

Unwarranted interference, fear and self-censorship

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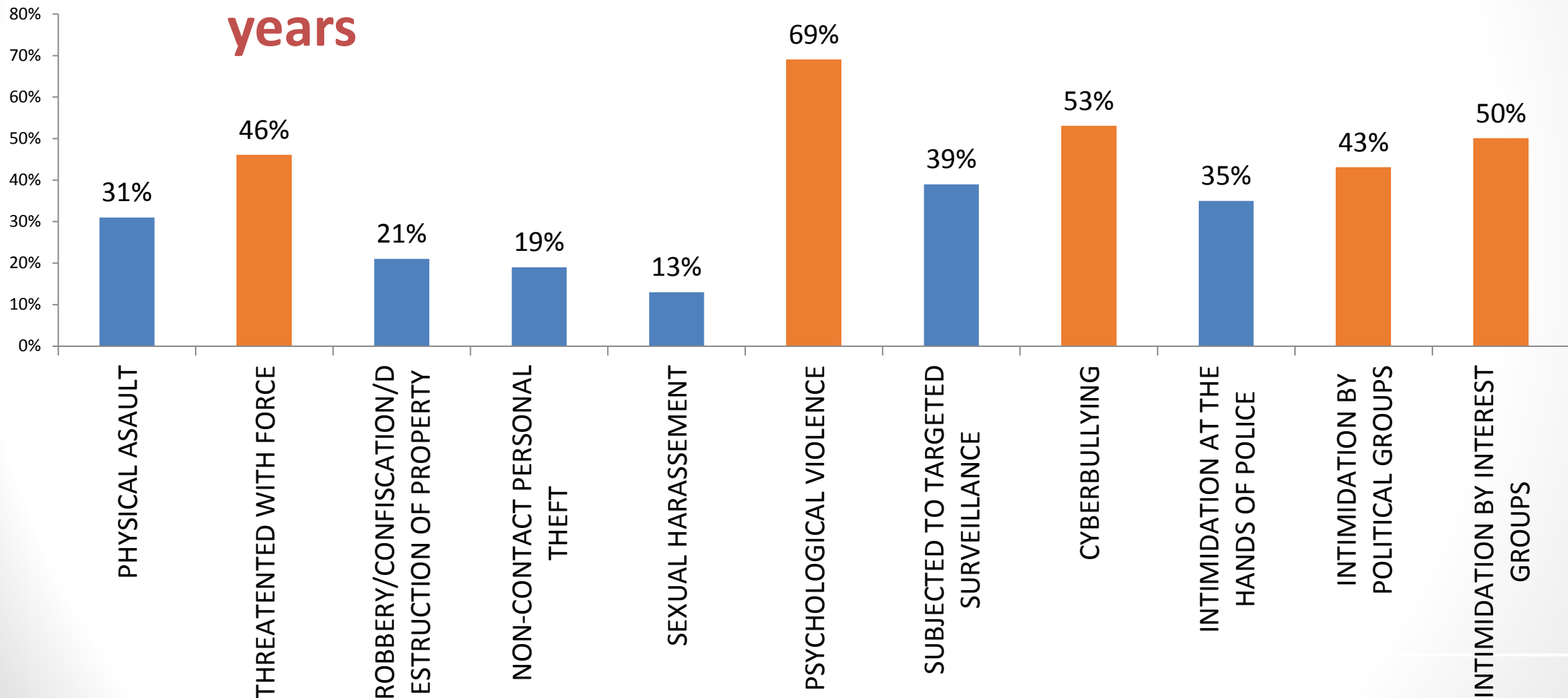
In every group or society there is tension between the:

