

A Report

Challenges Experienced by Women Journalists during and before War in General

Cultural Media Centre
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Comparing the status of women journalists in the past and today tells us about the suffering of female journalists, and looking at the changes that have taken place, especially in the past five years, we still see the very exact suffering and much much more since the outbreak of war in 2015. The ordinary man still looks down on women in general and women journalists in particular. Yet, I cannot stereotypically say that all men are alike as there are many of them who have illuminated minds and think highly of women in general and women journalists in specific.

The Yemeni female journalist in general, and in Aden and south in particular, is encountered with so many obstacles and challenges, of which most remarkable is that she cannot freely express her opinion, she lacks proper academic qualification, and that officials and directors take over women's positions in their foundations. Moreover, very few women major in journalism and media as this is field disregarded by many families; for many the idea of their daughters' appearance on TV or being among male continuously is at all not preferable.

These inequalities manifest numerously in media institutions where all leading positions are overwhelmed by men. Another inequality is seen in their salaries where women are not paid as well as men are. Women also suffer discrimination such as unequal training opportunities, inappropriate work environment, and limiting women to some areas such as women and social life topics.

In a recent report published by the Studies and Economic Media Center titled "Yemeni Female Media Professionals: Challenges in Peace and War", it was stated that women working in the media comprise only 20 percent of all media workers and only 11 percent of the Yemeni journalist Syndicate, pointing out that women media workers were exposed to discrimination before war.

Yemeni media workers have paid a heavy price in the current war in Yemen. They have been susceptible to all sorts of violations as international media agencies, bodies and institutions handled this passively and turned a blind eye to all these violations.

❖ Professional Reality Challenge

The freedom percentage female media workers are allowed currently is attributed to the tendencies of their owners as well as the policy of the newspapers and channels they work for. Media workers work in an environment where they can discuss a variety of topics and issues, minus the politics-related ones. And while private media is not owned by a certain entity, they enjoy a certain greater margin, especially in the current conditions.

Hence, the relationship of women with media must be given the attention and care of the journalist syndicates and media professionals unions since they are the group most affected by the current events. Despite the fact that the Yemeni female media professionals earned their spurs in the field of media, they

still suffer gender-based discrimination and are subject to violations, which is attributed to political, social, and cultural factors.

The women journalists working at 14 October Newspaper manifested a prominent presence on the scene through their work in news writing, investigations, and other press material. They are at the helm of editorial journalism by heading important press departments, foremost of which was the leadership of editorial department. Ms. Nadira Abdul-Qudoos held the position of acting chairman of the board of directors of the 14 October Press Foundation.

Working for a newspaper depends mainly on women journalists who topped the front lines with their capabilities and capacities that were parallel to those of their counter journalists through their active participation in community work and events and activities of civil society and community-based organizations as well as in protests, making of journalism an instrumental tool for communicating the voices of these organizations and independent bodies.

❖ Security Situation Challenge:

Journalism has become very risky. The security situation in Yemen poses a real challenge and danger to women in general, let alone to those women journalists who deal with political and military issues. In fact, it is the most dangerous for women as some have been threatened, assaulted, and prone to assassination attempts, one of whom was Fatima Mutahar, who is an executive director of the Yemeni Press Association.

The media environment has become repellent to Yemeni journalists, particularly women journalists. Owing to the war, many women journalists drew back and left their jobs in the media. Add to this, many political parties and other groups brought their own media women while most of the professional women journalists had to lock themselves at home in fear of the insecure situation outside, suffering from being restricted and unable to do their job with freedom.

Women media professionals are encountered with numerous social and professional challenges during the war. One of whom is the young journalist Hadeel Al-Yamani, who went through an exceptional experience as a reporter of Al-Jazeera. She courageously reported the tragic events from the midst of the battles in Taiz, exceeding her counterpart male journalists. She encountered all administrative, social, and field challenges; some of the challenges are family's concern and fear of losing their daughter as well as society, financial capacities, and lack of work safety and sufficient training and qualification. That she was a Courage in Journalism Award honoree in 2017 conveyed an important message of the role Yemeni women journalists played despite the risky circumstances. Besides Hadeel, many women journalists stood out as war correspondents.

