SURVEILLANCE OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN PAKISTAN

A Research Study by Digital Rights Foundation

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ABOUT

Digital Rights Foundation is a research based advocacy organization based in Pakistan focusing on ICTs to support human rights, democratic processes and better digital governance. DRF opposes any and all sorts of online censorship and violations of human rights both on ground and online. We firmly believe that freedom of speech and open access to online content is critically important for the development of the socio-economic infrastructure of the country.

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SUMMARY

This report builds on the experiences of seven female journalists in Pakistan and seeks to document the forms of state, political and social surveillance that they have faced in their line of work. The research does not confine itself to traditional forms of surveillance by the state and its institutions, but also looks at social surveillance by the audience and various non-state actors. The study will map the different experiences of surveillance and the impact that it has on their work, personal safety and freedom of the press in general.

INTRODUCTION

Surveillance of journalists is a matter of concern all around the world. The right to free speech, a universal norm and recognised as a fundamental right under Article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan, also guarantees the right to freedom of press. That right of freedom of press includes the right to operate free from censorship, monitoring, and intimidation. Surveillance has wide ranging consequences, including the erosion of the right of privacy, allowing institutions unfettered access to otherwise private information, censorship and the targeting of individuals. The effects of surveillance are amplified manifold when it comes to journalists and the media. Surveillance of journalists leads to fear of safety among the community, self-censorship, fear and is often accompanied by on-the-ground threats. This kind of surveillance has a direct impact on what journalists say and the subjects that they work on, which has implications for free speech and freedom of the press.

Pakistan ranks as one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. In a report issued by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), based on the last 25 years, Pakistan has been ranked as the fourth most dangerous country for journalists in the world.[1] Furthermore, journalists' freedom of speech is also under attack with the passage of laws such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (PECA). The vague language of the Act and the broad powers that it gives to the state is a troubling development for journalists who already face surveillance and physical threats. The dangers that journalists face are multifaceted and experienced differently based on the identity and position of the journalist (gender, class, religion or ethnicity), subjects that they tackle, type of media they work in and whether they are reporters or editors. This report seeks to explore one facet of these threats: gender. With the disappearance of Zeenat Shahzadi in August 2015, understanding the nature of the threat faced by female journalists has become urgent.[2]

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[1] International Federation of Journalists. Journalists and Media Staff Killed 1990 -2015: *25 years of contribution towards Safer Journalism*. Brussels: International Federation of Journalists, 2016. Accessed December 30, 2016. http://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/documents/25_Report_Final_sreads_web.pdf.

[2] Ankit Panda, "Zeenat Shahzadi's Story: A Young Reporter, 'Disappeared' in Pakistan," The Diplomat, May 14, 2016, http://thediplomat.com/2016/05/zeenat-shahzadis-story-a-young-reporter-disappeared-in-pakistan/. "Zeenat Shahzadi: Fears for missing Pakistan reporter," BBC News, May 11, 2016, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36149315.

This report finds, based on qualitative interviews with female journalists working in Pakistan, that the experience of surveillance for female journalists is gendered and is thus different from their male counterparts. While there is no conclusive evidence of whether women face more surveillance, the form that the surveillance takes is in the form of sexualised threats, attacks on character and appearance. This gendered form of surveillance is true for both state and social surveillance. Female journalists were chosen as subjects of this pilot study based on their unique position since journalists have increased visibility in both online and offline spaces. This report will also explore the varied experience they have of these spaces because of their gender.

OBJECTIVES

Surveillance and its impact on the media, and in turn free speech, is a well-documented phenomenon. The gendered aspect of surveillance and its specific manifestations is often ignored within mainstream surveillance discourse. It is this gap in research that the present report seeks to fill. The groundwork for this research has been laid by the various studies and academic discourse on the targeting of journalists. This study seeks to nuance current literature and aims to tease apart existing categories through a gendered analysis.

This report is a pilot research into the study of gendered surveillance of female journalists. Digital Rights Foundation seeks to identify areas of research that could be expanded upon by future studies and researchers in the area of media studies and surveillance.

Given the limited sample size, our conclusions are not representative of the dominant experience of female journalists in Pakistan, rather an identification of certain trends within the community and the varied effects of surveillance. These experiences within our sample size were far from uniform, and an indication of the diversified impact of surveillance. The theoretical core of this report documents the diffuse surveillance strategies for female journalists.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative in nature and consists of in-depth interviews with seven female journalists working in Pakistan. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, and were geared towards generating a conversation on surveillance, gender and the personal experience of the journalists. Some interviews were held in person, while others were conducted over the phone and Skype when it was not possible for the interviewees to travel to the location of the researchers.

The names and identities of the journalists have been included through informed consent and certain information has been anonymised when it was indicated that it might put the journalist at risk. The interviewees have been shown a draft of the research before it was sent for dissemination and publication.

The report is conceived as a pilot study, which is limited in its sample size and scope. The journalists approached by Digital Rights Foundation largely belong to traditional media outlets, such as television channels and newspapers. Given the changing nature of journalism and the media, there is much to be explored in terms of the surveillance that target the emerging forms of the media and news outlets. However, this research focuses on the dynamics and negotiations of female journalists on "non-traditional" social media forums.

SURVEILLANCE OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS

Most of the journalists that we interviewed defined surveillance as the act of "watching" and "monitoring". They identified it as the feeling of *being watched*, as the object of the gaze surveilling them. Kiran Nazish[3], defines surveillance as "any kind of monitoring by an outside group, be it a government or corporate organization. Anyone looking or spying on your personal or professional interactions between you and your sources and contacts"[4]. Amber Shamsi[5] also describes surveillance as synonymous with monitoring, "whether it is the state, interest groups or non-state actors, who track your career and work—through social media and on the telephone by recording your calls and keeping track of who you're talking to through text messages"[6]. This definition is mirrored by Sarah Eleazar[7] who posits that "surveillance is keeping an eye on what someone is doing, or writing in the case of journalists"[8].

Apart from surveillance as a feeling of being watched, Ramish Fatima[9] felt that it was more intrusive than simply the act of watching. According to her, surveillance is more accurately described as an *interference* "in personal life and as an intrusion into your personal circles"[10].

