

Working conditions of female journalists in Tamaulipas

*Condiciones laborales de las mujeres
periodistas en Tamaulipas*

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This paper analyzes the working conditions of female journalists of radio, print/digital press and television in Tamaulipas, a Mexican border state attacked by drug trafficking. It is approached from the Critical Political Economy and Glass Ceiling Theory, through surveys and interviews applied from 2017 to 2019. We found a wage gap up than 2.5 times compared to men. 43% of journalists have suffered sexual harassment.

KEYWORDS: Precarious work, Glass Ceiling Theory, sexual harassment, media, Tamaulipas.

Se analizan a las mujeres periodistas en radio, prensa impresa/digital y televisión en Tamaulipas, un estado fronterizo mexicano atacado por el narcotráfico. Se aborda desde la economía política crítica y techo de cristal a través de encuestas y entrevistas realizadas de 2017 a 2019. Se encontró una discriminación salarial de hasta 2.5 veces menor salario en comparación con los hombres. Un 43% del total de las periodistas analizadas ha sufrido acoso sexual.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Precariedad laboral, teoría del techo de cristal, acoso sexual, medios de comunicación, Tamaulipas.

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INTRODUCTION

Tamaulipas, a state bordering with the US in northeast Mexico, has been, in recent years, the scenery for numerous risk situations, such as “blockades, gun battles, violent assassinations, immigrant and American businesspersons kidnappings, racketeering, and hydrocarbons theft” (Galván, 2019, p. 2), committed by at least three different drug cartels.

The practice of journalism hence became a high-risk activity. In 2017, the *Red Estatal de Mujeres Periodistas de Tamaulipas* (Female Journalists Network for the State of Tamaulipas) reported that, since the year 2000, 19 journalists have been murdered, 4 of which were women. Also, 14 journalists were threatened, 3 of which were women (Redacción, 2017). In this context is that we offer the current state of affairs in the working conditions for female journalists in that state.

The preexisting risks for the exercise of journalism in the studied area come mainly from the prevailing organized crime groups, and affect males and females equally; however, besides this circumstances, women face wage gap, work inequality, and sexual harassment in the workplace.

This paper aims to integrate information from three empirical independent research works, conducted between 2017 and 2019 amongst female journalists from Tamaulipas. It has a mixed methods approach, using surveys and direct interviews to know the magnitude of the problem as well as the experiences of the subjects from a gender perspective. The objective is to describe patterns of wage gap and work inequality, through evidence that highlight the experiences of being a woman, being a female journalist and being from Tamaulipas.

To make these problems more visible, we compared the variations between work and salary of female journalists depending on the media at which they work, educational level, working hours, harassment and risks they face on a daily basis. The results showed that women are payed down to 2.5 times less than their male counterparts, and experience precarious work conditions, as well as sexual and work harassment. Finally, there is an almost non-existent female representativity in the media management in the state.

AN OVERVIEW ON THE ACTIVITIES OF FEMALE JOURNALISTS IN MÉXICO AND TAMAULIPAS

Journalism is an intrinsically dangerous profession. In recent years, several authors have pointed out the highly risky conditions in which journalism is carried out in Latin America and Mexico (Aguirre, 2016; Arribas, 2016; Arroyo, 2017; Carballo, 2017; Cepeda, 2017; Del Palacio & Olvera, 2017; González, 2017; Gutiérrez, 2015; Márquez, 2015; Ramos & Navarro, 2017; Valdivia-García, 2017). On a yearly basis, several international organizations such as Article 19 (2019), Reporters Without Borders (2019), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (2018) and the FEADLE (2019) have produced reports to highlight the seriousness of the situation. Of special significance are the international efforts such as the 4th World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995 (ONU, 2020), in which attempts were made to acknowledge the importance of women's role in the media. Also, several international (Red Internacional de Periodistas con Visión de Género, 2020) and national organizations have appeared, looking after women's equality in journalism, as well of denouncing the violation of their rights, such as the CIMAC (2020) and the different female journalists state networks throughout Mexico.

