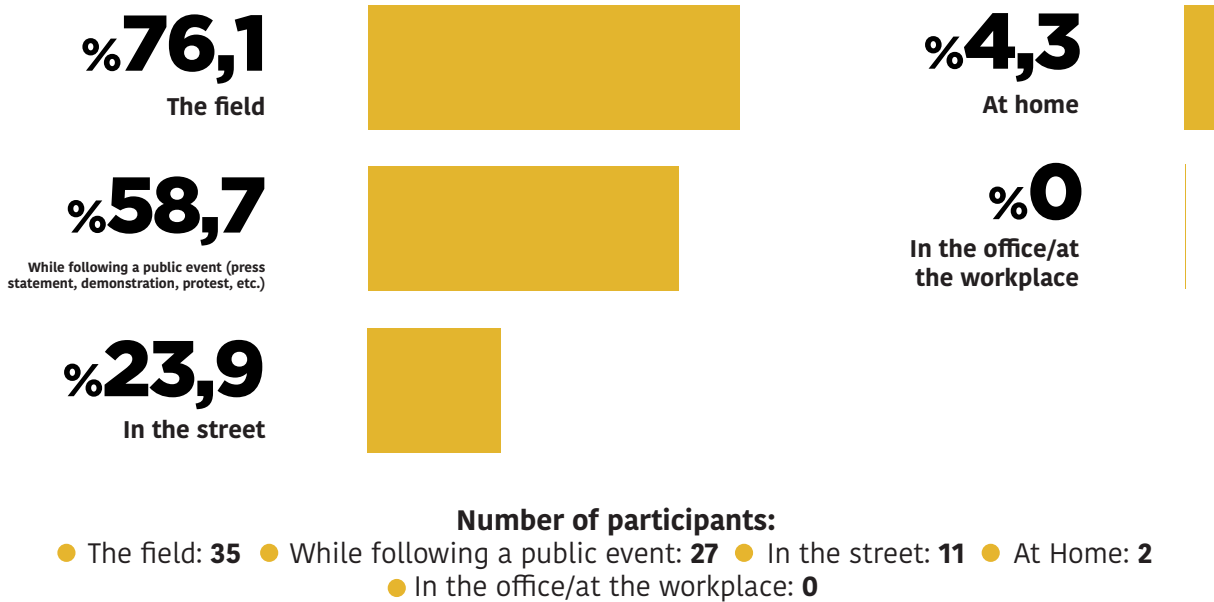
Insults and hate speech are the most frequent types of attack, followed by pushing and pulling, which 40.4 % of the participants suffered, and assaults with tear gas, pepper spray, or any other gas, which 36.8 % of the participants experienced.

Among the women and LGBTI+ journalists surveyed, three experienced sexual harassment.



Graph 2.4: Rates of participants exposed to the indicated threats and attacks

Most of the journalists surveyed have experienced violence and threats in multiple locations. However, “the field” stood out as the place where journalists are most vulnerable to attacks. Among the 46 participants who indicated having experienced physical violence, 76.1 % (35) have faced threats or violence while working in the field. This is followed by the areas in which public events such as press statements or protests occur, where 58.7 % of the journalists who experienced physical violence became subjected to threats or attacks. 23.9 % were threatened or attacked on the street. 4.3 % were threatened or attacked at home, and 0 % were threatened or attacked in the office/at the workplace.



Graph 2.5: Rates of journalists who experienced threats or attacks in the indicated place

