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Harnessing momentum for change

Improving the safety of women journalists in
Bangladesh and Nepal



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Together with our partners, we develop cutting-edge research and legal and policy analysis to drive change worldwide, lead work on the frontlines of expression through our nine regional hubs across the globe, and propel change by sparking innovation in the global freedom of expression movement.

We do this by working on five key themes: promoting media independence, increasing access to information, protecting journalists, expanding civic space, and placing human rights at the heart of developing digital spaces.

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Part of ARTICLE 19's project: [Equally Safe: Towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists](#)

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Executive summary

This report, the latest in ARTICLE 19's [Equally Safe: Towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists](#) project, sets out the findings of our research into the persistent challenges facing women journalists in Bangladesh and Nepal. As part of our feminist research approach, we spoke with 22 journalists and media representatives in both countries to explore their lived experiences, as well as conducting desk research and media monitoring.

Our findings reveal that, in both Bangladesh and Nepal, political unrest and tightening media control continue to interact with systematic inequality and discrimination to threaten the safety, participation, and career progression of women journalists. This, in turn, limits media freedom and democratic discourse more broadly.

Like in many other countries, women's rights to freedom of expression and non-discrimination are far from a lived reality in Bangladesh and Nepal. Amid shrinking media freedom in Bangladesh, women journalists are targets of harassment and abuse online and gender-based physical attacks offline, especially when they report on political or gender issues. While Nepal's legal framework is somewhat more robust, women journalists – particularly those who are young and freelance – continue to face harassment, intimidation, and threats.

Inequality and discrimination in recruitment, promotion, pay, and assignment are among the key forms of discrimination that women journalists face within media organisations in both countries. Sexual harassment also remains pervasive in media workplaces, yet institutional complaint mechanisms often fail survivors – especially the most marginalised – leading to retaliation, retraumatisation, and job loss rather than justice.

In both countries, we found instances of laws being misused to silence women journalists through dubious criminal charges. Online harassment has also surged, from direct threats to doxxing to coordinated attacks directed at women's appearance, resulting in women self-censoring or withdrawing from journalism altogether.

ARTICLE 19 conducted this research in 2024–25: a period marked by significant social upheaval in both Bangladesh and Nepal. In Bangladesh, [protests](#) in July 2024 (dubbed the Monsoon Protest, quota reform protests, or July Revolution) began in response to the re-instatement of a government job quota that protected the ruling party, but grew into a larger movement that achieved the removal of the Sheikh Hasina government, ushering in hope for a more democratic government that would better protect human rights. In Nepal, Gen-Z [protests](#) in 2025 similarly saw mass youth mobilisation against government corruption, high unemployment, and [sweeping government bans](#) on various social media platforms. The protests resulted in the [resignation](#) of Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli and the announcement of elections for a new government to take place in March 2026. Police in both countries responded violently to these protests.

Journalists play an especially important role during periods of social change, but the instability of such periods can endanger them – especially women journalists who face intersecting forms of discrimination – as powerful actors seek to control the narrative.

In addition to sociopolitical challenges, workplace discrimination remains a significant barrier to women's professional advancement in both countries. Women are under-represented in the profession overall, especially in leadership positions. Persistent pay disparities, gendered assignments, unsafe workplace conditions, and stereotyping hamper women's career growth and sense of professional self-worth. Traditional gender norms impose additional burdens, and the double bind of professional and domestic pressures is made even more challenging by inadequate childcare and patriarchal restrictions on mobility and dress.

Addressing these problems in an intersectional, feminist, and comprehensive manner is essential to foster safe, inclusive media environments for women journalists – in all their diversity. For this reason, this report not only analyses the challenges women face; it sets out what governments and media organisations in Bangladesh and Nepal must do to solve them.

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Introduction

Upholding the right to freedom of expression requires that women, especially those facing intersecting and overlapping forms of oppression, are equally able to share their ideas and opinions without censorship or fear of retaliation, which can drive them out of public debate. Yet while journalists of all genders experience threats, violence, abuse, and harassment for carrying out their vital work, **women journalists face additional gendered risks** – from workplace sexual harassment to online rape threats. Furthermore, women journalists are not a monolithic group; the risks and abuse they face differ depending on their race, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, and other characteristics. Multiply marginalised women typically face greater risks and harsher abuse.

An intersectional feminist approach – one that recognises these intersecting forms of oppression – is needed to enhance the safety of *all* women journalists.

In 2021, ARTICLE 19 launched [Equally Safe: Towards a feminist approach to the safety of journalists](#) to explore what such an approach might look like and what benefits it might bring. We published our findings in the form of new global research, case studies from 6 countries, practical guidelines, and advocacy tools.