There are also some authors who analyze journalism from a gender perspective (Castillo, 2017; Hernández, 2018a, 2018b; Leal et al., 2017; Vega, 2019), as well as others that study their role as content producers and media directors (Amado, 2017).

According with the Fiscalía Especial para la Atención de Delitos cometidos contra la Libertad de Expresión (FEADLE, Special Prosecutor for Crimes Against Freedom of Expression), from the year 2000 to July, 2019, of a total of 256 victims, 27.1% of aggressions against journalists were suffered by women. These aggressions were mainly direct threats, kidnaping, abuse of power, robbery, homicide, forced entry and bodily injuries, amongst others (Fiscalía General de la República, 2019, pp. 2-3). Article 19 (2019) documents the murder of 127 journalists during the same period, 8% of which were women. Two of them worked in Tamaulipas.

The *Red Estatal de Mujeres Periodistas de Tamaulipas* started its activities in the year 2000, with the objective of promoting journalism

from a gender perspective. It currently has 90 members in the state, which offer support to their female colleagues in denouncing power abuse, aggressions, and threats.

Besides the previously mentioned risks that the journalistic activity represents for them, female journalists in Tamaulipas face another situation that aggravates their position: workplace discrimination, wage precarity and sexual harassment at their workplaces.

GENDER-BASED WORKPLACE DIFFERENCES

Even before going out on a reporting assignment, female journalists face struggles within the companies at which they work. The Occupational Segregation Theory (Bergmann, 1974), states that each gender is assigned with differentiated activities, and proposes two kinds of discrimination: *horizontal* (in which is harder for one gender to participate in an activity predominantly performed by the opposed gender), and *vertical* (in which career promotions to higher importance and authority positions are harder for specific groups of individuals). This theory tries to explain the corporate reasoning behind the gaps in wage and work opportunities.

In the corporate environment, Llorente et al. (2018) concluded that, in Spain, based on age, seniority, and educational level of the workers, women are less successful at improving their wage level, while men are usually promoted to higher positions. Similar conclusions were reached by Martínez & Camacho (2017) after reviewing 30 publications between 2005 and 2015, from countries such as Chile, Colombia, Argentina, Mexico, Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela: 23% of women have a lower wage compared to their male counterparts, even though 26% of the times, the workload and expectations are exactly the same.

Turns out that there is a work stagnation for women, even despite having the same skills and responsibilities as their male colleagues (García, 2006). In organizational leadership, the Glass Ceiling Theory is described by Morrison, White & Van Velsor (1987) as a series of obstacles that women must face in office work environments in order to climb an inconspicuous hierarchic ladder that discriminate women.

Such barriers are currently present amongst women journalists, resulting in a low female presence in the media power positions.

This phenomenon is also analyzed by communication science in the Political Economy and Feminist Critical Theories approaches (Vega & Ortega, 2014), that highlight the concentration of mainly male workers in the media. These obstacles are not only inherent to the newsrooms, but also pose an important weight on their roles as wives or mothers, especially when their children are of a short age. In the Mexican context, the most evident conditions are: “the amount of non-paid work, the traditional gender roles and the lack of policies that allow the proper integration of work and family life” (CIMAD, 2013, p.3)

However, Bucio (2014), suggests overthrowing this barrier on ethical and social justice reasons, to better represent their female coworkers best interest, to ease economic equality within the families, to give a better use to human resources, and to improve social welfare.

FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN MEDIA OWNERSHIP

The Feminist Critical Theory provides the political economy of communication with its gender-neutral vision, which makes more visible the control and ownership asymmetries in cultural industries. In this way, it is produced “a division of work based on the gender as a determining factor in social organization” (Vega & Ortega, 2014, p. 3), which gives economic, political and hierarchical preeminence within the media to men.

Since 1995, the United Nations (UN) established, in its 4th World Conference on Women, the importance of women participation in the media, and in order to do so: “All stakeholders are called to join forces to combat stereotyping of women and inequality in women’s access to and participation in all communication systems, especially in the media” (UNESCO, 2014, p. 10). It also cites the Global Report on the Status of Women in the News Media, pointing out that in “media organizations, men hold the vast majority of the seats on governing boards and in top management, at 74.1%” (UNESCO, 2014, p. 13).