- **free flow of information and**
- **its restraint**

- **Censorship**
- **Self censorship**

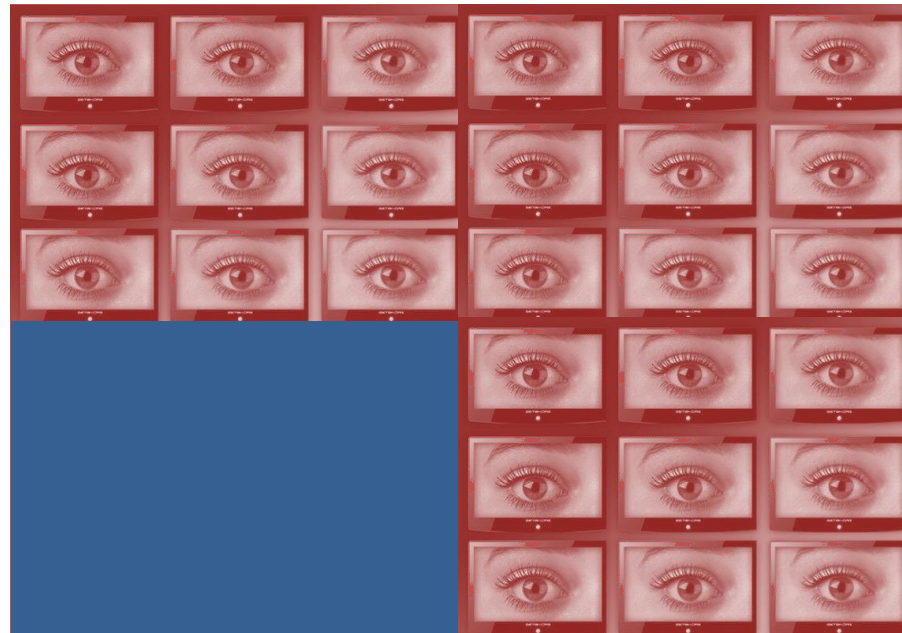
It is facilitated in a climate of fear brought about by intimidation and violence.

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

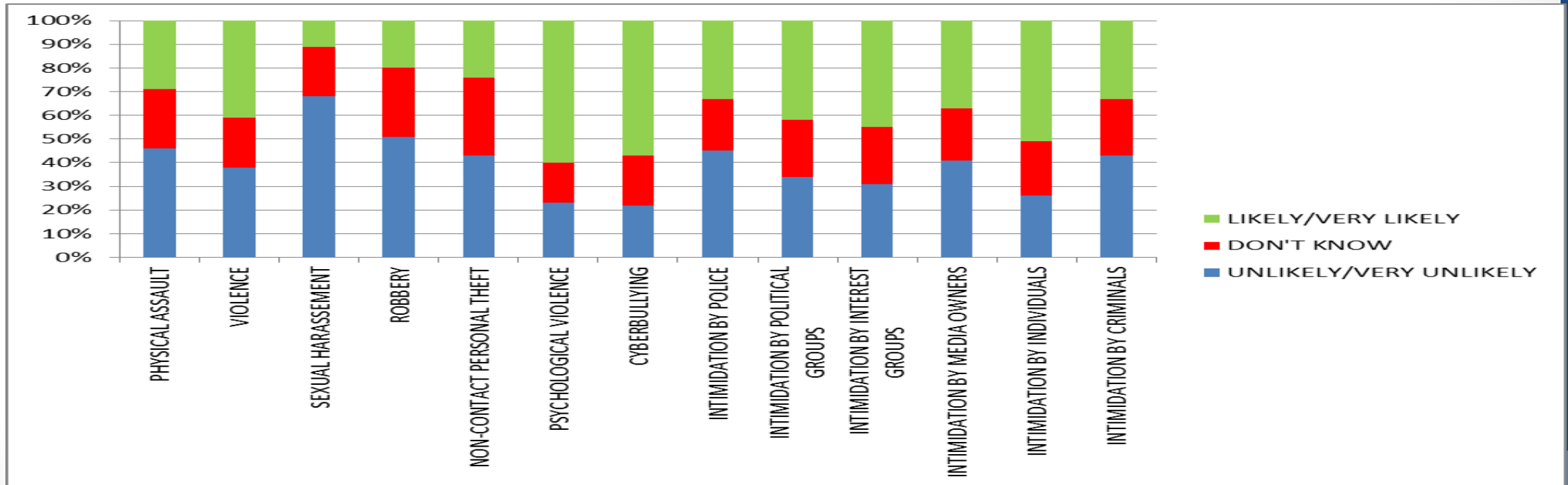
- Arrest
- Investigation
- Threat of prosecution
- Actual prosecution (civil or criminal)

under a number of laws.