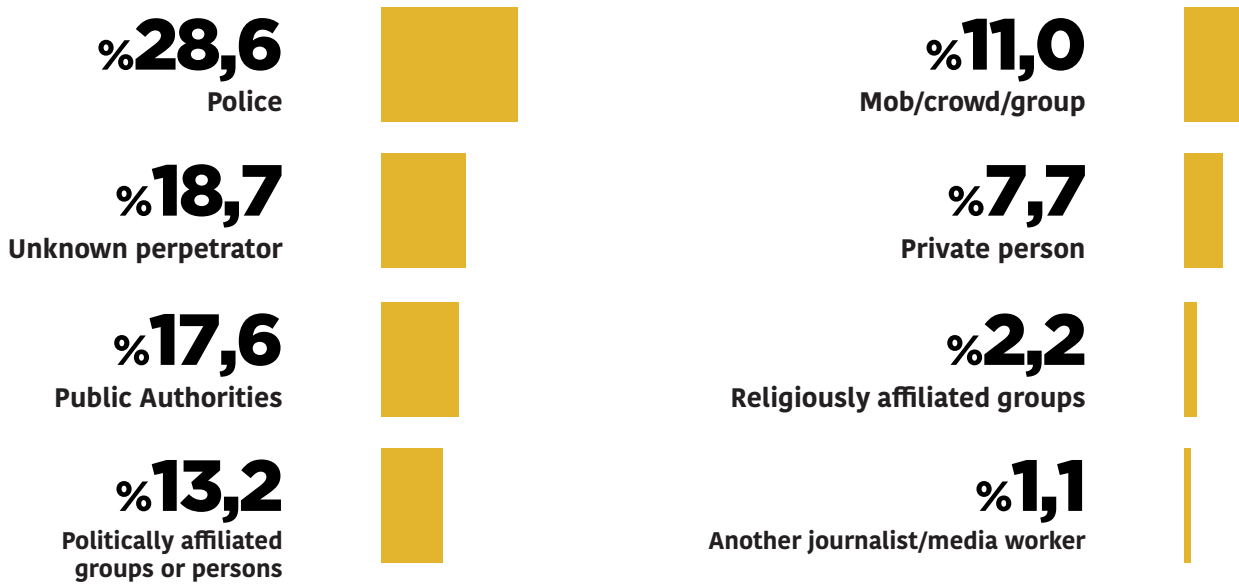
As indicated above, most of the survey participants are located in Istanbul and Diyarbakır. Notably, all survey participants from Diyarbakır (100 %) indicated having faced physical violence or threats, while this rate was 75 % among the participants from Istanbul. As the participation rates in other cities were in the single-digit rate, no meaningful rates can be provided for those. In that regard, further research in the future could start here to provide a geographically more complete picture of violence against journalists in Turkey.

“

While covering the protests in Diyarbakır, I was targeted by a plainclothes police officer. Following that, the riot police battered me with batons and shields. Some officers deliberately kicked me with their knees so I wouldn't take pictures. In addition, while we are covering the news, we are often photographed by the police. The police ask us about which media we work for. Sometimes they take our ID and take a picture of it. I wanted to follow the case of a person killed by police in Diyarbakır, but the court did not let me into the courtroom, accusing me of making false news in front of the participants in the case. My complaint to the Council of Judges and Prosecutors about this judge was not processed.

”

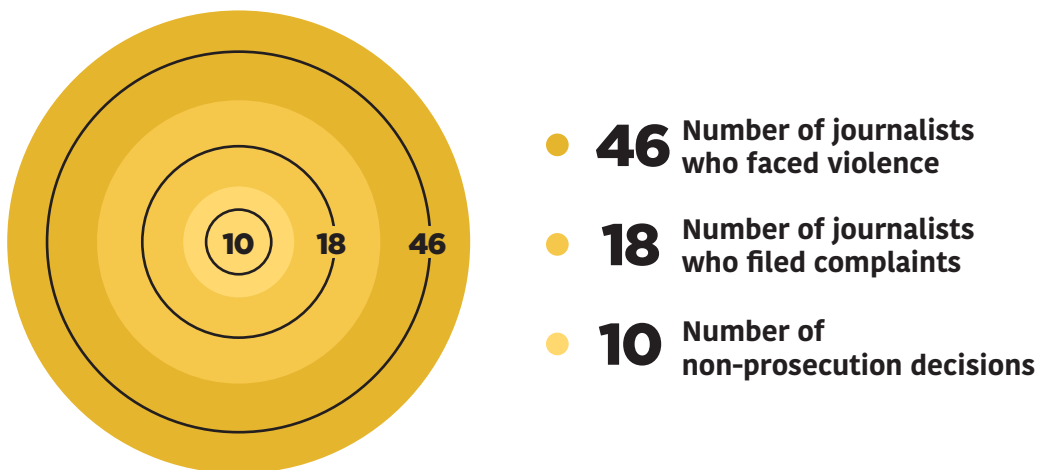
The identity of 18.7 % of the perpetrators of threats and physical attacks was unknown to the survey participants. 17.6 % of the perpetrators were public authorities, and 28.6 % were police officers.