In the specific case of Mexico, in 2009 media company Televisa did not considered the gender quota system to favor men and women

equally, since they focus on merit and professional performance (UNESCO, 2014). Women are not yet represented in the highest ranking executive positions within the company, in which only one out of eleven seats in the Board of Directors is occupied by a woman (Televisa, 2019). In other words, the treatment and benefits offered by the company to their female personnel are discretionary: merit promotions assigned arbitrarily and without a high hierarchical power.

METHODOLOGY AND LOGISTICS

Given the current dangers in the practice of journalism, it is necessary to incorporate data that allows to visualize the problems in the local context with a gender perspective. Considering the above, this paper looks to measure the following variables for Tamaulipas: media, educational level, working hours, wage, and harassment experiences.

It starts with the question: Which are the working conditions for female journalists in Tamaulipas?, from this, we derive several propositions: a) working conditions of female journalists in Tamaulipas are characterized by harassment, work inequality and wage gap; b) women do not have representativity in power managerial positions within the media in the state; c) women receive lower wages than their male counterparts in the same positions, even in spite of having the same working hours and educational level; d) women working in the media are affected by the obstacles pointed out in the Glass Ceiling theory.

This paper has a predominately qualitative approach. It has a descriptive, non-experimental scope, according with Hernández et al. (2018), for a longitudinal study that compares three state-wide samples collected during 2017, 2018 and 2019. From the qualitative standpoint, the design is of a phenomenological type, according to Creswell (2003) because it looks to describe the experience of the female journalists facing the pressures of organized crime, power groups and wage discrimination inside the media at which they work. We will depart from the interpretative paradigm of feminism according to Denzin & Lincoln (2012) highlighting life stories, problems and vulnerability.

The data compilation tools used were surveys and direct interviews. The first were applied to 45 female journalists in Tamaulipas, with at

least two years working in radio, television, press or digital media, and with a degree in Communication Science, Journalism or similar. The sampling was non-probabilistic, since the population is undetermined; the selection was intentional to cover different positions, cities and media.

Six female journalists were surveyed in 2017, 20 in 2018 and 19 in 2019, for a total of 45 women. In the first year also 21 males were surveyed, identifying an unequal female participation and a lower salary than their male counterparts, since women were paid a monthly wage ranging from \$2 000 to \$6 000² Mexican pesos (MXP), meanwhile the men were paid about three times more (Cepeda, 2019).

The semi-structured interviews were performed in 2019 to seven female journalists working in radio, television, press and digital media in the cities of Tampico, Ciudad Madero, Ciudad Victoria, Ciudad Mante and Matamoros, Tamaulipas.

RESULTS

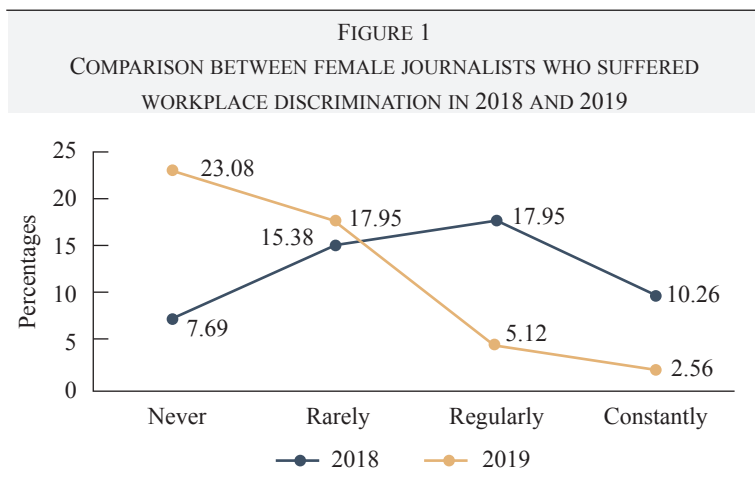
Workplace discrimination: Most of the female journalists interviewed agree on the premise that news media work roles show an evident gender-based differentiation, since women are usually located at areas such as proofreading, social events reporting and weather forecasting, placing them accordingly with predetermined stereotypes based on youth and beauty.