This public and private life distinction is central to surveillance and to the safety of journalists. Ramish points out that the audience tends to think that if someone is using social media to report, their personal lives—in addition to their work—is also public property[11]. The ease with which people can move from the public nature of their work to their private lives is what makes female journalists so vulnerable and an important subject for surveillance studies.

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[3] Kiran Nazish, interviewed by Shmyla Khan and Luavut Zahid, November 7, 2016.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Amber Shamsi, interviewed by Shmyla Khan and Luavut Zahid, November 8, 2016.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Sarah Eleazar, interviewed by Shmyla Khan and Luavut Zahid, November 9, 2016.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Ramish Fatima, interviewed by Shmyla Khan and Luavut Zahid, November 7, 2016.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.

SOURCES OF SURVEILLANCE

Through our interviews, we have identified two main sources of surveillance experienced by female journalists in Pakistan. The first form of surveillance is by the state, government institutions and intelligence agencies. State surveillance is troubling given that it is backed by state machinery which makes for effective, systematic and efficient monitoring.

This form of surveillance, however is difficult to measure and describe in detail given that it is hidden by its very nature and manifests only in extreme circumstances. Given the complicated forms that surveillance takes, it is difficult for some journalists to connect the dots and even identify surveillance for what it is. Kiran Nazish posits that she would get strange messages on her Facebook which contained the content of her previous messages to private contacts, but she did not know what it was at the time. Many times, when it was revealed to the journalists that they were surveilled it was surprising for them to discover that they had been monitored for years; however the surveillance went undetected due to its covert nature. Kiran has pointed out that "you cannot tell that surveillance is happening unless someone shows you data of it, [often] of two or four years"[12].

Social surveillance, experienced by all the journalists we interviewed, is carried out by the audience, political parties, non-state actors, fellow journalists and personal contacts. Some journalists reported that they experienced more social surveillance than by the state. Thus, it becomes particularly important to mainstream a definition of surveillance that not only includes state surveillance, but social surveillance as well. Unfortunately the traditional definition of surveillance excludes and silences female experiences of social surveillance.

Ramish feels that surveillance and interference by individuals has its own dynamics because "the state at least has some mandate to interference in personal lives at times, but this is not the case when surveillance [is carried out] by individuals" where there is little recourse against private citizens[13]. While there are legal remedies for social surveillance such as the reporting mechanism against online harassment in the Cybercrime Wing of the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA), particularly following the passage of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (PECA), the general feeling of powerlessness in controlling social surveillance was echoed by others as well. Maria

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[12] Kiran, interview.
[13] Ramish, interview.

Memon[14] is of the opinion that surveillance through social media is an inevitable aspect of her participation in that space and there is very little that journalists can do about it.

It is important to note at the onset that state and social surveillance are not discrete categories that operate independently of one another. Oftentimes the two work together in complicated ways to harass, threaten and monitor journalists. For instance, Kiran Nazish points out that systematic surveillance, even when done by political parties and groups, cannot be carried out without the cooperation of the intelligence agencies[15]. Maria Memon told us that "if you tweet from a pro-state narrative then you get a lot of retweets, but if you go anti-state or ask a probing question then that does not get as much traction. That indicates to you that some machinery is driving [the social surveillance]"[16].

There seems to be no clear trend regarding the dominant type of surveillance directed at female journalists; the variations seem to depend on the kind of journalist you are. Amber Shamsi points out that she has experienced "surveillance and monitoring by all three groups, whether it's the state, non-state actors or audience". She added that as a general observation there is no trend of one type of surveillance targeting female journalists[17].

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[14] Maria Memon, interviewed by Shmyla Khan, November 10, 2016.
[15] Kiran Nazish, interview.
[16] Memon, interview.
[17] Amber Shamsi, interview.

ONLINE AND OFFLINE SURVEILLANCE

Offline and online surveillance tends to be viewed as separate. However, both these forms of surveillance are deeply interlinked and are equally severe. Offline surveillance is often seen as more severe and worrisome. This notion not only misconstrues the nature of online surveillance and its relation with offline implications, but it also discards the experience of many women who primarily face online surveillance.

There is consensus on the strong link between online and offline surveillance. Kiran Nazish pointed out that most of the time, "offline surveillance translates into online surveillance as well"[18]. Technologies have often been used to track physical movements and conversations that journalists have with their peers and sources. On-the-ground surveillance is often accompanied by messages and hate mail, and after a while some journalists start to see these patterns and come to recognize the messages as surveillance. Maria Memon also did not feel that women journalists face more surveillance on digital media than on the ground, in fact she saw the two mediums as deeply interconnected: "sometimes what you say on social media will translate into on the ground surveillance [and vice versa]"[19].

Some journalists, on the other hand, such as Ramish Fatima and Amber Shamsi, felt that female journalists experience more online surveillance than on the ground. Amber reported that, "in some cases, in terms of intelligence agencies, they do handle female journalists with more kid gloves. Apart from the one case of the female journalist [Zeenat Shahzadi] who went missing, I think state agencies try to use psychological techniques over physical abduction or torture"[20].

Kiran Nazish also alludes to this notion of "kid gloves". According to her, when female reporters "are interacting with the intelligence agencies, they often invoke your gender and you can feel that they are interacting with you as a woman"[21]. In the cultural context of South Asia, while there is an element of showing respect to women, the surveillance is still paternalistic and can be intimidating as well. For instance, Kiran Nazish says that at the Kashmir border she was offered accommodation and food by the Military who followed her through her journalistic assignment, as she covered the issue on the border. She felt the communication by the military was distinctly gendered. She was informed by her male

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[18] Kiran, interview.
[19] Memon, interview.
[20] Shamsi, interview.
[21] Nazish, interview

colleagues, who were also working in the same space, that this had never happened to them[22]. Other interviewees pointed out that given gender stereotypes, female reporters are often underestimated by the state. They posited that women can sometimes publish quite provocative reports without serious repercussions because of their gender.

Maria, on the other hand, pushes back against the idea that women are dealt with less severely than male journalists. She stated that "there is a tendency to over exaggerate a 'female advantage' when people see women doing well. For instance, if women are doing well on an exam, they accuse them of playing their female card"[23].

