



THE CHILLING EFFECT

FEAR AND SELF CENSORSHIP

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In every society there is tension between the:

- free flow of information and its restraint
- Even in democratic societies, authorities and institutions often have a vested interest in restricting information and opinions to prevent criticism, accountability, and transparency in order to maintain their POWER



Censorship in journalism may take two main forms.

1. Censorship which is coerced or directly imposed by either authorities or private parties.
2. Self-censorship which is effected by the individuals doing the newsgathering and reporting to avoid reprisals, censure or penalties

An act of intentionally and voluntarily withholding information from others in the absence of formal obstacles



According to Danilo Kis

- *[self-censorship] is far more efficient than censorship. While both depend on the same means — **threats, fear, blackmail** — self-censorship masks, or at any rate does not reveal the exercise of, constraint. The fight against censorship is open and dangerous and thus heroic, while the battle against self-censorship is anonymous, lonely, and unwitnessed — a source of humiliation and shame for the collaborator. Self-censorship means reading your own text through someone else's eyes, a situation that makes you your own judge. You become stricter and more suspicious than anyone else could.....*





Reasons for Self censorship

- Pressures from a number of sources;
- To avoid creating disputes;
- To avoid upsetting a particular audience;
- To avoid instigating legal action;
- Commercial and economic pressures;
- Cultural expectations;
- Cognitive mechanism or bias .



The source: Who instigates self censorship

- The state
- Privately owned companies use advertising to put pressure on journalists.
- Cultural expectations such as gender, racial and religious issues.
- Organised criminal groups
- Media owners