The samples of 2018 and 2019 were asked “Have you suffered of workplace discrimination for being a woman?” 70% agreed, although with different intensities (see Figure 1). In 2018, 43.59% answered that they have suffered discrimination, and 25.63% answered the same in 2019.

To understand this issue, they were questioned in the interviews on how the journalistic assignments were distributed, and one answered: “it is harder for them (women) to start in political sources, that you

² The exchange rate as of May 20th, 2020, was \$23.54 Mexican pesos (MXP) per one US dollar, according with Citibanamex. Hence, the monthly wage of female journalists ranges from 85 to 254 US dollars.

are given the chance to start in this areas, it takes time and a lot of experience, is not as easy as it is for men” (Digital Newspaper Director, Matamoros, 2019)



Source: The author.

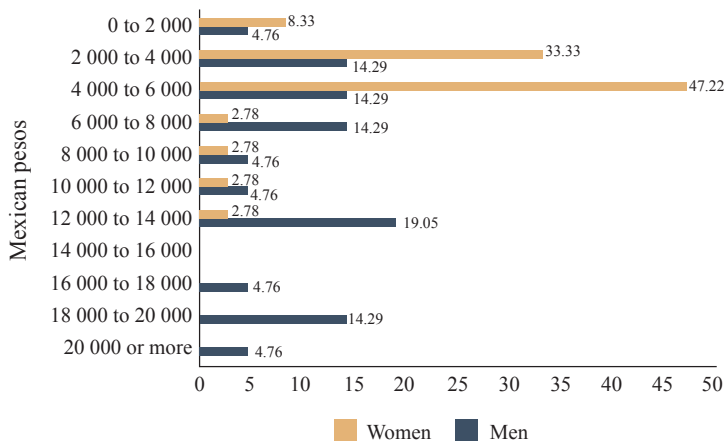
The importance of being assigned to a political source is that sometimes advertisement contracts are subscribed with the media, from which the journalist receives a commission. The female journalists interviewed explain this kind of discrimination as part of the macho culture, confirming the Glass Ceiling Theory: “Men prefer working with another men because women have issues such as children, or pregnancy. They perform better, don’t have any other commitments” (Columnist, Ciudad Victoria, 2019).

Our male colleagues that cover on political parties or government offices get advertisement contracts, which mean extra money, and we women don’t have access to that extra money. I noticed that men were usually sent to small municipalities, to get advertisement contracts and get the commission, and the media would be reluctant to send women (Digital Newspaper Correspondent, Ciudad Victoria, 2019).

Female journalists are assigned to certain areas such as reporting and news presenting. The jobs assigned less frequently to women are photographer, columnist, and general director. A systematic exclusion of women from areas or job assignments in which they can improve their income or improve their work is evident; the reason of such discrimination, according to their own conclusions, is not related to their skills, but to their gender.

Income: Comparing the results of man (2017) and women wages in the years 2017, 2018 and 2019, the results indicates that, even though there is a higher female presence in the sample of this research, there is still a higher concentration or precarious wages among them (Figure 2); the highest monthly income for women was, in 2019, in the range of 12 000 to 14 000 MXP, meanwhile for the men, in 2017, was over 20 000 MXP.

FIGURE 2
SUMMATION ON WAGE PERCEPTION BY GENDER, FOR THE JOURNALISTS SURVEYED IN 2017 AND 2019



Source: The author.

In 2017, the average income among male journalists in Tamaulipas was 9 650 MXP, while the average income for female journalists was around 3 800 MXP. Men made up to 2.5 times more than women, creating a higher concentration of precarious wages in women. Although in the following years no men were surveyed, the average wage for women in 2018 was 4 900 MXP, and in 2019 5 500 MXP, which was 1.8 times less than their male colleagues. The perception of an increase in the wage average during those years can be caused by the growth of the state sample. However, the wages are still very low compared with the male average, which makes more evident the wage discrimination.