Another reason why women are not subjected to same level of offline violence and surveillance is because female journalists are simply not given the "hard" beats and the opportunities that their male counterparts are. Given the organizational structures of media offices and the implicit gender stereotypes that prevail in newsrooms, women are not given many political or security related reporting assignments. Sarah Eleazar postulated that the reason gendered surveillance is not widely discussed because women are simply numerically disadvantaged in the profession as a whole. Furthermore, she feels, it is this lack of numbers makes female journalists more vulnerable, as they are easier to pick out and particularly visible[24].

Some journalists dismissed online surveillance as merely psychologically and emotionally distressing, while identifying threats such as stalking, abduction, physical torture and intimidation in offline spaces as more real and tangible. Furthermore, many posited that women are less likely to be physically manhandled than men. While this binary obfuscates the deeply connected nature of offline and online surveillance, it is a reflection of some of the attitudes that prevail within the state and agencies. Women are often given deference and respect on the basis of their gender, and thus intimidated in different, sometimes subtler, ways. The section on "How is surveillance gendered?" of this report explores this manifestation of surveillance in more detail.

According to Kiran Nazish, the primary source of surveillance is oftentimes a function of logistics and resources. Technologies and online activities allow for easier forms of surveillance and it is simply more efficient to track journalists online given their usage of social media and electronic means of communication.[25] It remains to be seen if journalists will experience a wider shift of surveillance to online spaces, or whether that shift has already been set in motion.

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[22] Kiran, interview.
[23] Memon, interview.
[24] Eleazar, interview.
[25] Kiran Nazish, interview.

STATE SURVEILLANCE

As mentioned earlier, the clandestine nature of state surveillance and technologies makes this form of surveillance difficult to measure and less visible at times. This difficulty was seen during our interviews where the journalists were reluctant to identify some instances decisively as state surveillance given the ambiguous nature of the messages or the partial visibility of the threat. Maria Memon said that while she feels that state and social surveillance are both equally pervasive, "with the state I've never felt like they are watching me constantly even though [I know that] they are, but social actors make their presence felt more".[26] Nevertheless, many of the journalists we interviewed identified certain patterns that manifested themselves as backed by state apparatus.

Many interviews mentioned automated accounts, or "bot accounts", that follow journalists, troll in massive numbers and in a concerted manner. Amber posits that there are "these generic accounts, pictures and names and tend to be associated with a particular political party, but once you look a little closer at the account, when it was created or the origin, it does look very dubious and it is generally a sign that this is a concerted campaign, potentially by the state"[27]. Maria Memon also alludes to coordinated campaigns and generic accounts. She asserts that if you Tweet something deviating from the regular narrative of the state then "you start to get the same tweets from different accounts, but you can tell that these are bots and troll accounts".[28]

Saba Eitizaz[29] has also experienced such systematic campaigns when she covered topics that might be deemed controversial from the state's point of view. When the BBC published an article on the Zeenat Shehzadi case, there was a lot of abuse directed at Saba's character and referred to her as a traitor. For several days following the story, Saba said she "received messages which were all in a very systematic manner; there

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[26] Memon, interview.
[27] Shamsi, interview.
[28] Memon, interview.
[29] Saba Eitizaz, interviewed by Luavut Zahid and Seerat Khan, October 25, 2016.

was a three-hour gap and then a series of messages and it seemed like they were clocking it"[30].

> "Being a journalist, I always feel like I'm under watch. Especially my tweets, because that's the public domain and everyone can see it. I do know my tweets are being, read, watched, monitored—by political parties and agencies"
>
> - Maria Memon

Other journalists said the presence of state monitoring becomes obvious as certain signs emerge following articles or programs that present alternative views to the state narrative. They usually start to receive vague phone calls, messages, emails and attempts to gain access to their accounts during such periods. Saba Eitizaz posits that the state is not "too direct about [its surveillance] but certain agencies and people use these certain language in emails which makes us realize that the state is keeping an eye on us"[31]. On other instances, female journalists have been physically followed or have noticed suspicious persons repeatedly outside their homes.

Working in particular regions also results in increased and direct surveillance. Reporting in areas where there is militant activity and/or army presence automatically results in state surveillance, often times in very overt forms. Kiran Nazish told us that working in FATA and refugee camps for internally displaced persons led to state officers monitoring and inquiries about her work and sources[32].

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[30] Eitizaz, interview.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Nazish, interview.

In some cases, intelligence and state agencies directly contact the journalists to indicate that they are being monitored. Some of our interviewees have been invited to meetings with intelligence agencies for the purpose of informing them that they are being watched. One interviewee mentioned that she was shown her emails and messages by government officials to let her know that she is under surveillance. Some journalists have received phone calls, either directly or through their editors, to deliver certain messages or warnings. These are not innocuous communications, but are carried out with the purpose of intimidation.

SOCIAL SURVEILLANCE

Social surveillance has been identified as monitoring and contact by social actors who have the effect of surveilling, policing, threatening and influencing the work of journalists. All the female journalists said that they experienced abuse in online spaces from individual audience members, supporters of political parties, religious groups and militant organizations. Not only did many of the experiences exhibit similar patterns, they were seen as a natural consequence of having an online public presence. Ramish Fatima points out that since there has been an increase in online journalism, social surveillance by readers is "a part and parcel of reporting"[33].

The experience of surveillance varied based on the social media site on which it took place. Many of the journalists we spoke to accept the abuse on Twitter as inevitable in their line of work. Given the public nature of a platform like Twitter, many journalists had lower expectations of privacy and community standards. Ramish pointed out that the 140-character word limit sometimes prevented more personal abuse from getting across[34]. Abuse received on Facebook, on the other hand, affected our interviewees more and the surveillance there was seen as markedly more personal[35].

While some of our interviewees said that they had not experienced overt government surveillance or monitoring, they had, on the other hand, experienced a lot of social surveillance. Online social surveillance takes on a particularly gendered form and the harassment is often specifically geared towards the person's sexuality, appearance and character.

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[33] Fatima, interview.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

IS SURVEILLANCE GENDERED?