Graph 2.6: Distribution of perpetrators of violence

Impunity in the judiciary

Only 18 of the journalists who said they had been subjected to violence, 39.1 %, stated that they had filed a complaint. Among the 18 journalists who filed complaints, 13 filed them with the prosecutor’s office. Some participants also indicated to have submitted complaints to the police, employers, or professional organizations. 10 of the 13 complaints filed to the prosecutor’s office resulted in non-prosecution. The fact that the majority of the complaints resulted in non-prosecution highlights the impunity that has permeated the judiciary regarding cases of violence against journalists.



Graph 2.7: Ratio of reported incidents

While 10 of the journalists stated that their complaints resulted in non-prosecution, no results were obtained in the complaints of the other journalists yet. Regarding the overall result, it is revealed that none of the perpetrators were punished as a result of the applications of the journalists who stated that they made a complaint.

Most of those who did not file a complaint explained that they did so because they thought there would be no results. In one answer from a survey participant, the “normalization” of impunity was also noted.

As reasons for not making a complaint, one journalist cited the lack of punishment of the police officers complained about, the lack of economic means to follow a judicial process, the fear of being exposed to more pressure from law enforcement officers after filing complaints, and the fact that they had become used to and normalized those violations. This reveals both the cycle of impunity and its impact on journalists.

The impact of impunity on journalists and their professional activities was also revealed in the survey results. When asked about the effect of the threats and violence they are faced with, feeling insecure and intimidated as well as worrying about personal safety were the most frequent answers. Nearly every second journalist, 47.4 %, indicated to feel those effects. These results show that violence results in security concerns and anxiety.

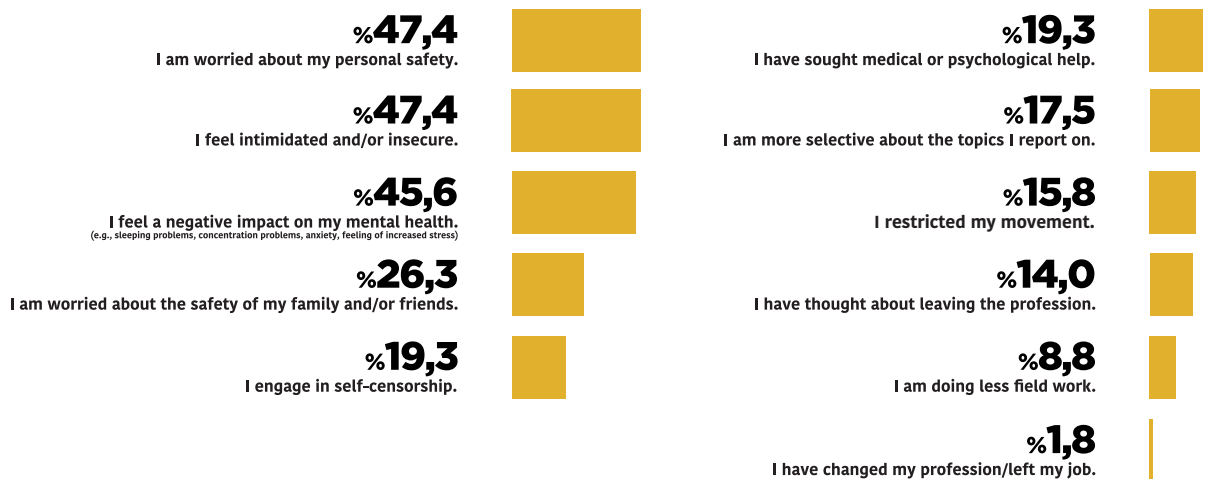
“ I started to constantly check my back while walking on the road. ”

The third most frequent effect of violence on journalists according to the survey results is a negative impact on mental health, which 45.6 % of the participants confirmed.