In 2024, we launched a second phase of Equally Safe to implement and strengthen this innovative feminist approach by pinpointing solutions to the problems identified in Phase 1. This report is part of that second phase. It focuses on 2 South Asian countries featured in our earlier case studies: [Bangladesh](#) and [Nepal](#). A separate, forthcoming report will focus on the Latin American countries featured in our earlier case studies: Brazil, Chile, and Paraguay.

Are women journalists equally safe yet?

Since ARTICLE 19 launched Equally Safe in 2021, the international community has increasingly acknowledged the need to protect women journalists and develop gender-responsive approaches. The accessibility and ubiquity of generative artificial intelligence tools, in particular, has brought questions of violence against women, girls, and LGBTQI+ journalists to the forefront, and at the UN level, ARTICLE 19 has contributed to successful efforts to mainstream gender considerations into resolutions on the safety of journalists and human rights defenders.¹

Yet despite this, the situation on the ground remains much the same. Governments pledge to protect journalists, but do not take effective action. Media institutions promise safe workplaces, but do not implement their own policies. Tech companies profit from content produced by women journalists, but do not prevent abuse against them.

On a regional level, South Asia has experienced significant transitions over the past 5 years. In Bangladesh, [tighter controls on freedom of expression](#) and increasing [online hostility](#) have made reporting more dangerous, especially for women who challenge authority or cover gender-related issues. ARTICLE 19's [Global Expression Report 2025](#) ranked Bangladesh 127th out of 161 countries and categorised the country as 'in crisis'.

While Nepal ranks slightly higher (79th), women journalists there still face harassment, unequal pay, and limited influence.

Attacks on women journalists in both countries – as in *all* countries – are united by a common goal: to push women out of public debate.

To make women's right to participate fully in public debate without discrimination, exclusion, or retribution a reality, women journalists must be able to work safely. This requires a fundamental shift in perspective from viewing safety as a matter of *individual risk management* to viewing it as a *collective responsibility*. This is a tall order, but the benefits of including, learning from, and centring the most marginalised are sweeping – and essential if we want a representative, diverse, and accountable media.

Harnessing momentum for change

ARTICLE 19 believes that advocacy for change is most effective when evidence and solidarity combine. This report provides both. **Our aim is not just to describe problems but to catalyse solutions.** For that reason, as well as outlining the key trends experienced by women journalists in Bangladesh and Nepal, it offers concrete recommendations that governments and media houses must follow to meaningfully improve the safety of women journalists in both countries.

Momentum for change already exists:

- **Nationally**, networks of women journalists in Dhaka and Kathmandu are working with unions, national commissions, and journalism and digital rights groups to push for reform.
- **Regionally**, organisations are aligning around shared advocacy goals.
- **Internationally**, frameworks including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists provide strong foundations for coordinated action.

The next step is to bring these efforts together to deliver real change for women journalists – in all their diversity – on the ground. We hope this report is useful in advocacy towards that goal.

Methodology

An intersectional feminist approach to journalists' safety goes hand in hand with an intersectional feminist methodology. Feminist methodologies place women's experiences, realities, and protection needs front and centre. ARTICLE 19 therefore adopted a largely qualitative approach to explore the everyday lives of women journalists – in all their diversity – in Bangladesh and Nepal.

Our research methods included:

- A **focus group** with 8 women journalists;
- **Interviews** with 14 journalists, journalists' associations, and media civil society organisations;
- **Case studies** about 3 women journalists whose experiences are emblematic of broader problems in Bangladesh and Nepal; and
- **Desk research**, including media monitoring carried out by ARTICLE 19.

The research was conducted between 2024 and 2025. As part of our intersectional feminist approach, we spoke to women from a range of ethnicities, castes, religions, sexual orientations, ages, locations, and socioeconomic strata. Our data analysis focused on identifying significant trends and systemic inequalities facing women journalists.

Where available – and reliable – we have also included quantitative data. However, these figures will inevitably be underestimates of the true scale of violence, abuse, harassment, and discrimination experienced by women journalists in Bangladesh and Nepal. There are several reasons for this:

- **There is a dearth of reliable quantitative data** on attacks against women journalists in both countries;
- **Women are significantly under-represented in journalism in both countries** (making up only about [10%](#) of the workforce in Bangladesh and about [19%](#) in Nepal), so the raw number of attacks against them is inevitably lower than the raw number of attacks against male journalists; and

- **Sexual harassment, workplace inequalities, and other violations that disproportionately affect women are widely under-reported** (not only in Bangladesh and Nepal, but worldwide) due to stigma, fear of retaliation, and insufficient institutional support, and therefore do not show up in official data.