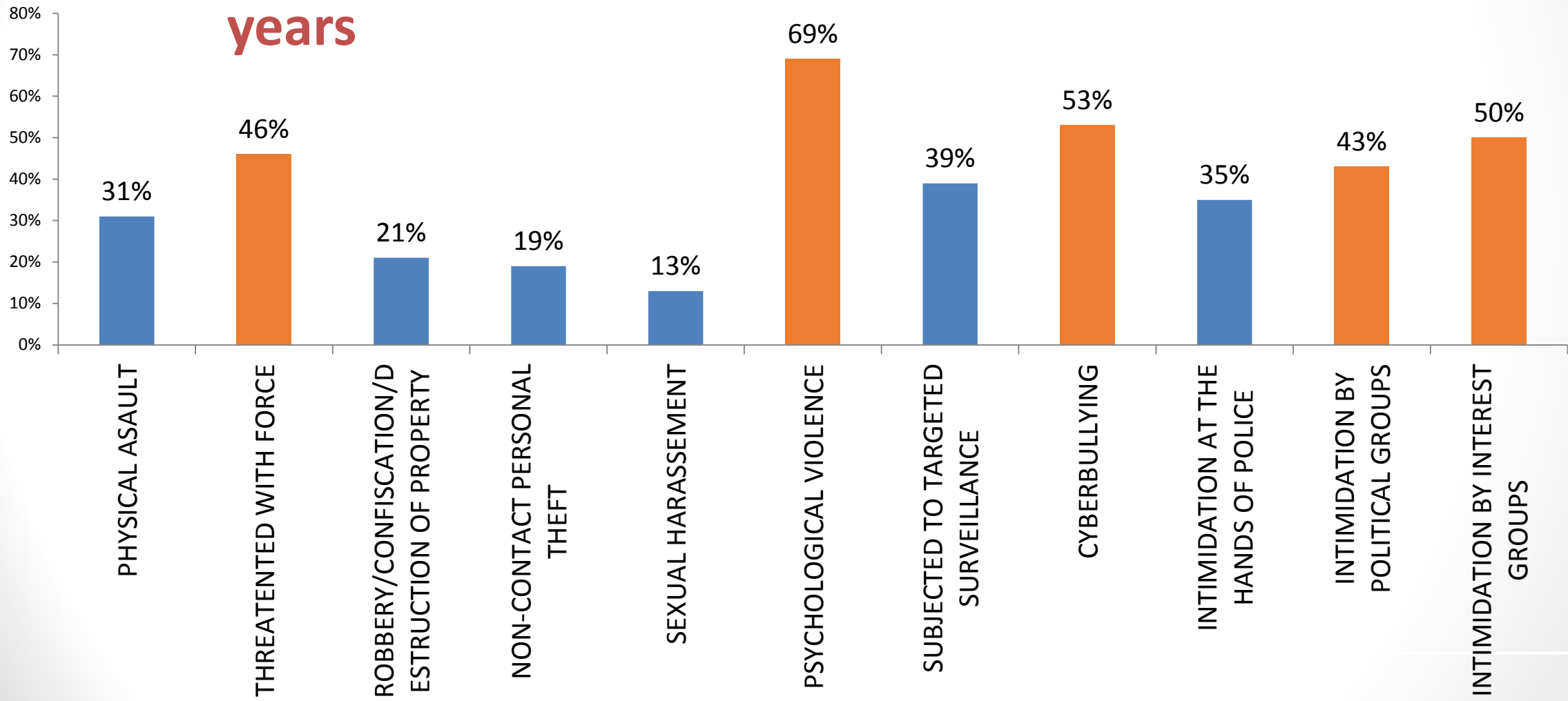
The 2017 Council of Europe study

- High reported prevalence of unwarranted interference
- High levels of fear
- High levels of self censorship
- Some resilience