It is also important to note that with 26.3 %, the rate of those who are concerned about the safety of their family and/or friends is substantial.

In addition, eight of the 57 journalists who participated in the survey stated that they were considering quitting their profession, and one stated that they had left their job.

“ Unless I have to, I don't cover protests or press statements as I used to [anymore]. ”



Graph 2.8: Impact of violence and threats on journalists

“ The attack caused permanent health problems in my eyes and legs. My nervous system is completely damaged. ”

DIGITAL VIOLENCE



I observe an increase in online attacks when I cover news about sex workers, LGBTI+s, particularly trans people, immigrants, and the Kurdish issue.

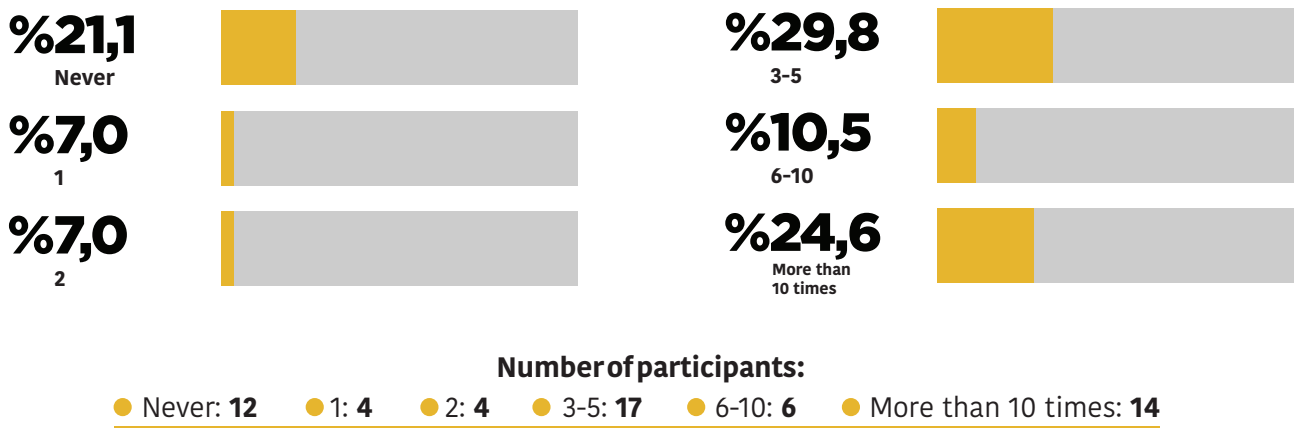


In the survey, participants were asked about the cases of digital violence and threats they have been exposed to in the last five years.



Graph 2.9: Rates of participants who were exposed to digital violence in the last 5 years