Key trends

Based on our research findings from Bangladesh and Nepal, this section sets out key trends in the challenges facing women journalists in both countries, namely increasing violence and impunity, escalating judicial harassment and legal intimidation, widespread online abuse and harassment, and persistent workplace discrimination.

Increasing violence and impunity

Women journalists in Bangladesh and Nepal face severe physical violence and targeted gender-based attacks that reflect, and exacerbate, their marginalised position in often-hostile professional and political environments.

In Bangladesh, ARTICLE 19 documented 387 freedom of expression violations against journalists in 2024, with physical attacks forming the largest category. While these affected significantly more men than women (raw figures that, as stated in the previous section, must be interpreted with caution due to women's under-representation in journalism), smaller scale does not imply less risk or significance – and the attacks on women included serious gender-based violence.

2025 saw a continuation of these trends. Of particular note is the 2025 [rape](#) of a woman journalist, which appeared to be both planned and directly tied to her journalistic profession: she was lured to a location on the premise of newsworthy information, where a group of men attacked her. A December 2025 study of journalists in Bangladesh [found](#) that half the women surveyed feared sexual violence if they covered the 2026 national elections. Understanding these perceived risks (alongside actual attacks) illuminates how the fear of violence has a chilling effect on women journalists' expression, resulting in them avoiding certain locations and topics.

Women journalists in Nepal experienced fewer incidents than those in Bangladesh, but nonetheless [faced](#) notable risks – [usually](#) threats and intimidation. For example, at a demonstration in Pokhara in October 2024, protesters attacked journalist Anita Ghimire and her colleagues, which Ghimire [reported](#) was motivated by retaliation against their critical reporting.

In Bangladesh, too, many journalists were injured when reporting on protests. [At least](#) 5 women journalists were injured in targeted attacks by police and protesters when covering the July 2024 protests – Nadia Sharmeen (reporter for Ekattor TV), Fabeha Monir (photojournalist), Halima Akter Labonya (chief reporter for Asian TV), Jannatul Mohona (staff reporter for Desh TV), and Yasmin Akter (reporter for RTV) – and 3 others were sexually assaulted. Most distressingly, Reshma (a reporter for *Sojasapta*) [endured](#) physical and sexual assault: her face was set aflame and she survived an attempted rape. Such incidents expose the dual danger women journalists face, as reporters and as women, especially in volatile political contexts. The trauma Reshma experienced was compounded by victim-blaming and a lack of justice.

Indeed, the persistent culture of impunity is a critical concern. At the time of writing, ARTICLE 19 was not aware of any cases filed or arrests made in response to the aforementioned attacks. Such limited transparency regarding accountability (or lack thereof) raises concerns about the effectiveness of responses to violence against women journalists and perpetuates an environment in which such violence can continue unchecked.

Case study: Woman journalist harassed live on camera in Nepal²

On 13 December 2025, Rama Chand, Editor-in-Chief of Naya Sandesh Online, was deliberately pushed from behind while reporting live from the Sudurpaschim Mahotsav, a major cultural and trade fair in Dhangadhi, Nepal.

The incident, which occurred in a densely crowded festival space while Chand was speaking on camera, was captured on video and widely circulated online. Chand described it as an act of violence against women and reported that it caused her physical pain and emotional distress:

'While I was talking on camera about the festival, an unknown young man came from behind and mistreated me. I also felt pain at that time. But I kept quiet because I felt uncomfortable in that crowd. I have demanded action so that other women do not have to endure such injustice.'

This assault reflects the unsafe and gender-hostile environments that women journalists in Nepal frequently face while reporting in male-dominated public spaces that lack appropriate safety protocols. It is part of a persistent pattern in which women journalists are subjected to violence aimed at silencing their voices and diminishing their public legitimacy.

At the time of writing, there is limited information available regarding any support offered to Chand in the wake of the assault. However, on 15 and 16 December 2025 the Kailali District Police arrested 2 local men, Manish Shrestha and Bikash Bhatta. While this was an important first step, further action is essential to build safer, more equitable conditions for women journalists in Nepal, including secure media zones, crowd-management measures, and trained police liaison officers at public gatherings.

Pervasive sexual harassment and institutional failures

Although comprehensive statistics on sexual harassment are scarce in both Bangladesh and Nepal, those that do exist highlight alarmingly high incidence rates and systemic failures to address harassment effectively.

In Bangladesh, one survey found that [71%](#) of women journalists had faced sexual harassment at work, compared to [32.8%](#) of women in general. This disparity indicates that media is a particularly hostile industry for women, perhaps due to its unique role in public debate. Complaints received by organisations such as Bangladesh's Women Journalists Centre [primarily](#) relate to sexual harassment – from inappropriate remarks to assault – signalling entrenched cultural and institutional problems. As one woman journalist in Bangladesh told us:

'So many things happen with women in media, which do not get public. These are like [a] silent cry. The complaints on sexual harassment and abuse are not taken into account with due importance. On the other hand, if and when survivor women voice their complaints, they are blamed and kicked out.'