Many of our interviewees observed that when it comes to controversial topics, both female and male journalists face equal levels of surveillance, however the form of surveillance tends to be gendered. In the experience of some journalists, when the state is attempting to intimidate or discourage them from publishing or reporting particular materials, they often employ sexualized threats or the possibility of revealing facts about their personal lives. Even when the communication is not couched in threatening terms, the interactions are still informed by the journalists' gender. Kiran Nazish points out that she has often received subtle threats in the vein of "friendly advice"[36]. Women are informed in so many words that their reputation could be damaged given the society we live in, "I was told if you're not careful your reputation can be damaged". These interactions delicately use cultural and gender norms against women journalists. Ramish Fatima points out that male journalists do not have to face the same kinds of scandals, speculation about sexual affairs and sensationalized gossip that female journalists are subjected to[37].

Female reporters feel that they are scrutinized online more than men. Amber Shamsi said that "for female journalists it's not just about the work, in fact they are treated based on their personal life and appearance. A female journalist doesn't just have to worry about the interview or the story, but she also has to worry about what she's wearing and how she looks"[38]. While the threat of violence is probably equal for both men and women, "one is very conscious as a female journalist, not just of your appearance but your own personal life"[39]. Saba Eitizaz points out that "criticism on women seems to be more personal, whereas men are criticized for their work. For women, it's more about who she is, her character and gender. I receive graphic descriptions of sexualized abuse online and that is purely based on my gender and not my work"[40].

However, Maria Memon was of the opinion that there isn't much difference between the surveillance faced by male and female journalists, "my male counterparts face the same threats as the females". She, nevertheless, also alluded to the fact that the kind of surveillance women face is different: "it's mostly about your physical appearance"[41]. She

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[36] Nazish, interview.
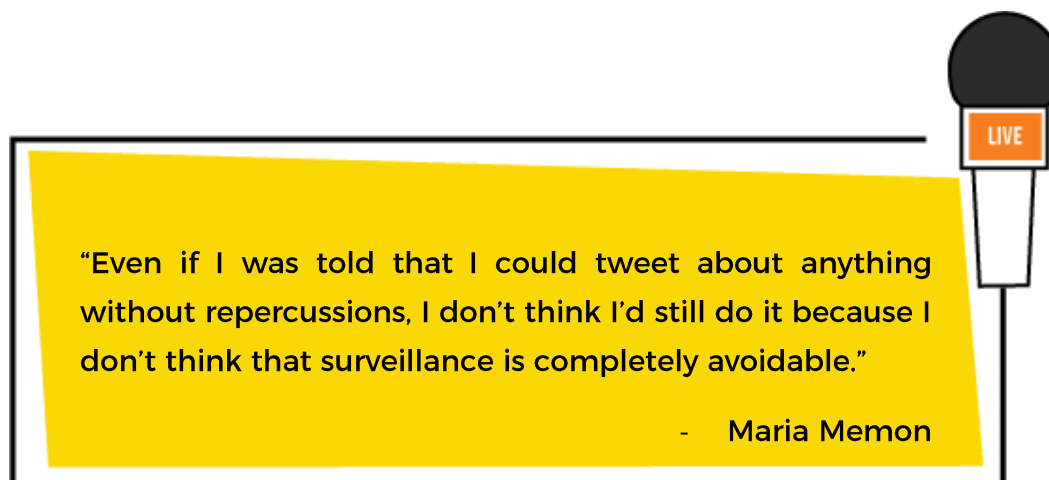[37] Fatima, interview.
[38] Shamsi, interview.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Eitizaz, interview.
[41] Memon, interview.

did, however, shy away from concluding that she is at more of a risk because of her gender, "everyone is equally at the other end of the stick when it comes to surveillance"[42].

Saba Eitzaz told us that talking about violence against women and problems that women face in society results in a lot of abuse online. She says that "people don't really hear the stories we share and since I work for BBC they consider me as an outsider. When we share stories on honor killings and show the real side of Pakistan they refer to us as RAW agents and always criticize us for sharing the negative side of Pakistan. These people like to think that these things are not happening in Pakistan"[43].

Kiran Nazish, who is an international correspondent and has reported in several countries, believes that the surveillance is carried out in some countries can be particularly gendered - often an extract of one's customs. Pakistan being one of those countries, she posits, where women face some very specific and prolific dangers leading to isolation and abandonment. She believes that women's gender is often used against them, used to silence and intimidate them. Audience reaction to controversial pieces, especially those that counter the state's narrative and religious sensibilities, quickly descends into comments like "what kind of woman are you, if you don't wear a *dupatta* (covering) on your head" or "you are a shame to the country and a shame to Islam"[44]. Female journalists are very careful about what they post in terms of personal content.

> "Even if I was told that I could tweet about anything without repercussions, I don't think I'd still do it because I don't think that surveillance is completely avoidable."
>
> - Maria Memon

Amber Shamsi reveals that more often than not the primary focus is on the appearance of female journalists, "for instance on occasion I have been wearing western clothes and posted [those] pictures [online]. And I have been called a western agent because I was

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[42] Ibid.
[43] Eitizaz, interview.
[44] Nazish, interview.

wearing a particular kind of dress. I try not to let that affect me, but sometimes it can be a bit much"[45].

Often the personal and family lives of female journalists are also affected. One journalist reported that while working in the field in FATA, apart from on-the-ground surveillance, she was getting messages on Facebook calling her character into question and referring to her a "prostitute". At the same time, her entire family (brothers, sisters and parents) received these messages as well. She is still unsure about how her family was tracked down, and it was naturally an unsettling experience for her. She not only had to deal with the stress of putting her family in danger, but also had to face the repercussions given that she came from a socially conservative background.

Ramish Fatima talked about how her work led to character assassinations online. Various fake Facebook profiles bearing her name and pictures were made to target her integrity and character. This ordeal lasted for around eight months, exhibiting the lack of response by authorities and social media companies and the relentless campaigns that female journalists can be subjected to.[46]

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[45] Shamsi, interview.
[46] Fatima, interview

INTERSECTIONALITIES: HOW DIFFERENT IDENTITIES IMPACT SURVEILLANCE

Gender is not a uniform category, and there are many identities that cut across it. Amber Shamsi points out that "as we saw in the Cyril Almeida case that personal life, personal affiliations and religion has also played a factor [in the amount of surveillance and scrutiny by the state]. So, it is any place where you are vulnerable, and in the case of females, it is your behavior, family life and appearance"[47]. Ramish Fatima also feels that there is an intersectionality that makes women from certain classes and minority groups more vulnerable[48]. The situation becomes more complicated in light of these intersectionalities and a simple analysis regarding the gendered aspects of surveillance needs to be nuanced to take into account other factors that cut across gender.