Gender differences in experiences of unwarranted interference

- Male journalists were significantly more likely than females to be threatened with force, intimidated by police and to experience physical assault.
- Conversely, females were significantly more likely than males to experience sexual harassment and/or violence.
- There were no statistically significant gender differences with regard to experiences of robbery, non-contact personal theft, psychological violence, cyberbullying, intimidation by police and intimidation by interest groups

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%

- Fear of repercussions for reporting may occur in the face of repeated unwarranted interference that has a psychological toll on the victim
- fear, although experienced, may be associated with **shame**
- **As is self censorship...**

Psychological repercussions of unwarranted interference

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

Impact of unwarranted interference

40%

**personal
life was affected**

Impact of unwarranted interference

37%
work was affected

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

31%
tone down
sensitive,
critical stories

19%
shape content to
suit company's
interest

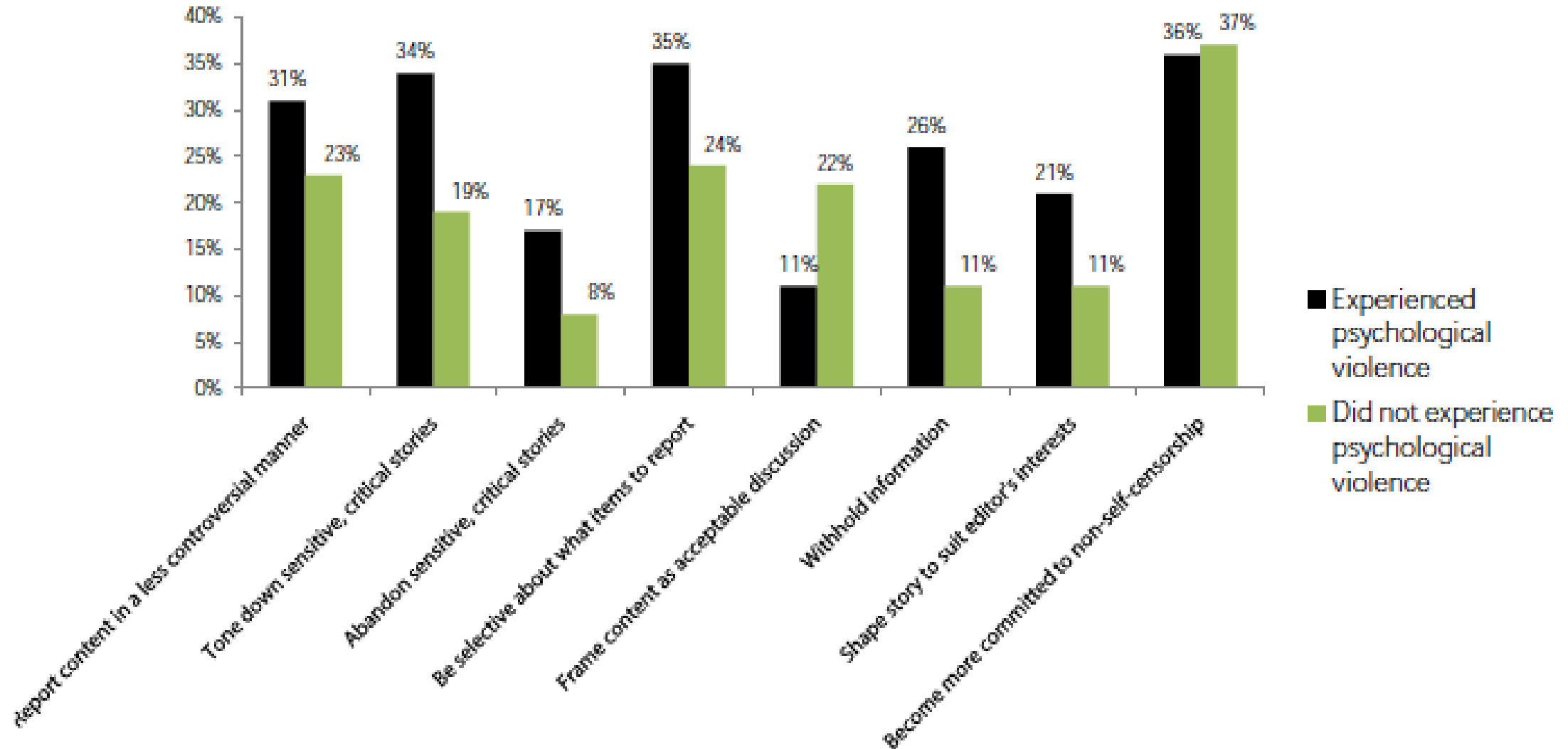
23%
withhold
information

15%
abandon sensitive
critical stories

self-censorship involves

- an effort on the part of an individual to resolve a *conflict of attitudes* between him or herself and the censor by balancing commitments to beliefs or values, and *pragmatic concerns* about if and how these should be expressed.
- Self-censorship seems particularly closely associated with instances where the conflict is based on a censorship regime that is enforced predominantly *through power rather than legitimate authority*.
- Conflict and fear is an essential feature of self-censorship.

Figure 16: Experiences of psychological violence and the chilling effect



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 SG's foreword

- called for a **more in-depth** stocktaking of the state of freedom of expression across Europe,
- along with greater awareness raising over these vital issues.

Qualitative study

A deeper understanding of the

- personal experiences of such interference,
- that **draws out the nuances of what it is like to be doing journalism in a context of fear,**

can only be achieved by an analysis of in-depth narratives of such experiences.

Research objectives

- To explore **what it is like** to be doing journalism in a context of fear.
- To highlight **how journalists create meaning**
- To understand how journalists **negotiate the risks** inherent in their profession
- To contribute to the **identification a number of remedies**
- To explore how **national, European and international institutions** may contribute to the successful implementation of such remedies.

Research Approach

- qualitative
- inductive and emergent
- a narrative study
- an emancipatory approach was adopted that examines:
 - ✓ Socio-political and cultural constraints