Some of the interviewed women working for the press or radio, pointed out that, regarding reporting jobs, the wage gap is non-existent, but in higher rank positions females are paid less than males. A newspaper female journalist commented: “I know that there is someone (male) in the same position that I have, who makes more money than me and that is not good. We do the same work, I felt aggravated, I felt it was not fair... it was around 20% more” (Newspaper Publisher, Tampico, 2019). Besides the wage, a television news presenter observes there is a predisposition regarding working hours:

I have noticed that men are paid more, even if he works in the same job, than women... To make as much as a male coworker I have to put in more working hours, I work almost 14 hours a day, to make as much as my male colleague makes for 8 hours of work (Television News Presenter, Ciudad Victoria, 2019)

This implies that there is not a wage gap between women and men at lower level positions, but as the workers rise in the work hierarchy, distinctions are more present, whether it is a better income or less working hours for men.

We considered the educational level might be a possible reason for this income differentiation. Of the 45 surveyed women, all have a bachelor's degree in communication. Out of them, 77.7% only studied the Bachelor's degree, 20% have a Master's degree and only 2.2% have a Doctorate. However, a degree does not guarantee a higher income:

For over 20 years I have received the same wage in a media. There is nothing that can help me make more money than a newbie, not even the acknowledgement of my degree. It is the same money for someone with no degree, even for High School dropouts, and for someone with a Doctorate, it makes no difference (Columnist, Ciudad Victoria, 2019).

On Table 1 we depict the information regarding the wage, educational level and working hours of the 45 women surveyed in Tamaulipas. Less women are amongst those in the higher wages than those in the lower wages. The table also indicates that the working hours of most female journalists are 8 or more, hence, even if they work full-time their wage is precarious.

TABLE 1
 FEMALE JOURNALISTS OF TAMAULIPAS, SEPARATING WAGE, WORKING HOURS AND EDUCATIONAL LEVEL, FROM 2017 TO 2019

Monthly wages (MXP)			Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate	Subtotal
Lower	\$0 to \$2 000	4 hrs.			1	
		8 hrs.				
		More than 8 hrs.	2			
		Subtotal	2	0	1	3
	\$2 000 to \$4 000	4 hrs.	1	1		
		8 hrs.	4			
		More than 8 hrs.	7	1		
		Subtotal	12	2		14
	\$4 000 to \$6 000	4 hrs.	2			
		8 hrs.	6	1		
		More than 8 hrs.	8	1		
		Subtotal	16	2		18
Medium	\$6 000 to \$8 000	4 hrs.				
		8 hrs.		1		
		More than 8 hrs.		2		
		Subtotal	0	3		3

Monthly wages (MXP)		Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate	Subtotal
\$8 000 to \$10 000	4 hrs.				
	8 hrs.	1	1		
	More than 8 hrs.	1			
	Subtotal	2	1		3
\$10 000 to \$12 000	More than 8 hrs.	1			
	Subtotal	1	0		1
Higher	\$12 000 to \$14 000				
	4 hrs.				
	8 hrs.		1		
	More than 8 hrs.	1			
	Subtotal	1	1		2
Did not answer	More than 8 hrs.	1			
	Subtotal	1	0	1	
	Total	35	9	1	45

Source: The author.

The web page of the Instituto Mexicano para la Competitividad (Mexican Institute for Competitiveness) (2018) shows that, for those who studied Communication or Journalism, the monthly wage national average is 10 406 MXP, but specifies the gender gap in the income: 9 531 MXP for women and 11 498 for men. Comparing this with the data obtained during this research, the monthly income average of women in Tamaulipas during 2018 for the same activity was 4 900 MXP, increasing to 5 500 MXP during 2019. This means that, in recent years, female journalists in Tamaulipas made half of the national average income of their male counterparts, which also implies wage precarity.