Over a three year period

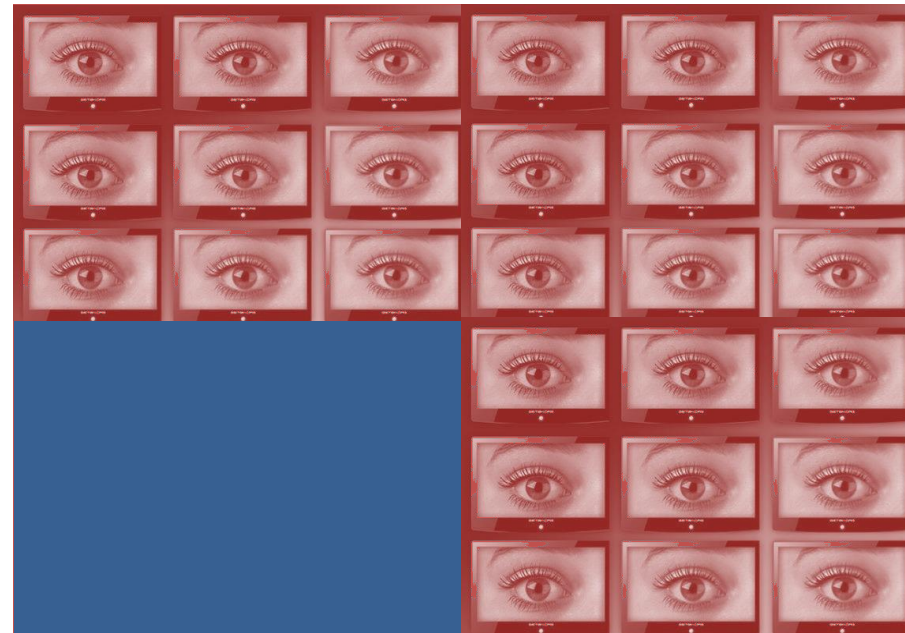


Experiences of unwarranted interference in the last 3 years



Feel protected against targeted surveillance

YES
24%



NO
76%





Protection of Sources

25%

of respondents reported that sources were compromised

48%

Feared that the ability to protect sources was compromised



Judicial intimidation

23% of respondents experienced

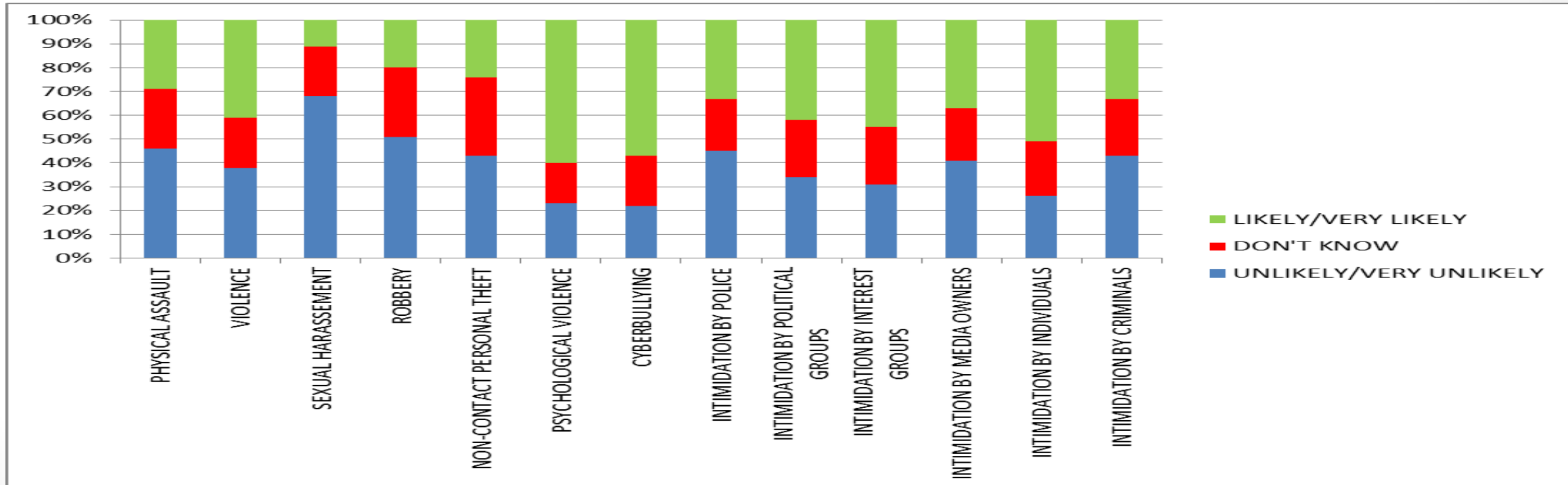
- Arrest
- Investigation
- Threat of prosecution
- Actual prosecution (civil or criminal)

under a number of laws.





Fear: Perception of likelihood of



Worried about safety.....

	I worry a lot / I worry somewhat
Worried about personal safety	38%
Worried about friends' and family's safety	39%



Psychological repercussions of unwarranted interference

- Stress 64%
- Anxiety 47%
- Depression 24%
- Burn-out 15%





Impact of unwarranted interference

40%
personal
life was affected



- Negative impact on personal relationships
- Paranoia and fear
- Stress
- Reduction of social activities
- Emotional effects





Impact of unwarranted interference

37%
work was affected



Resulting self-censorship trend:

- *“nervousness about doing more reporting on the same theme”;*
- *“changed the lead and focus of a story from an individual within the organisation to the organisation itself”*
- *“I double checked my science and left some data out”;*
- *“little bit reserved with other “powerful” stories”;*
- *“not being able to report all the facts at hand”.*



Self censorship

23%
withhold
information

31%
tone down
sensitive,
critical stories

19%
shape content to
suit company's
interest

15%
abandon sensitive
critical stories



Experiences of increased resilience (36%):

- One respondent said the experience made him ***“tougher”***, whilst another said that the interference made him ***“more determined to resist pressure”***;
- A journalist summarised this re-interpretation of a negative situation by saying, ***“I learned to appreciate a reasonable amount of hateful comments: they only mean that my writing has relevance!”***.