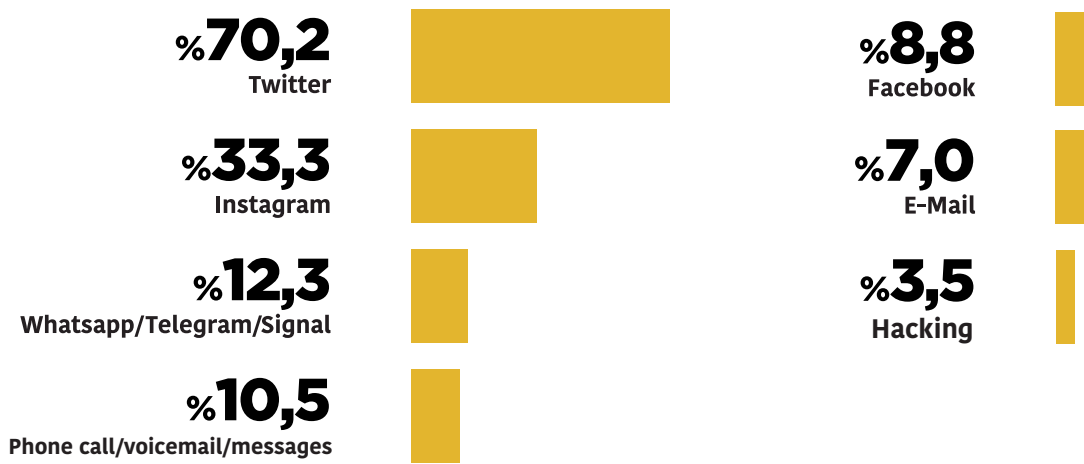
78.9 % of the participants stated that they were exposed to digital violence. While the rate of female journalists who faced digital violence was 72 %, both LGBTI+ participants said they had been subjected to digital violence. Among men, the rate is 69 %.



Graph 2.10: Frequency of participants' exposure to digital violence

Trolls play a leading role

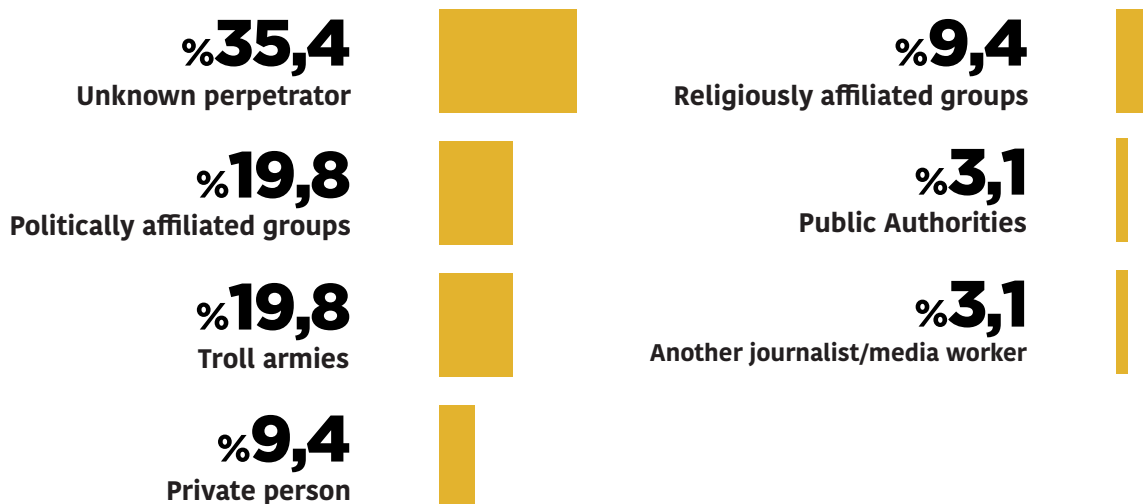
According to the survey results, Twitter is the medium over which most digital attacks against journalists occur. Seventy percent of journalists surveyed stated that they had been subjected to threats or violence on the platform. Twitter was followed by Instagram, where one out of three journalists faced violence.



Graph 2.11: Rate of participants exposed to online harassment in the specified medium

“ I was accused of being a PKK member, chasing ‘funds,’ defaming and plotting against the state on Twitter, because I took the photo of the father carrying the bag containing the body of Hakan Arslan, who was killed by the police, and shared it on Twitter. ”

The identity of 35.4 % of perpetrators of digital violence was unknown to the survey participants. This outcome reveals that some attackers use the right of anonymity offered by the Internet to benefit from impunity on social media.



Graph 2.12: Distribution of perpetrators of digital violence

19.8 % of perpetrators were identified by the survey participants as “troll armies” and another 19.8 % as “politically affiliated groups.” There have been news reports about groups such as “Ebabel Harekatı” (Operation Ebabel) that were organized to target specific people on social media. Ebabel Harekatı, which has thousands of members organized through Telegram, ran troll attacks against hundreds of posts, and social media users, including journalists, had their accounts closed or targeted individuals. In that sense, the findings of the survey are in line with other reports about online abuse.

