

## **Combat gender stereotypes and sexism in particular as related to women in media and sexist hate speech**

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**8 out of 10.** According to a recent survey published by the Guardian in the UK, 8 out of 10 **of the most abused writers** in the online comments of the Guardian's web site are women. The 2 men are black.

This says a lot about the price women have to pay for freedom of speech.

The **digital shift** of our industry has led to additional discriminations against women journalists. But the **traditional** ones remain: gender pay gap, glass ceiling and sticky floors, precarious working conditions, violence, bullying and harassment.

While journalism is becoming **more and more feminine**, while increasing gender equality **policies** are being put in place in the media, gender discrimination remains, both in the news content and in the workplace.

### **1) First observation: there are persisting stereotypes in news content**

These persisting stereotypes are closely linked to the **lack of gender equality culture in newsrooms**.

Stereotypes in the news are dangerous because news influence the public's view on gender and **media play a great role in shaping social norms**.

The results of the latest **GMMP** 2015 showed absolutely no progress worldwide on the place of women in news content in the past 5 years. Women still make 24% of people seen, heard or read about.

- GMMP results for Europe illustrate a **negative trend**: male predominance as sources of information, female invisibility in the stories, lack of female experts, women reporters relatively absent from hard news coverage as opposed to soft news (education, human rights).
- **One cannot underestimate the media crisis, the loss in advertising revenues, jobs cuts and** the search for profit and sensationalism that have

greatly impacted on the way we make news, journalists' ethical values as well as the news agenda.

- However, **some recent initiatives** taken by some media groups give hope that there is a way out. Belgium: "**chercher la femme**" (RTBF) has increased women's presence in the news, the AJP is developing a women index (AJP) with a plan to encourage media to use it. In Russia and Germany: award for most sexist media message. All these initiatives contributed to **raising awareness** in the newsrooms as well as **media owners' responsibility** in supporting gender equality in news reporting.

## 2) 2<sup>nd</sup> observation: **Sexism hate speech and violence are rampant in the media, both offline and online**

- Women journalists are specifically targeted for **2 reasons**: because they are women, and because they are journalists. **Perpetrators** can be colleagues, bosses, anonymous on the web.
- The final result is that it sexism and violence create **fear, impact self-esteem** and undermines freedom of speech. And these acts are **barely punished**. One murder of media professional in 10 is investigated. You can well imagine the amount of impunity surrounding this type of violence.

a) **In the newsroom**: the **2014 IWFM/INSI** study showed that almost **half of the respondents** of their study on women journalists said they had suffered sexual harassment in different forms. About sexual harassment, the reports shows that the majority of the attacks were led by supervisors, colleagues.

- In the UK, a study conducted by the **National Union of Journalists (NUJ)** in 2014 in broadcasting news staff reveals the appalling treatment some women face in their work places: 43% reported sexist behaviours while 45% experienced sexist attitudes from their management.

b) A most recent phenomenon is **online sexism hate speech**, where women professionals are **3 times more likely** to receive offensive comments on social media than men.

- The online sexism hate speech **takes 2 forms**:
- **online impersonation**. Cyber abusers can produce fake tweets and facebook pages, purporting to be the journalist and send abusive remarks in the journalist's name
- **Insults, threats and harassment** through emails and social media.

Online abuse was rightly described by a Guardian writer, Jessica Valenti:

*"Imagine going to work everyday and walking through a gauntlet of 100 people saying "you're stupid" "you're terrible" "you suck" "I can't believe you get paid for this".*

- Those online abuses seriously **hamper freedom of speech**. And witnessing female journalists being abused also has a **chilling effect** on those that would otherwise contribute to the public debate.
- A **norwegian study published in 2014** shows for instance that online harassment has greatly increased and that 1 woman journalist in 5 feels gagged.
- Here again, **some best practices** have been developed to tackle sexism around the idea to speak up. French women journalists from **Prenons La Une** raised their voice against sexism from politicians in a Tribune published in one of the main national newspaper, **Belgian RTBF** takes special action for live reporting of female colleagues following event in cologne, the **European center for press and media freedom started a reporting point for female media workers** when subject of attacks and where they can report anonymously.

**c) As a conclusion, I would like to make a couple of suggestions that the Council of Europe and its member states could take to tackle discrimination in the media**

- Include the media in the **scope of surveys** on sexism, gender equality, access to decision making and make the **results widely known**
- Support **projects**: that help media tackle sexism and help professional get trained on gender portrayal
- Support **trade unions'** work in promoting gender equality in the workplace

- **Involve media representatives** in any **legislative proposal** on gender equality
- Support more gender equality **curricula** in journalism schools
- Make the **Council's platform to promote journalism and the safety of journalism** better known in particular when an act of violence against a woman journalist are being notified.