It has been the experience of some of our interviewees that surveillance becomes more intense when journalists are covering certain stories and controversial topics. If a journalist is commenting on women's rights or critiquing state policy, then most interviewees point out that it is understood that you will be subject to surveillance and online threats. It is an unsaid rule that commenting on certain legislation and governmental actions, like the blasphemy laws, guarantees surveillance and harassment. One interviewee pointed out that certain things like gender, class and political background allows some journalists to report on topics that would prove dangerous for female or minority journalists. Many cannot do the same stories as well-connected men.

Saba Eitizaz points out that she receives additional scrutiny on social media because of her religion. She told us that "I have been referred to as 'half breed' because I am half Shia"[49]. This intersection of religious and gendered abuse led her to limit her use of social media and made her shy away from certain subjects[50].

Kiran Nazish also points out that the experience of foreign female journalists is quite different from that of local female journalists. In her experience, surveillance does not take a particularly gendered form when it is targeted at foreign female journalists who belong

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[47] Shamsi, interview.
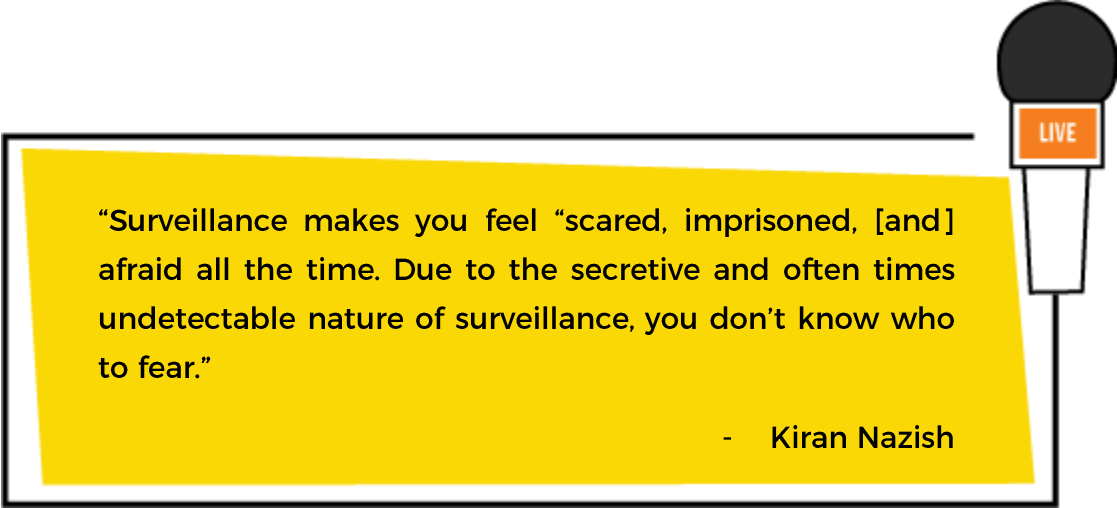[48] Fatima, interview.
[49] Eitizaz, interview.
[50] Ibid.

to different cultural backgrounds and are perceived to prescribe to different gendered norms[51].

The medium of journalism is a huge factor in determining the amount and the kind of surveillance one receives. It is more likely for television journalists to be surveilled on the ground, while for print journalists, it is easier to be trolled online, according to Kiran Nazish[52]. Maria Memon, hosting her own show on television, talked about how the nature and dynamics of surveillance change if you appear on television. "You are very accessible, people see you on TV and [they will] instantly feel like talking to you and giving you feedback". Further adding, "sometimes I'm on TV and I will instantly get a tweet saying your head isn't covered"[53].

Editors that we spoke to had not experienced the same extent of surveillance as most newspaper reporters. Sarah Eleazar, an editor herself, observed that surveillance is experienced mostly by journalists as opposed to editors, who often times operate under the radar. The threat of surveillance is more directly experienced by the reporter whose name is going on the by-line[54]. This highlights the need to view female journalists as a dynamic category who experience varying degrees of surveillance.

> "Surveillance makes you feel "scared, imprisoned, [and] afraid all the time. Due to the secretive and often times undetectable nature of surveillance, you don't know who to fear."
>
> -   Kiran Nazish

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[51] Nazish, interview.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Memon, interview.
[54] Eleazar, interview.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT

Psychology is a major weapon employed against journalists, activists and political actors to silence them. The manner in which the subjects of surveillance react is deeply psychological in nature. In fact, we were prompted by our interviewees on several instances to the particularly psychological tactics employed against female journalists.

Tracking of personal information and location can have a psychologically damaging effect on journalists. Kiran Nazish says that surveillance or the threat of surveillance makes her feel "paranoid" and forces her to take precautions to keep her identity as low-key as possible. According to her, surveillance makes you feel "scared, imprisoned, [and] afraid all the time".[55] Due to the secretive and often times undetectable nature of surveillance, "you don't know who to fear".[56] Saba Eitizaz felt that online social surveillance has sometimes had "a tremendous psychological effect on me and I felt violated. The social media is a parallel world [however] the comments and tweets made still have a huge impact on you. I end up removing my tweets [at times] and I usually try not to have an opinion on social media."[57] The emotional fallout of surveillance is an additional burden to the existing stress of reporting, especially for those reporting on topics such as gendered violence and conflict.

"Social surveillance online has sometimes had a tremendous psychotic effect on me and I felt violated."