The answers to the survey further showed that the perpetrators of digital threats are not restricted to those close to political power.

IMPACT OF DIGITAL VIOLENCE ON JOURNALISTS

“

The Governor’s Office closed the Osmanbey stop of the Yenikapı-Haciosman metro line on the day that assassinated journalist Hrant Dink was to be commemorated. The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality implemented this ban immediately. When I said that this was not limited to the commemoration of Dink but that the same ban was immediately implemented on Pride Month and International Women’s Day, I was attacked on Twitter by the supporters of İmamoğlu, the mayor. Among them were people who wrote that I should die.

”

Comparing the rates at which survey participants resorted to complaint mechanisms in incidents of digital and physical violence shows a dramatic difference. While the rate of participants who filed a complaint in case of physical violence or threats was 31.6%, this rate was 11.4% for digital violence. In other words, only one in ten online attacks are reported.

Looking at the gender distribution of those surveyed, it is revealed that the rate of complaints filed is much lower for men. According to the results, 36 % of female journalists, 6.6 % of male journalists, and one of two LGBTI+ journalists who were subjected to online violence had reported the digital attacks.

Three out of five participants who reported the attacks stated that they directed their complaint to the Twitter management. Looking at the results of the complaints, however, it was found that although some accounts were closed, the complaints were usually inconclusive.

“

Twitter often closes the account after a report, but the owner of the banned account continues to bully through another account.

”

When asked about the reasons for not acting against online violence, one journalist replied, “because it wouldn’t make a difference.” This statement not only summarizes the experiences of many of the surveyed journalists, it also reveals that journalists do not believe online violence will be punished.

“

I didn’t report because based on my previous experiences, I thought I wouldn’t be able to get results. Anyways, who am I going to complain to and whom am I going to complain about?

”

On the other hand, some participants answered that they “don’t care about online violence” or “withdrew the complaint because it [the abuse] didn’t continue.”

When we look at the effects of digital violence on journalists, personal security concerns come to the fore, as in the case of physical violence and threats. According to the results, almost half of the participants feel uneasy or insecure due to digital violence. One out of five journalists is concerned for the safety of their family, and almost one out of five practice self-censorship due to digital violence.

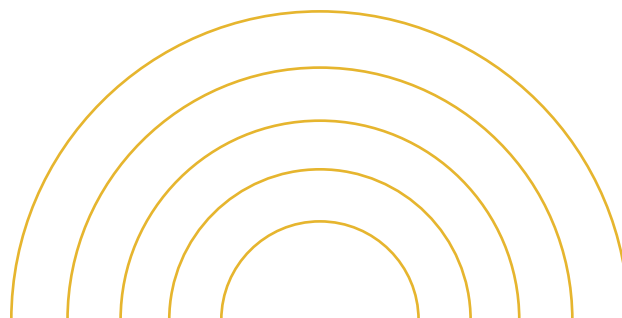
Some of the surveyed journalists also reported to have received death threats through digital means.



I couldn't get on Twitter for a while. I still cannot read what is written under the lynched posts. Apart from my news reports, I do not share or comment on social media, and I try to ignore the attacks that my pieces receive.



Graph 2.13: Impacts of online violence and threats on journalists



GENERAL AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF SECURITY

Lack of access to security training

Under the heading “General Evaluation” of the report, journalists were asked about precautions they took or measures they applied to overcome the impacts of the threats and violence they were subjected to.

38.6 % of the journalists stated that they had attended security training before. Among those who answered that they didn't receive any training, economic reasons and lack of awareness or opportunity were named as reasons.

While 7 out of 25 journalists who answered the related question stated that they did not take any precautions for their safety, some replied that they took digital security measures such as covering their computer camera, using a strong password, and deleting their data from social media.