One young journalist in Bangladesh told ARTICLE 19 that when she requested an interview with a female government official, that official publicly humiliated her. Women reporting on local and religious issues in Bangladesh also face exclusion and harassment by radical groups. In Nepal, women told us that younger reporters and those working in commercial media are especially vulnerable due to those environments being largely driven by ratings, revenue, and advertising rather than staff wellbeing. Government media, on the other hand, is seen as safer.

In 2009, Bangladesh's High Court legally mandated that media organisations must establish sexual harassment complaint committees – yet according to a Broadcast Journalist Centre [survey](#), fewer than 1 in 5 actually have such a committee. Interviewees told ARTICLE 19 that many corporate media houses instead manage sexual harassment complaints through human resources departments or senior editors. This undermines accountability and transparency, limiting survivors' trust in institutional remedies and perpetuating unsafe workplace cultures. This was the case for [Farhana Nila](#), who lost her job after filing a sexual harassment case against her company's joint news editor. A woman coworker, who had been with the organisation for nearly a decade, was also fired for supporting Nila's accusation.

Rather than finding potential for justice in complaints processes, women who lodge complaints commonly face retaliation. Those targeted with assaults and threats are often re-traumatised by reporting processes that replicate, rather than dismantle, the power structures that enabled the harm and abuse to take place in the first place. One senior woman journalist in Bangladesh told us:

'While I was working at a TV station, I found such a committee, but the committee's members were contentious. In many situations, internal reporting yielded no result other than being compelled to leave jobs.'

In Nepal, formal complaint mechanisms are legally mandated through the Sexual Harassment at Workplace (Prevention) Act 2014 but are [largely ineffective](#). Journalists express little confidence in pursuing legal action due to lengthy, opaque, and retraumatising processes. As one woman journalist said:

'The complaining mechanism is poor. Generally, women journalists don't feel safe resorting to legal mechanisms for justice. The lengthy legal procedure also discourages women from seeking legal remedies.'

Case study: The fallout of a mishandled sexual harassment complaint in Bangladesh³

On 18 October 2024, 3 months after she and her colleagues at Dhaka Stream filed a sexual harassment complaint against senior editor, Altaf Shahnewaz, 28-year-old graphic designer Swarnamoyee Biswas was found dead in a case that the police described as suicide. Her colleagues alleged that the newsroom's handling of the complaint – including discussions about reinstating the accused – had deepened Swarnamoyee's distress and left her feeling unsafe, while the company's later statement denied any link between her death and what they called the 'unprofessional conduct' of the accused editor.

Soon after the complaint, 3 of Swarnamoyee's supportive colleagues – Sajib Tushar, Shatabdika Urmi, and Ishtiak Hossain – were dismissed under disputed pretexts: a move widely read as retaliatory and chilling to other staff. Family members said Swarnamoyee was deeply troubled by the office situation in the weeks before her death, and blade marks found on her hand showed evidence of self-mutilation. While relatives awaited police findings, peers argued online that the newsroom's mishandling of the complaint and treatment of the complainants intensified her suffering.

Dhaka Stream said it withdrew the accused editor from the newsroom and adopted a code of conduct. However, its own coverage of the death was vague and omitted the harassment context, raising concerns that the outlet sanitised the event rather than acknowledging its own failures. Consistent with the industry's institutional protectionism around misogyny and abuse, there was little coverage in other major Dhaka-based media, despite the clear public-interest dimensions of workplace safety, gender-based harassment, and whistleblower retaliation.

Under High Court guidelines, Dhaka Stream should have had a fully functional sexual harassment complaints committee in place when Swarnamoyee and her colleagues filed their complaint on 13 July 2024. To comply with the guidelines, such committees must have at least 5 members, be chaired by a woman, contain a majority of

women, and include at least 2 members external to the institution, preferably with relevant expertise (for example, women's rights or legal). Any investigation should have been carried out through that legally mandated body.

It appears that no such committee existed at the time of the complaint, and nor was one created subsequently. Instead, Dhaka Stream relied on an inquiry made up of just 2 people – both of whom were internal. Unfortunately, this flagrant disobedience of the High Court is far from unusual in Bangladesh. Independent assessments consistently show that many institutions either lack committees altogether or maintain committees that exist only on paper, remain inactive, or are not communicated to staff or students.

Swarnamoyee's case underscores the intersecting vulnerabilities that young women in newsrooms routinely face: patriarchal power structures, fear of retaliation for speaking out, and an absence of survivor-centred protection mechanisms.