-   Saba Eitizaz

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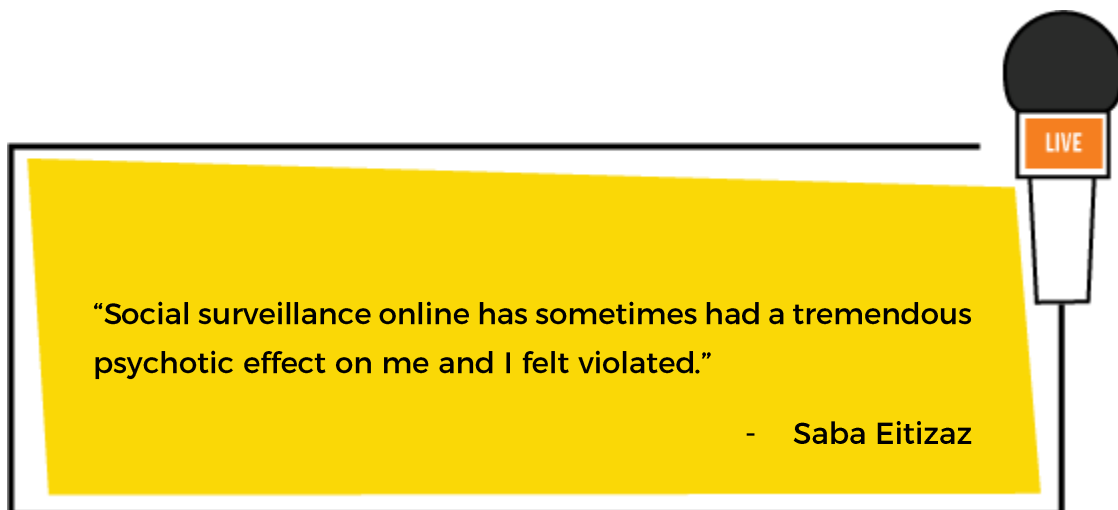
[55] Nazish, interview.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Eitizaz, interview

Kiran Nazish also agreed that surveillance is psychological for women as opposed to men who are more likely to be physically manhandled and intimidated. Often times, she was made to feel that she didn't belong in the field alongside her male counterparts. When she visited refugee/IDP camps in Bannu, which hosted IDPs from Waziristan, Kiran said that security forces would tell her that this was not a place where she should be seen because of her gender. She stated that, "it's not just one person telling you that you don't belong here, it's a number of people and that constant refrain can be very intimidating and one starts to feel concerned"[58]. The same dynamic manifests itself online, when a group of accounts is trolling you, as opposed to one person, it can become quite intimidating.

There is also a lack of conversation about mental health and the psychological toll of surveillance. Sarah Eleazar stated that she has rarely spoken about surveillance to her colleagues, and rather the instinct is to avoid talking about it[59]. Kiran Nazish also pointed out that many people in journalistic circles do not consider trauma as a problem, which is an extension of attitudes in our society[60].

> "It's not just one person telling you that you don't belong here, it's a number of people and that constant refrain can be very intimidating and one starts to feel concerned."
>
> - Kiran Nazish
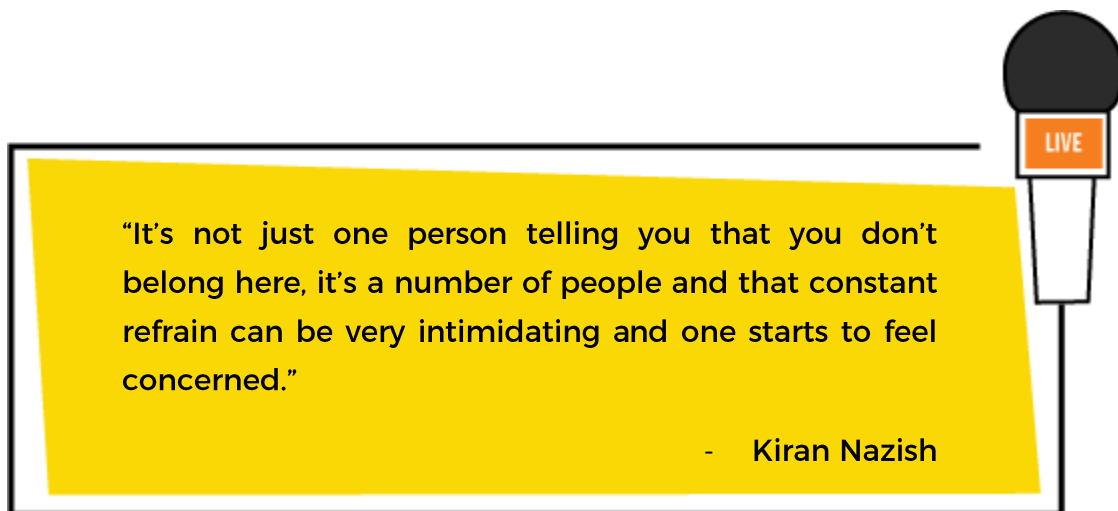
The emotional and personal toll of surveillance can cause immense stress among journalists, which can be overwhelming. Ramish Fatima revealed that she personally knows two bloggers who stopped posting and eliminated their online presence in the face of relentless gendered surveillance. Ramish says that "one can only tolerate abuse up till
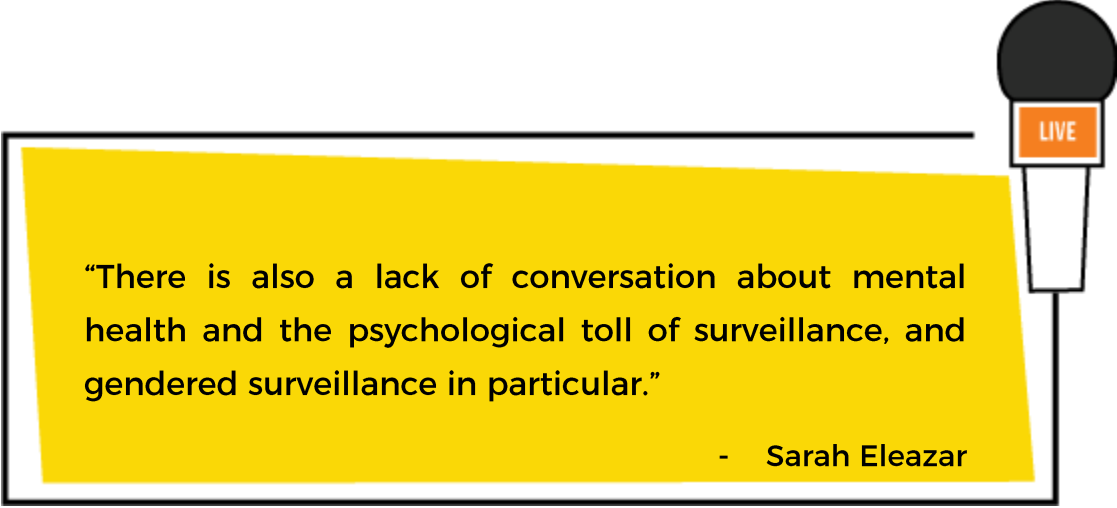
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[58] Nazish, interview
[59] Eleazar, interview
[60] Nazish, interview

a certain point, after a while you start to feel the stress and you can abandon writing altogether in some cases"[61].