Describing the security measures they have taken, one journalist stated that he has left the country, while another said, “I feel obliged to inform my close friends about the places I go. I share where I am, and if possible, I do not go alone.” From this, it can be concluded that warnings which have been made in this area in recent periods are effective. However, more awareness-raising is still needed on security measures.

Asked about whether they have taken any steps for their well-being, 5 of the 27 journalists who answered the question said that they did not take any measures. Among the reasons cited were financial difficulties. The majority of those who did take steps mentioned to engage in sports and physical exercise. 11 participants said they received psychological support. Some participants also mentioned participating in professional organizations, exchanging with friends and colleagues, taking breaks when feeling overwhelmed. One participant indicated to take an antidepressant.

Journalists do not feel safe in Turkey

When asked, “Do you feel safe as a journalist in Turkey?” half of the journalists indicated to feel “very unsafe,” and 36.8 % said to feel “unsafe.” Taken together, this means that almost 9 out of 10 journalists who participated in the survey do not feel safe practicing their profession in Turkey.



Graph 2.14: Safety perceptions among participants

“

Because we are not safe. Because we face detention and arrest at any moment.

”

CONCLUSION

Our survey among 57 journalists from 13 cities shows that most journalists feel unsafe practicing their profession in Turkey.

What's more, the perpetrators of violence against journalists are to a large degree those who are supposed to protect journalists, such as law enforcement or public authorities. In addition, the survey findings show that journalists often prefer not to engage in struggles against violence mainly because of a "distrust in the judiciary."

The finding that most journalists face violence repeatedly, both digitally and physically, shows that impunity is a systematic problem.

The fact that journalists working in the field, such as camera operators or photojournalists, are more exposed to violence reveals that the practice of working on the street is unsafe for journalists and that even the most basic journalistic activity has become difficult. The answers of survey participants pointing to "the field" as the place where journalists are most exposed to violence also support this finding.

With regards to exposure to violence, the answers of the journalists working in Diyarbakır, who all stated that they had been subjected to physical violence or threats in the last five years, shows how unprotected journalists are in the city.

That LGBTI+ and female journalists report that they are exposed to sexual violence and rape threats as well as other forms of violence due to their professional activities reinforces the rising concerns of recent years, in which attacks on women's vested rights have increased.

“

A pro-government writer tried to slander the associations I volunteer in through my trans identity and political views. He constantly targeted me by tagging accounts such as the General Directorate of Security and the Governor's Office. I received threats and harassment messages via DM... Psychologically, I couldn't connect with any of my friends for a long time...

”

Because the right to anonymity protects perpetrators, "unidentified persons" are the primary sources of attacks. However, considering the frequency of detentions and investigations against anonymous accounts of the opposition, limiting the explanation to "the exercise of the right to anonymity" would be incomplete. The fact that journalists tend to not report digital violence, that some do not attach importance to this form of violence, and moreover, news reports that some troll armies associated with political groups are formed by those in power, reveal a culture of impunity that has prepared the environment for anonymous perpetrators.

When it comes to safety training, the fact that journalists say that they did not have the opportunity to join one or that they did not think of it shows the lack of awareness and the need for employers to take action.

Furthermore, the answers of some journalists, which bring to light economic difficulties as a major reason for not seeking support when it comes to mental health, reveal the lack of support mechanisms in this area.

Asked about their suggestions on approaches to struggle against violence and threats, the most common answer of the participants was to **"strengthen solidarity."**

“

... We should cover the cases more that result in deterrent sentences. Of course, if there are deterrent sentences. Professional organizations need to provide more legal and financial support to freelancers. Online training workshops can be organized on the steps that should be taken in the face of attacks.

”

In this context, journalists expect to ensure solidarity among colleagues and for journalist organizations to be more active.

“

Professional organizations need a system that looks after journalists more. Press statements alone don't protect people.

”

“

... Politicians must not target journalists. Journalist organizations have a big role to play in these matters. But I don't think they're fighting very effectively.