Escalating judicial harassment and legal intimidation

Judicial harassment refers to the misuse of legislation to intimidate, silence, and burden journalists, often through repetitive, baseless, and/or exaggerated criminal charges and lawsuits, and the weaponisation of state institutions and resources to silence protected expression. Judicial harassment, which includes strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs), is not typically levelled with the aim of winning a legal proceeding. Rather, applicants – usually powerful figures – attempt to silence critical reporting by saddling journalists or newsrooms with time-consuming, exhausting, and costly legal proceedings.

This strategy particularly burdens women, who, due to their under-representation in journalism, often face more pressure than their male counterparts to prove their competency, and face professional roadblocks when they are perceived as 'difficult'. This compounds the additional social and professional [challenges](#) they face when seeking justice.

In Bangladesh, judicial harassment against journalists escalated in 2024, especially during and after the quota reform protests. This uptick reflects a global trend: social and political instability often prompts efforts from powerholders to control the narrative in the face of uncertainty. Over 300 journalists were [blacklisted or charged](#) with various offences in the country in 2024, many of which appeared to be unfounded or politically motivated. One woman journalist, senior reporter Shahnaz Sharmin, was [accused](#) of murder despite not being near the crime scene at the time (or at any point in the preceding 2 years).

Similarly, the August 2024 [arrests](#) of broadcast journalists Farzana Rupa and her husband Shakil Ahmad, the dubious murder charges that followed, and their subsequent mistreatment – including solitary confinement, physical assault, and restricted access to contact with lawyers and with their families – reveal the extreme pressures exerted on journalists through judicial means. Farzana Rupa faced additional physical assault and was [slapped](#) on the head while entering the courthouse. Her case illustrates that, for many women journalists, attacks are often multifaceted: online and judicial attacks, which already have severe and long-lasting impacts on women journalists' mental health and professional wellbeing, also serve to manufacture consent or provide justification for physical and sexual attacks.

In Nepal, judicial harassment was evident in the February 2024 [arrest](#) of reporter Aishwarya Kunwar following her investigative reporting and related social media posts on police misconduct. The case was filed under Section 47 of the Electronic Transactions Act 2008, which criminalises the electronic publication of content deemed illegal under existing laws, or otherwise 'contrary to public morality or decent behavior', with a penalty of up to 5 years in prison and a fine of 100,000 rupees (USD 754). Its vague and overbroad scope leaves journalists and human rights defenders who publish content online that criticises authorities vulnerable to arbitrary abuse – as was the case with Kunwar.

Widespread online harassment and abuse

Online abuse and harassment of women journalists represents a growing and serious challenge in Bangladesh and Nepal, mirroring global trends yet worsened by the local sociopolitical context. ARTICLE 19 has [found](#) that women journalists worldwide endure a range of online attacks, including threats, sexual insults, trolling, hacking of accounts, and derogatory comments about their appearance and professional capabilities. The consequences are profound: anxiety, fear, and self-censorship limit women's willingness to cover sensitive or controversial topics, and some even leave journalism entirely.

Like other forms of gender-based violence, most online harassment and abuse cases remain unreported due to cultural factors (such as victim-blaming) and a lack of robust mechanisms for reporting and response. In both Bangladesh and Nepal, there is a dearth of data that captures the scale and effects of online harassment, as well as inadequate protection mechanisms, digital safety training, and institutional support. This leaves many women journalists and their families exposed to persistent threats, harassment, and abuse online without sufficient recourse. One woman journalist in Bangladesh told ARTICLE 19:

'As soon as the report goes live, I start facing bullying and personal attacks on social media. There are comments like "this reporter is not wearing hijab", "she should wear a hijab", "why do they report", "stop them". They abuse everyone – even the parents.'

Some male colleagues acknowledge the heightened vulnerability of women online:

'In the age of social media, everyone is vulnerable, but women are more so. There is no accountability. Anyone can write whatever they want. When a woman journalist raises questions about corruption and irregularities, various groups anonymously bully or slander her.'

In Nepal, coordinated online campaigns against women journalists involve harassment that includes tagging, sharing manipulated photos, and character assassination – all methods that amplify the reach and impact of the abuse. The permanence and visibility of online harassment mean that women journalists face harassment not only on an interpersonal level but also within their families and communities, intensifying social stigma and isolation.

Persistent workplace discrimination

Our research revealed that women journalists in Bangladesh and Nepal continue to face systematic inequality and discrimination in their workplaces, despite gradual increases in their participation over recent decades. Workplace environments in most media organisations remain neither inclusive nor gender-responsive; instead, they are characterised by disparities in recruitment, promotion, pay, assignments, and occupational safety. These structural barriers negatively impact women journalists' professional opportunities and personal wellbeing, often discouraging career progression or precipitating exits from the field.