Surveillance and the paranoia it creates has a profound impact on the psyche of journalists. Maria Memon stated that "even if I was told that I could tweet about anything without repercussions, I don't think I would still do it because I don't think that surveillance is completely avoidable"[62]. Even in her own hypothetical world of no consequences, Maria could not conceive of a world without surveillance. Kiran Nazish posits that surveillance changes the way you react to situations and "when you face the same situations and intimidation tactics over a long period of time, you begin to give rehearsed responses. When it happens repeatedly, you get trained in how to react".[63] However, when you give a calm response and don't hyperventilate, even that can be used against female journalists as a sign that they're too comfortable with such situations and must possess an ulterior motive[64].

> "There is also a lack of conversation about mental health and the psychological toll of surveillance, and gendered surveillance in particular."
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> -   Sarah Eleazar

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[61] Fatima, interview.
[62] Nazish, interview.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

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SELF-CENSORSHIP

There is a direct link between surveillance and self-censorship, making surveillance a free speech issue. This link is particularly potent when it comes to certain topics in Pakistan, such as the blasphemy law and rights of minorities. Ramish points out that even talking about the problematic implementation of particular laws and their potential for abuse leads to surveillance and social censure; simply broaching the topic leads to labels such as "anti-religion" or "anti-Islam". As a journalist and a commentator, she says that she avoids talking about these issues directly[65].

> **Kiran Nazish had to decide not to publish a controversial story on surveillance in Pakistan because of the threats that she was receiving; a story that she had been working on for nearly six months and had spent substantial intellectual, emotional,**

Kiran Nazish points out that even in the formative stages of their learning, journalists are taught to take surveillance into account and anticipate it as a reality of the profession[66]. Sarah Eleazar told us that self-censorship happens even in the absence of a direct threat of surveillance[67]. Maria Memon also sees surveillance as inevitable and a natural consequence of reporting in a country like Pakistan. She says that she is extremely careful on social media, and only posts "keeping in mind the social norms and sensitivities"[68]. Given her background in television, Maria says that she is very cautious

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[65] Fatima, interview.
[66] Nazish, interview.
[67] Eleazar, interview.
[68] Memon, interview.

about speaking her mind regarding controversial issues. After the Sabeen Mehmood incident, she is very careful about what she says and how she says it because "you never know how it might be interpreted or misinterpreted"[69]. She never voices her religious views, but given the nature of her job she is required to talk politics—but is always mindful about the social context when she does so[70].

While self-censorship happens in general, especially when it comes to sensitive issues like religious discrimination or civil-military relations, there is also a fair degree of censorship when it comes to reporting on issues of gender. One journalist tells that you have to try to find a way to frame gender issues so that it is understandable to a large section of society. It was revealed that she feels a pressure to water down her writing and frame gender issues in a way that the majority of people won't reject outright. These news stories or opinion pieces have to be made palpable according to the general societal norms.
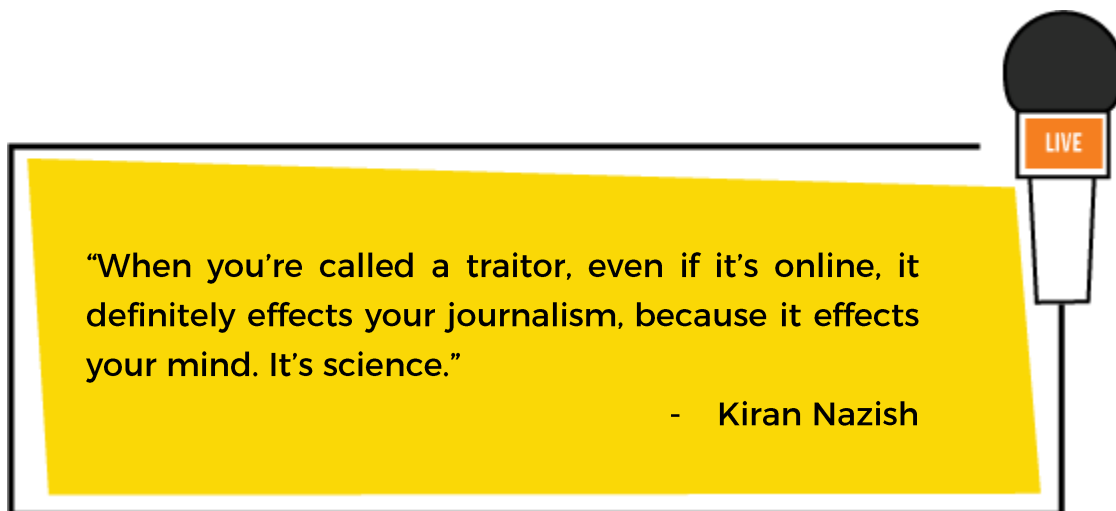
As a correspondent with Tehelka, an Indian publication, Kiran Nazish revealed that she never wrote anything related to the security situation in Pakistan or content that could be perceived "as anti-Pakistan in any way"[71]. This hesitance is rooted in the toll that trolls and negative feedback has. Kiran Nazish posits that "if someone calls me a 'RAW agent', I will be scared for my family". After her family received threats, it stopped her from reporting on certain issues. Kiran Nazish told us that she had decided not to publish a controversial story on surveillance in Pakistan because of the threats that she was receiving; a story that she had been working on for nearly six months and had spent substantial intellectual, emotional, and financial resources on. She says that it is due to the combination of surveillance and gendered intimidation that she decided to stop reporting in Pakistan, stating that she could not "handle the stress that revolves around reporting in Pakistan"[72].