Women representativity in the media: The 45 women journalists studied come from 18 media outlets across Tamaulipas, that are mostly owned by men, with the exception of the newspaper *El Bravo de Matamoros*, inherited by the daughter of the licensee, and the digital newspaper *Frontera en Red*, a native digital newspaper, that does not

pay any salaries. According with the broadcasting licenses register of IFETEL (also IFT, Federal Telecommunications Institute of Mexico), there are three more media outlets registered to women: a TV channel at Nuevo Laredo (DOF, 2014), a radio frequency at Tampico (IFT, 2017) and one more for Cable TV at Jaumave (IFT, 2019). However, female representativity is still minimal in the power structures, since even though women are registered as licensees, they are not part of the managerial structure of such companies.

The Glass Ceiling Theory still proves right with the female journalists studied. One of them states: “I had the chance to make an audition for Televisa but I did not show, I was pregnant and the working hours would not give me any liberty... so I decided to focus more on my children, on my family, because of the low salary” (Newspaper Director, Matamoros, 2019). Another female journalist rejected becoming chief editor when she became pregnant: “I made a balance between what I wanted to do and what working in a media outlet will allow me to do, since it is very demanding. I have to discuss it with my husband, to take care of my daughters... it wasn’t convenient for my family life” (Managing Editor, Tampico, 2019). Women self-limited their professional growth since they knew the level of commitment and risks implicit in working for the media, which they also must face without any kind of leaves of absence, good salary or schedule flexibility.

Work Risks: In an interview, a female journalist explains the experience of living with organized crime threats in Tamaulipas: “A (female) colleague was threaten, they said they were going to disfigure her face, they were going to throw acid at her” (Television news presenter, Ciudad Victoria, 2019). Another female journalist explains: “Upon picking up the phone, without even knowing who answered, someone said that if the story of a certain character being gunned-down got published, they were going to shot the newspaper” (Columnist, Ciudad Victoria, 2019).

The following is an example of the direct threats originated by political groups:

Political power is: if you have a family member working for the government they will fire him or her, or if you have an advertisement contract they will terminate it, those are constant threats that stop you from freely exercise journalism, you have no guarantees. There are indirect and veiled threats from the political groups (Correspondent, Ciudad Victoria, 2019).

The risks and direct threats to female journalists from organized crime and power groups are similar to the ones faced by their male counterparts, since they might print stories contrary to the interests of such groups, that make no difference on gender, simply threatening or acting upon the person. However, being a woman in Tamaulipas implies a different vulnerability:

We, as women, are more vulnerable because management won't support you, there is no position that guarantees any backup; we are talking about reporters, communicators, news presenters, about women that take risks, that go out on the streets, that drive around and can be assassinated (Female Broadcaster, Tampico, 2019).

Even though male also take the same risks, women face another situation inside their working places that makes them uncomfortable, as well as stresses and wears them down: harassment.

Work and sexual harassment: Work harassment is a commonplace inside the newsrooms. A female journalist says: "I faced work harassment when we started the movement to demand a professional salary for journalists. I was covering health and education government sources, and they sent me to cover 'red news' (violent crimes stories) to pressure me into quitting" (Correspondent, Ciudad Victoria, 2019).

Another female journalist talks about the constant harassment she had to endure:

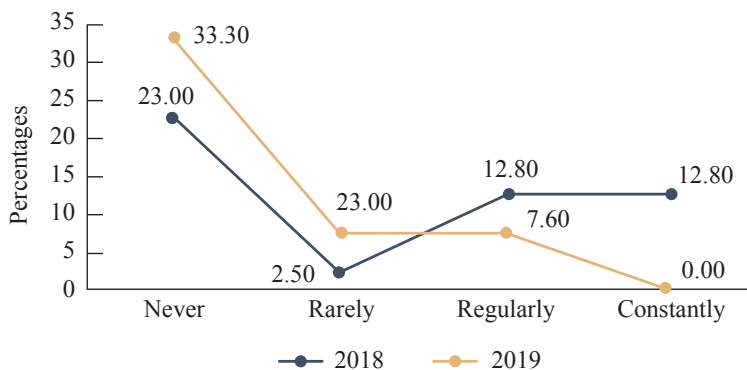
They talk about women as if they were things, sexual objects, even when you are around... there is a lot of collusion, they cover each other's backs, they protect each other. Many times I received derogatory remarks and they said to me "we're inviting you just to cover gender quotas", but they don't really believe women are entitled to have an opinion (Female Broadcaster, Tampico, 2019).