Under-representation and lack of promotion

Many media outlets either exclude women outright or fail to apply transparent recruitment policies, resulting in fewer promotions and lower pay for women compared to men.

In Bangladesh, women constitute [fewer than 10%](#) of journalists, with many concentrated in on-air presenting roles rather than investigative reporting or leadership positions. Several previous studies have [revealed](#) a stark under-representation in senior editorial roles, with only 2 women editors across more than 500 newspapers in Dhaka, and just 2 women holding top editorial positions in private television channels. Content creation similarly [reflects](#) gender imbalance: only about [8%](#) of bylines are attributed to women journalists.

One senior Bangladeshi woman journalist told ARTICLE 19:

'I got promoted in 2013. I was promoted from junior reporter to staff reporter. Since then, I have worked with all my best efforts. But I did not get promotion until 2022, despite being named the best employee of the house each year.'

The situation in Nepal is similar: women [make up](#) approximately 16% of journalists but hold only about 6% of decision-making posts, and women's bylines account for just [0.3%](#) of news items, indicating extreme invisibility in public discourse.

Objectification and stereotyping

The women we spoke to told ARTICLE 19 that negative workplace culture issues include the stereotyping of assertive or vocal women journalists as aggressive.

Another growing trend in both countries is the objectification of women journalists, particularly in Bangladesh, where the rise of multimedia platforms has led to recruitment priorities focused more on physical appearance and glamour than journalistic competence. This commodification perpetuates gender biases that limit both career growth and the types of roles available to women journalists by assigning them value in line with patriarchal notions of beauty rather than their journalistic skills and intelligence.

Intersectional marginalisation

In both countries, women from ethnic minorities, Indigenous women, and women working in less urban areas face even fewer opportunities and greater barriers.

Many local reporters in Bangladesh, for example, do not receive a salary but rely on advertisement commissions, which exposes women to exploitation. They also experience coordinated exclusion, reflecting the systemic and entrenched nature of the harms:

'When a particular woman journalist is invited to a programme in a district in Bangladesh, other male journalists boycott it.'

In Nepal, too, intersecting challenges [persist](#) for journalists outside Kathmandu, as well as for freelancers, ethnic minorities, Dalit women, and those from sexual- and gender-diverse communities – all of whom receive lower pay, fewer benefits, and less institutional backing when facing discrimination or violence. One senior woman journalist told us:

'The reality – especially for those working outside major cities – is that many do not feel completely safe or backed. Especially those in local media, receive lower salaries and fewer benefits than their male counterparts.'

Minority ethnic and lower-caste groups in Nepal also report dehumanising treatment and exclusion. Some have resorted to creating independent news platforms due to these pressures:

'I was not given high priority at work. I faced domination by editors and felt constant pressure in the workplace. It was particularly difficult to obtain leave during sexual and reproductive health concerns. I also struggled with writing news articles, as I come from the Sherpa community and lacked formal training. Due to the ongoing stress and lack of support, I recently decided to leave my job and start my own online news portal.'

Gender-based assignments

Assignments in both countries tend to be gendered, with women confined to 'soft' beats, such as health or culture, rather than politics or crime. Senior journalists reported exclusion from high-profile political coverage based on gendered assumptions about risk and capability, limiting their ability to exercise choice in their work, as well as their overall professional development.

One senior woman journalist in Nepal told us:

'My journey from reporter to desk editor and now news editor has always been challenging. I cannot forget many significant moments, such as covering high-level visits by foreign dignitaries like foreign prime ministers and foreign ministers – where I was usually the main reporter'

responsible. But when it came to the reverse – covering our own prime minister's or foreign minister's visits abroad – my male colleagues would manage, by any means, to convince the editor to give them the assignment instead.'

Bangladeshi journalist Prity Das [shared](#) how she was steered away from her area of study towards assignments perceived as more 'feminine':

'It was my dream job to be a journalist, and I had a deep interest in financial journalism. However, I found that my male colleagues were assigned to cover business and trade issues, while I was primarily assigned to beats like women, children, and fashion.'

Safety concerns

Women journalists are also concerned for their safety at work – concerns exacerbated by deficient transport, lack of facilities for childcare and breastfeeding, unpaid maternity leave, and absence of medical or occupational injury compensation. These conditions compel many talented women to leave mainstream media, transitioning instead to NGO work or freelance careers.

Societal expectations and environment

Patriarchal gender norms and expectations around marriage and family continue to hinder women journalists' careers in both countries, mirroring global patterns. Balancing professional work with household responsibilities is particularly challenging due to inadequate childcare support, inflexible work schedules, and prevailing societal views that assign women primary care roles.