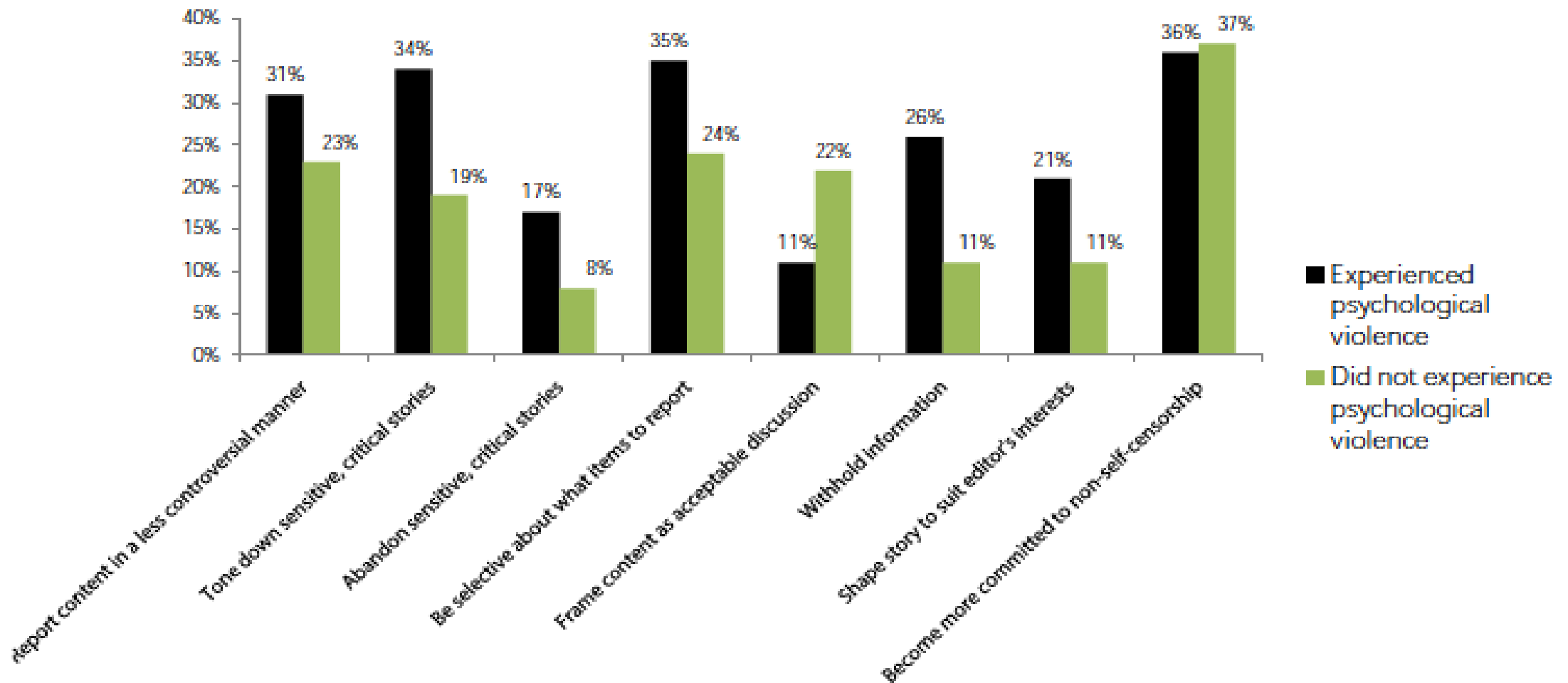
The chilling effect



Journalists who reported experiences of unwarranted interference during the last three years were significantly more likely than those who had no such experiences to:

- feel that the ability to protect their sources was compromised.
- worry about their personal safety and the safety of their significant others.
- worry significantly more that they would become victims of unwarranted interference
- reported that these experiences significantly affected their personal and their work lives

Figure 16: Experiences of psychological violence and the chilling effect



The issue of self-censorship was most evident in Turkey. Those from EU and non-EU Western Europe had the greatest percentages of respondents reporting that these experiences made them even more committed to not engaging in self-censorship.



Remedies

- **Recommendation CM/Rec(2016)4 on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors**
- **Platform to promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists.** <https://www.coe.int/en/web/media-freedom>
- **In depth study**



Further references

Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 2097 \(2017\)](#) and [Resolution 2141 \(2017\)](#) on attacks against journalists and media freedom in Europe;

Committee of Ministers [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2016\)4](#) on the protection of journalism and safety of journalists and other media actors;

Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 2062 \(2015\)](#) and [Resolution 2035 \(2015\)](#) Protection of the safety of journalists and of media freedom in Europe.



- Thanks for your attention !

www.coe.int/freedomofexpression