Regarding sexual harassment, which was included in the research variables in 2018 for the studied area, half of women said never have experienced it, but 43% referred experiencing it in 2018 and 2019, and a 12% in a constant manner in 2018 (Figure 3). This decrease can be related with a campaign to denounce sexual harassment in the institution.

A young journalist shares her experience:

The office manager was trying to take advantage of his position and asked me to go out on dates, and to go out to dinner, and constantly said that he liked me and made remarks about my legs; once... he asked me to go out to dinner with him and I refused, so about one week went by and then he fired me, because I did not want to go out with him and he was definitely sexually harassing me (News Presenter, Cd. Victoria, 2019).

FIGURE 3
COMPARISON BETWEEN FEMALE JOURNALISTS THAT SUFFERED
WORKPLACE SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN 2018 AND 2019



Source: The author.

43% of the experiences of sexual harassment shared by the surveyed female journalists indicate that there are more stories of harassment in the newsrooms, but in fear of retaliation they refrain themselves from sharing them; however, this does not mean they never occurred.

CONCLUSIONS: SEXUAL/WORK HARASSMENT AND SALARY DISCRIMINATION

The empirical evidence analyzed for Tamaulipas reinforces the conclusion on the existence of a tendency to discriminate female workers in the media newsrooms. Occupational segregation is present amongst female journalists in Tamaulipas. They suffer workplace discrimination in favor of their male colleagues in the vertical and horizontal structures; as described by Bergman (1974), the most privileged journalistic activities are often quickly offered to men, as well as bonuses, better salaries and the best working schedules.

We confirmed the idea of a low representation of women in power positions within the media in Tamaulipas, since we highlighted the asymmetry in ownership and control of local media, with the exception of inherited leaderships or control upon non-paying digital media.

This situation reduces any support or understanding that can be offered to women suffering from sexual or work harassment at the media newsrooms in Tamaulipas. When men are in directive positions or have the power of decision tend to minimize, hide or reject these accusations. The proposals of 1995 Beijing's Conference are still left out of local press newsrooms.

The Glass Ceiling Theory is also confirmed in the newsrooms of Tamaulipas. The flexibility required by women to be journalists, mothers, and to escalate to higher positions at work, is not present in media structures.

Another of the scenarios confirmed is wage precarity. It is evident a gap that ranges between 2.5 to 1.8 times less salary for women compared to their male colleagues from 2017 to 2019 (just in 2017 the monthly wage average in the state for men was 9 650 MXP and for women was 3 800 MXP). Compared to the national context, the female journalists surveyed in Tamaulipas have a total income of almost half of the monthly average (in 2018 their income was 4 900 MXP against 9 531 MXP) of their peers. The wage gap exposes a blatant discrimination against women's competitiveness, by means of paying precarious wages that make very difficult for them to cover their working hours and take care of their families as well. A finding is that working more hours than

men or having postgraduate degrees does not necessarily mean they can have a higher income. This goes in line with what García (2006) states regarding work stagnation for women with the same skills and responsibilities than their male counterparts.

Now, even if the overall picture for female journalists during the last three years in Tamaulipas is not characterized by violations, assassinations or kidnappings, they have internal debates on whether they should cover stories that have imply risks, cope with their coworkers' and bosses' workplace discrimination, wage precarity, and, also, deal with work harassment (43% of them referred having suffered it at their workplace). Fortunately, there are state and municipal journalists' organizations that provide a support network that offers understanding, assistance to denounce, replication of complaints and economical support.

Working conditions are characterized by wage discrimination, as well as sexual and workplace harassment. It is urgent for the government to enforce public policies that guarantee the permanence, wage, source assignment and work promotions equality, since this correlates with the quality of the information that the society deserves.

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