Journalists in both Bangladesh and Nepal highlighted reproductive roles and gendered divisions of labour as major obstacles. Married women journalists often face harassment or lack of support at home, leading to a 'double burden' that restricts their time and capacity for career advancement and underscoring the urgent need for shifts in traditional gender roles and household-labour sharing.

In Bangladesh, additional constraints stem from traditional gendered expectations around how women dress, exposing women journalists to harassment offline and online when they exercise basic choices relating to their self-presentation. Women are also typically subjected to the gendered expectation that they are responsible for their own safety, and (as expressed throughout this report) are victim-blamed when they face gendered and sexual attacks. This lack of collective responsibility for general safety, as well as broad impunity for perpetrators, limits women journalists' mobility, independence, and ability to engage in networking – all key for competitive field reporting.

A rising challenge in Bangladesh is the influence of Islamist extremism, which has intensified since mid-2024, bringing increased sexual aggression and public hostility towards women and directly affecting their professional opportunities and ability to participate in public life – as the following case study illustrates.

Case study: 'You're a woman – you cannot be here': Islamist extremism and women journalists in Bangladesh⁴

On 4 May 2024, Monika Chowdhury, a young multimedia journalist at the *Daily Jugantor*, was removed from a press conference in Barisal solely because of her gender. The conference was organised by the Barisal city chapter of Islami Andolon Bangladesh: a conservative Islamist political party that upholds strict purdah norms and gender segregation. Despite objections from several other journalists, party members insisted that she leave – a stance that the organisers reinforced.

After the incident, Monika publicly explained what had happened:

'Like other journalists, I had set up my camera and boom mic to record footage. That's when some of the Huzur's followers approached me and said, "You're a woman. You cannot be here. Female journalists are not acceptable in our event. Please leave.'"

Monika questioned their reasoning:

'I asked them why a female journalist is not acceptable. They replied: "There are many Islamic scholars here who won't be comfortable with your presence." When my colleagues protested this, they insisted: "Under no circumstances can a female journalist stay here. She must leave.'"

Reflecting on the emotional impact, Monika stated:

'After the incident, I felt humiliated. I cried. I am a journalist – regardless of whether I am a woman, man, or transgender. I was there to do my job as a journalist.'

Monika's removal exemplifies how conservative, religious political forums maintain gendered gatekeeping by framing women's presence as inherently inappropriate or unacceptable, thereby preventing women's perspectives on certain issues from being shared at all. Such discriminatory practices not only limit women journalists' ability to access crucial reporting environments but reinforce the notion that political news coverage is a male domain. Ultimately, this diminishes media diversity and deprives the public of the broader perspectives that women reporters contribute.

What began as an act of gender-based obstruction quickly spiralled into coordinated online and offline harassment. Following initial media coverage of the incident, Monika faced doxxing, cyberbullying, misogynistic trolling, colourist insults, moral policing, and attacks on her professional integrity. Disturbingly, the backlash extended beyond supporters of the political party: many of her media colleagues from Barisal joined in with the online harassment. Meanwhile, intimidation near her home indicated how digital hostility can escalate into offline threats – a pattern commonly experienced by women journalists in Bangladesh.

Monika's experience is emblematic of broader systemic issues: gender discrimination in political spaces; patriarchal control extending through online environments, mirroring offline dynamics; and the intersecting vulnerabilities faced by women journalists. When women are pushed out of political reporting – and then punished for raising their voices – the entire media ecosystem becomes less inclusive, less accountable, and less reflective of society.

Recommendations

To overcome the deeply entrenched and profoundly gendered challenges facing women journalists in Bangladesh and Nepal, ARTICLE 19 offers the following recommendations to the governments and media organisations of both countries.

The governments of Bangladesh and Nepal must:

- Adopt a comprehensive legal framework with an intersectional feminist approach to safeguarding LGBTQI+ and women journalists – in all their diversity – from threats, intimidation, and other violations of their right to freedom of expression.
- Reform and amend existing laws, policies, and practices regarding both freedom of expression and the safety of journalists to ensure they comply with obligations and commitments under international human rights laws, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and CEDAW. This includes recognising the ways in which discrimination on the basis of gender and other intersecting identities impinges on the ability to exercise the right to freedom of expression.
- Ensure prompt, effective, and independent investigation into all allegations of violence against women journalists, bring all perpetrators and instigators to justice, and ensure survivors have access to appropriate restitution, compensation, and assistance.
- Introduce intersectional feminist training for law enforcement, the judiciary, and media regulators to ensure threats and instances of violence and harassment against women journalists are responded to holistically, and that incidents are still recorded even when they do not reach a criminal threshold.
- Develop accessible reporting mechanisms, coupled with legal protections, that encourage survivors of harassment and attacks to report online harassment without fear of retaliation. This must include formal changes to reporting mechanisms alongside efforts to re-conceptualise safety as a collective responsibility rather than an individual one, so that survivors do not bear the burden of shifting the culture of impunity alone.