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Nazish, interview.
[72] Ibid.

> "When you're called a traitor, even if it's online, it definitely effects your journalism, because it effects your mind. It's science."
>
> - Kiran Nazish

Maria Memon points out that women are generally very careful about what they say or post online, given the gendered experiences that they have had in the past[73]. Kiran Nazish says that "if you have been trolled online, the next time you tweet you will think [twice] about it and these things become barriers in your mind"[74]. Some of the journalists we interviewed said that they were hesitant about reporting on the Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaaf (PTI) because of the presence of their supporters online, and the intensity with which they attack anyone who criticizes their party[75].

Amber Shamsi says that she tries her level best to not self-censor. She points out that the content and subject matter of a reporter's work depends on the kind of journalism they are involved in—print or online, broadcast or print, Urdu or English. Having experience in multiple mediums, she says that "in television, I have to temper and censor more than I would like. Whereas I really don't do that for anything that I write for print or online"[76]. Amber also told us that apart from self-censorship, she has experienced direct forms of censorship when an article that she wrote was removed after threats from some militant outfits[77].

Many of the journalists we interviewed talked about the importance of working with a reputable media organization and the protection that it accords. Saba Eitizaz points out that international organizations are usually very strict in terms of their policies on harassment and inform their reporters on how to guard against online surveillance[78]. Amber Shamsi also added that international organizations have entire departments

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[73] Memon, interview.
[74] Nazish, interview.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Shamsi, interview.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Eitizaz, interview.

dedicated to safety of journalists, and cyber security is a vital component[79]. Despite these protections, most of our interviewees felt that not much can be done by their management about online abuse. Furthermore, local media organizations did not take gendered abuse as seriously as most journalists would like and some reported a lack of gender sensitivity towards gender issues. Additionally, this approach to journalists' security ultimately leaves freelance journalists, bloggers and those working for less established organizations vulnerable to surveillance and abuse.

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[79] Shamsi, interview

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. TAKE THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TOLL OF SURVEILLANCE SERIOUSLY

There is a certain amount of shame attached to admitting that one has been psychologically affected by surveillance, particularly the social surveillance that female journalists have to face on a daily basis. Media organizations and those managing them need to recognize the psychological effects directly stemming from surveillance and provide resources to help journalists keep themselves safe, both physically and emotionally.

Many of the journalists we spoke to indicated that the stigma attached to discussing their emotional distress and the psychological injury made them hesitant in talking about it. Women are often times told to 'toughen up' and roll with the punches of a tough job. These effects, however, are real and need to be recognized and dealt with in a healthy and empathic manner. Line managers and editors bear a responsibility to identify the burnout among their reporters and take remedial actions to address their needs.

B. COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS

In cases of social surveillance, journalists need to start supporting one another in public as well as at an individual level. Some of our interviewees pointed out that in the face of online abuse, it was immensely comforting when they received the support of their colleagues, both privately and online. Fellow journalists, given their first-hand experience, understand most effectively the experience that their peers go through, and our interviewees pointed out that they are most likely to turn to their colleagues with problems they face with surveillance.

Given this, a collective approach to security and emotional support can also translate into solidarity at a political level to influence policies geared towards greater and institutionalized security and rights of journalists. Emotional and political support will be particularly useful for more vulnerable journalists, such as female reporters, as they are the most visible and lack the influence to secure themselves.

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C. TRAINING AND AWARENESS SESSIONS ABOUT ONLINE HARASSMENT, REPORTING MECHANISMS AND ONLINE SAFETY

It has been observed by some of our interviewees that many journalists are left to fend for themselves when it comes to their physical and digital security. In light of this, there are many preventive and mitigating measures that journalists can take in order to secure their communications from monitoring and interference by third parties. However, there is a lack of awareness among the journalist community regarding these tools of digital security as well as a resistance to adopt them into everyday practices and habits in the newsroom or while reporting.

Media houses need to take responsibility for training their staff on the tools and measures available for secure and confidential communication that does not put them or their sources at risk. Furthermore, journalists need to be made aware of the resources available to them in terms of legal and technical measures that they can take to report such abuse and bring the perpetrators to justice. Online harassment training sessions at media organizations need to be a prerequisite to inform journalists about their rights online and reporting mechanisms. Media organizations also need to support their employees if they chose to report their cases of abuse to the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA).

D. LEGISLATION ON PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTS

The National Assembly is currently working on the "Journalist Protection Bill" with the aim of passing a law that could afford protection to journalists and media houses. Digital Rights Foundation proposes that the scope and ambit of such a law should be expanded to include journalists under surveillance as well as measures to prevent and minimize the effects that the surveillance has. The proposed law currently conceives the threat for journalists as coming primarily from militant groups and other non-state actors, with debates in the Standing Committee on Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage concentrating on terrorist attacks. However, as evidenced by this report, the nature of the threat is much more decentralized and comes from many sources, including the state and individual readers.

Any law that guarantees security of journalists must protect them and their freedom of speech to allow them to cover controversial subjects without repercussions. Thus, any legislation that aims protect journalists cannot work independently of reform of other laws that curb and limit speech both online and offline. Furthermore, the state machinery must

be made accountable for the surveillance that journalists face and made subject to judicial oversight.

Media houses need to be protected, but also made accountable for the safety of their journalists under the law. It has been observed in our research, that the management of media houses is not held accountable for failure to equip their reporters to secure themselves against surveillance, monitoring and abuse.

E. UNDERSTAND THE EVOLVING NATURE OF JOURNALISM

There is an urgent need to understand that while the nature of the threat is multifaceted, journalism itself is changing drastically as well. Many reporters and journalists are either by-passing traditional media altogether or are working on a short-term, temporary basis. These new realities need to be taken into account when devising law and policies for the protection of journalists. Non-permanent and part-time journalists are at as much risk as other journalists, however they enjoy less institutional protection. Any new law that is promulgated needs to extend protections to these journalists as well.

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