 - ✓ power relations
 - ✓ strategies employed
 - ✓ the gender dimension

Core emergent categories

- Narratives of intimidation – forms and sources
- Chilling effects - socio-psychological repercussions of intimidation; climate of fear; the costs of being a journalist; self censorship and resistance; reasons for non self censoring
- The impact of context: social, cultural, historical and political climate; values; gender; types of journalistic activity
- Resiliency
- Needs and remedies

Physical intimidation

- emanate from interest groups such as anti-migrant groups, criminal groups like the mafia, far right groups, and political interest groups
- Scapegoating leading to physical attacks
- Threats of being physically hurt equally intimidating
- A threat is troubling because it shows willingness on the part of the perpetrator to contemplate violence and shows a disposition to employ violent means

Psychological interference

- attacks on professional activity and private life,
- exposure of private-life facts,
- attacks on families/friends,
- attribution of specific political or other agenda
- denial of the status of journalist,
- smear campaigns
- enemies of the state,
- accusations of “fake news” media,
- cyberbullying,
- surveillance of professional and private activities, gender and cyberbullying

Judicial/legal/ police/intimidation

- Defamation
- Surveillance

Economic interference

- Commissioning funding with favourable reporting was an emergent theme from the data.
- Governments, interest groups and individuals have become increasingly cognisant of the fact that they can effectively achieve their goals of monopolizing media markets by business pressure and economic means

A climate of fear

- Climate of fear descending over the media landscape in Europe
- Traditional watchdog role of a free press threatened?

Psychological repercussions of intimidation

- stress and exhaustion:
- anxiety and safety considerations
- intimidation aggravated by a culture of legal impunity for the perpetrators. This may result in disillusionment with the profession:
- Living with intimidation takes its toll on both the physical and mental wellbeing of journalists
- Fear and shame
- loss of esteem and confidence

A high price

- loss of personal reputation
- experience loss of privacy;
- difficulty in making and sustaining relationships
- family life impacted by the strains and stresses emanating from their journalistic activities
- fear for the safety of their family and friends.

Self censorship and resistance



- Notably difficult subject to discuss
- Acknowledgment of censorship in others and self
- Resistance

resilience

- The development of resilience
- Facilitators of resilience
- Coping strategies
- Identity, motivation and narrative – turning points
- Mitigating the risks

Conclusion: Can a democracy do without the fourth estate?

- Prevention
- Protection
- Prosecution
- Awareness raising
- The Platform

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www.coe.int/freedomofexpression