- Improve legal protections by reviewing and amending existing laws, including those related to cybersecurity and digital harassment, to better protect women journalists from online abuse and gender-based violence. Ensure that online abuse, attacks, and gender-based violence are not conceptualised only as individual attacks but rather understood as part of a continuum of violence that women journalists face. Investigations into online attacks and harassment must recognise that offline violence often follows online attacks, and that online attacks have lasting effects on women journalists' mental health and career trajectory.
- Strengthen legal frameworks to ensure swift investigation and proportionate penalties for workplace sexual harassment, with protection against retaliation for complainants, and enforce mandatory, independent sexual harassment complaint committees in all media organisations made up of trained, impartial members trusted by women journalists.

Media organisations must:

- Comply with the existing national laws and policies, including the Labour Law and Wage Board in Bangladesh and the Working Journalists Act in Nepal, to ensure workplaces provide equal pay, maternity support, and other employment benefits.
- Provide anti-discrimination training focused on eliminating discrimination on the basis of gender, caste or socioeconomic status, LGBTQI+ identity, disability, and other forms of discrimination to all media staff, especially senior leaders and managers.
- Equip journalists with the necessary safety training, safety gear, and safety protocols, following a gender-responsive and intersectional approach.
- Develop intersectional gender-equality policies, in accordance with national policy directions and in alignment with [UNESCO's Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media](#), to ensure equal gender representation in media houses – including in leadership positions – and to create a discrimination-free, gender-responsive work environment.

- Conduct gender-safety audits and implement a gender-responsive mandatory workplace safety strategy to address occupational safety issues, including gender-based and intersectional safety risks for women journalists. Any workplace safety strategies must address structural power imbalances that enable harms to take place, rather than understanding harassment, abuse, and violence against women as individual-level concerns. They also must actively include women journalists when designing such safety or protection systems, as well as consulting them throughout the process.

Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, ARTICLE 19, [UN: New resolution on human rights defenders](#), 4 April 2025; ARTICLE 19, [UN: Human Rights Council adopts strong resolution on safety of journalists](#), 7 July 2025.
- 2 Dinesh Khabar, [Two youths arrested for misbehaving with journalist in Dhangadhi](#), 16 December 2025; Arjun Shah, [Youth arrested for abusing journalist Chand](#), eKantipur, 16 December 2025; *Media Action Nepal*, [Women journalists face harassment, mistreatment in Kathmandu and Dhangadhi](#), 17 December 2025; Rama Chand, ['What about men who are so courageous...'](#) [Facebook reel], n.d.
- 3 *The Daily Star*, [Media professional found dead at Dhaka home](#), 19 October 2025; *The Business Standard*, [Media professional found dead; uproar over workplace sexual harassment allegation](#), 19 October 2025; bdnews24.com, [Dhaka Stream staffer Swarnamoyee's death highlights alleged abuse, toxic media office](#), 19 October 2025; *BD Digest*, [Female journalist who accused Dhaka Stream colleague of sexual harassment dies by suicide](#), 20 October 2025; *Daily Times of Bangladesh*, [Journo suicide: 243 eminent citizens demand justice for Swarnamoyee](#), 21 October 2025; Yeashfin Yousha Tashfi, [Swarnamoyee's death into a wake-up call for safer workplaces](#), *South Asia Voice*, 22 October 2025; Abdul Mokim, [Dhaka media's silence on Swarnamoyee's suicide: Questioning women's safety in the workplace](#), *BD Media Monitor*, 19 October 2025; *Dhaka Tribune*, [Eminent citizens demand proper investigation into Sornomoye's death](#), 21 October 2025; Bangladesh Feminist Archives, [Female media worker found dead in Dhaka; probe underway amid workplace harassment allegation](#), 19 October 2025.
- 4 bdnews24.com, [সংবাদ সম্মেলন থেকে নারী সাংবাদিককে বরে করে দেয়ার অভিযোগ | Woman journalist | Barishal](#) [YouTube], 3 May 2025; *Times of Bangladesh*, [Islami Andolon cites 'purdah' in justifying expulsion of female journalist](#), 4 May 2025; *The Business Standard*, [Female journo 'forced out' of IAB chief Mufti Faizul's press meet](#), 3 May 2025; Kaler Kantho, [সংবাদ সম্মেলন থেকে নারী সাংবাদিককে বরে করে দেওয়ার অভিযোগ | Woman journalist](#) [YouTube], 3 May 2025.

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