”

“

Professional organizations should work harder on the 'official press card' regulation that police constantly ask for. I don't feel safe at all, especially while covering the news.

”

In addition to recommending professional organizations to provide legal assistance to journalists whose rights have been violated, the fight against impunity was important among the suggestions brought up. Ensuring editorial independence was also suggested as a measure against violence.

“

Journalism should have immunity. An environment should be created in which journalists do not think 'what will happen to me' when they are reporting for the public.

”

In addition, ensuring job security and decent wages were among the participants' demands.

SUGGESTIONS

- The perpetrators of violence against journalists should be identified promptly, and investigations should be conducted quickly and effectively.
- The pressure on journalists by public officials such as law enforcement and the judiciary must end.
- Harassment and violence by law enforcement against journalists who cover news in the field must be ended. The Constitutional Court's reasoning in the Beyza Kural case should be taken into consideration against arbitrary interference by the police. Effective investigations should be carried out, and deterrent sanctions should be applied against police officers and those responsible for preventing journalists from doing their jobs.
- Law enforcement officers should be given training on freedom of the press, which is guaranteed by the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).
- The authority of the Presidency's Directorate of Communications to issue Press Cards to journalists should end. Through legal regulation, the authority to issue Press Cards should be given to professional journalism organizations.
- The legal amendments introduced and known as the "censorship law" should be reversed as they pose a clear threat to the freedom of work, freedom of expression and press freedom of journalists.
- Journalists' freedom of association and the right to organize in unions should be ensured; obstacles to their organization should be removed.
- Solidarity and coordination between professional press organizations should increase. Various support channels should be developed for journalists, such as hotlines, contact points, and/or support procedures.
- The channels for reporting violence and attacks should be expanded and simplified within the legal system, on social media platforms, and in professional organizations.
- Access to free counseling and legal support should be facilitated for journalists exposed to threats.
- More training and awareness raising efforts are needed on violence and its various forms. In particular, online harassment should be highlighted as a form of violence and taken seriously.
- In addition to documentation and reporting on violence against journalists and its impacts, priority should be given to research and programs on effective strategies to combat this problem. These programs should receive support and funding.
- Materials to inform journalists about their rights in the Turkish legal system should be prepared and regularly updated. Materials that already exist on the safety and rights of journalists should be distributed among journalists. Handbooks for the safety of journalists published in other languages such as English should be translated and published in Turkish.
- Employers and press organizations should provide journalists regular safety and rights-based training. Employers, media organizations, and professional organizations should encourage journalists to attend safety training and facilitate their participation.
- The personal rights of freelance journalists should also be guaranteed.
- Social media platforms should take active action against troll attacks and doxing against journalists.

RESOURCES FOR JOURNALISTS

Journalist Safety and Emergencies (English)

Committee to Protect Journalists, 2012



Safety Handbook for Women Journalists (English)

Abeer Saady, 2021



Safety Guide for Journalists (English)

Safety Guide for Journalists
Reporters Without Borders, 2016



Safety tool-box for freelance journalists

Safety tool-box for
freelance journalists Rory Peck Trust



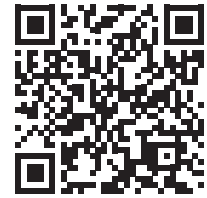
RESOURCES FOR JOURNALISTS



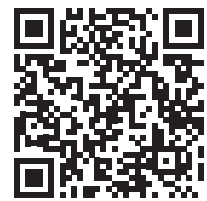
23 guidelines for journalists to safely cover protests
23 guidelines for journalists to safely cover protests. The Poynter Institute, 2020



The Online Harassment Field Manual (English)
The Online Harassment Field Manual
PEN America, 2020



Practical guide for women journalists on how to respond to online harassment (English)
Practical guide for women journalists on how to respond to online harassment UNESCO, 2021



Gender-sensitive safety policies for newsrooms: guidelines + checklist (English)
Gender-sensitive safety policies for newsrooms: guidelines + checklist UNESCO, 2021