Journalism is a profession marked with and full of troubles, and in a war country where there is not freedom of expression and where working women are looked down on and detested, it is no easy task for women to work in the field of journalism in a very risky environment.

❖ War Challenge

In spite of all these circumstances, women journalists would not but keep on striving so as to break the stereotypical image created for them. They managed to be in the field and report the events of the war and the human crisis and tragedy of the Yemenis. It is becoming more volatile as this merciless war makes no distinction between children, women, or elderly. For five years, the heaviest price was paid by women journalist, and despite all of that, they manifested real courage in the face of reality and stood out as capable war correspondents.

Hadbaa Al-Yazeedi is a media professional who had stood remarkably in the field of media. She worked as a reporter for the independent Yemeni channel, Al-Saeeda, in Hadramout, south-eastern of Yemen. The Yemeni society had reservations on her being a reporter as mentioned in the Independent Arabia, and she was bullied by her male colleagues, which was hurtful for her.

Hadbaa states, “I was treated disdainfully and disrespectfully by them because I was working for a channel run by the North state. I went through tough times in conflict with the Southern Movement that was demanding secession from the Republic of Yemen and a return to the former independent state of South Yemen. I was prevented from covering lots of events in Hadramout, and as Al-Qaeda took over Al-Mukala city, I was prevented from working by their men. Once I was video-taping the terrorists while they were robbing the Arabic Bank when they took away the camera. Even after the city was liberated, I was not allowed by the local authority to cover many events”.

❖ Nepotism and Centralism Challenge

Woman still faces a lot of obstacles. The society, including the educated who support engaging women in politics and enabling them to assume leadership positions, treat her as woman. She needs to walk the thousand-mile journey to prove herself. Some complain that they are denied their right to media coverage in or outside Aden in addition to the monopoly men, particularly leaders, have on participating in international events and conferences and presidential visits.

The shortcoming in the field of training and qualification, especially the external courses, is attributed to a number of factors; the most important of which are the inability of the press institutions in Aden to fulfill the financial obligations of these courses, the centralization of trainings in Sana'a and the monopoly to award courses at the expense of other governorates, including Aden, and the centralization of regional and international organizations in Sana'a.

Additionally, women journalists in Aden channel are marginalized and subject to discrimination, and they are not considered and included when holding internal or external training courses, and although the cost of these training courses is deducted from the staff's salaries, not all the staff benefits from these trainings.

❖ The Media Business Challenge

A factor that contributes to changing the stereotypical notions about women in the various Yemeni media outlets is allowing women to work in the field of media and journalism, particularly in the preparation, editing, or in presenting programs. Although it is noted that there is a quantum evolution in the number of women working in media, they are walking at baby steps towards the reduction of discrimination against woman, which in turn hinders the realization of equal opportunities for men and women in the business of media.

In addition to the unequal wages, incentives, rewards, and promotion opportunities that should be based on competence rather than gender, not existing in decision-making and executive positions is an additional obstacle that women media professionals encounter. They also need to be given opportunities based on their competence rather than gender.

And in regard to leadership positions for women journalists on TV, Aden channel states that they are not a lot, exceeding no more than two positions. However, in terms of equal rights, overtime hours, and intellectual production, women working in media are not given a chance like their men colleagues. Women journalists are in need to be allowed to cover events in order to improve their living and professional conditions.

Recommendations:

- Enable women journalist to assume leadership positions in media institutions on a defined time-bound basis, engage them in the preparation of radio and TV editorial and programmatic plans, and encourage women media professionals to participate in trade union action, especially in leadership position.
- Activate the stagnant union activity so as to promote awareness on women's rights in general and on the rights of women journalists in particular and jointly coordinate between Journalists Syndicate, Aden Branch, and society organizations that are concerned with human and women rights as well as any other organizations concerned with women journalists and media professionals.
- Activate the role of journalists union and organize continuous and sustained awareness campaigns, engage the government sector regarding the rights of women journalists and select the appropriate person in media leadership irrespective of the gender.
- Ban Qat sessions that do not show the competencies of women media professionals and limit their participation in relevant work-related discussions.
- Reinforce and enhance the willpower of women journalists themselves, define their positions, and encourage them to work more seriously and perseveringly in order to change their current reality.
- Enact media legislations that contribute to the realization of equality between men and women working in the media business and implement them on the real ground.

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