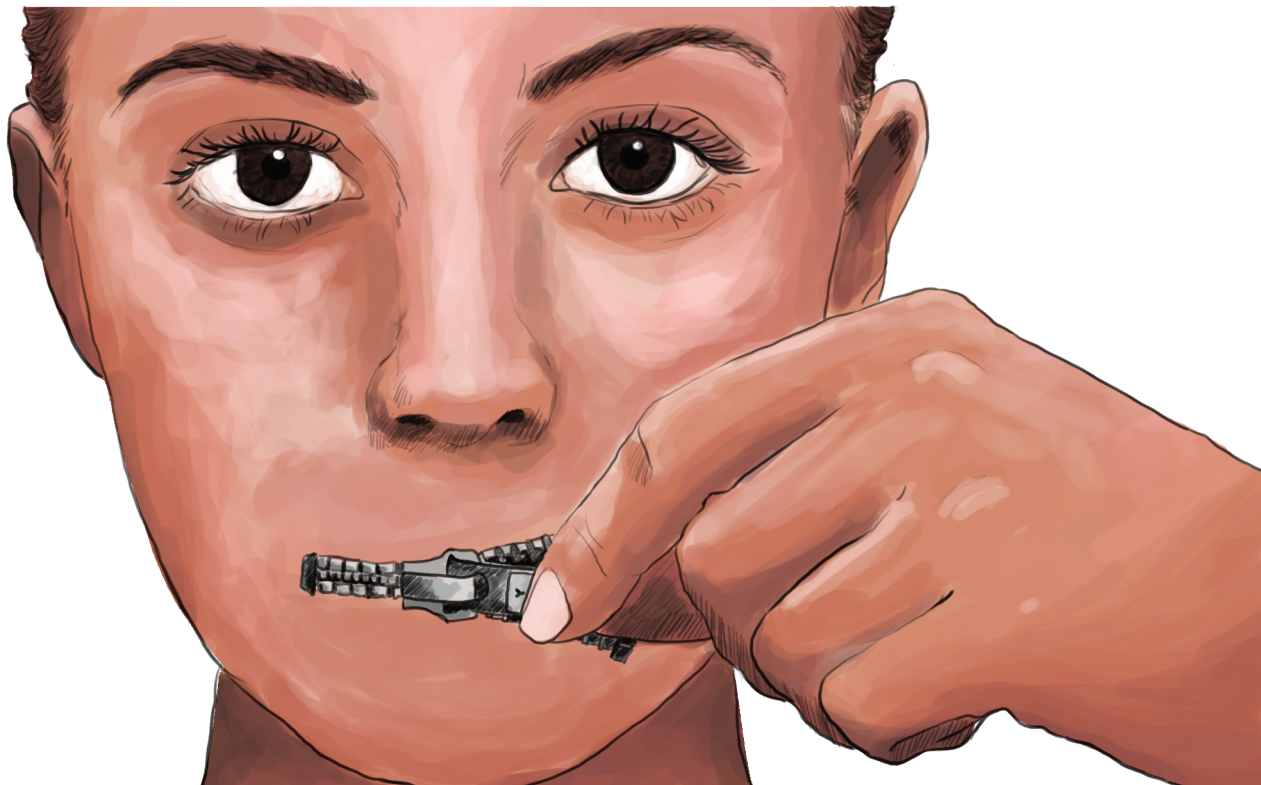


Women Journalists & the Double Bind

Choosing silence over being silenced



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Published by Media Matters for Democracy
2018

MediaMatters
for Democracy
Policy Research & Advocacy Initiative



DIGITAL RIGHTS MONITOR

Foreword

Women, no matter in which region, field or context they are in, are no stranger to self-censorship. The social constructs of 'good women' globally encourage submissive, compromising behavior from women and self-censorship, especially in matters of importance is generally encouraged. Pakistani women are no different. Censoring ourselves, especially if our opinions are dissenting from the mainstream, is second nature. At our homes and within our families, censoring our feelings, to protect family harmony is drilled as a key 'value'. Women who don't complain, women who don't assert, women who are not vocally in opposition of louder, more powerful (often male) voices.

Thus, when Media Matters for Democracy team undertook a research on self-censorship trends among journalists, the response of women journalists was of particular interest. For us, the experience of women journalists represents a double bind – as members of a community that is socially conditioned to see value in self-censorship, who are now practicing a profession within which the external pressures to be quiet about matters of perceived sensitivity, women are in a doubly vulnerable position.

This publication is a gendered version of our earlier publication *Surrendering to Silence*. It focuses on the experience of the women respondents of a survey, designed to map the presence of and elements related to self-censorship in professional and personal expression by journalists in Pakistan.

The findings are sobering.

Sensitive nature of information and organizational policies are quoted as the biggest factor for self-censorship in professional settings while cultural and religious sensitivities remain the biggest silencing factor in personal expression. None of this is surprising. All of this is a cause for concern. In a country where the discussion around freedom of expression generally and the debate on threats to journalists specifically, focuses predominantly on men, the findings detailed in this research are a grim reminder that threats to media and press are not limited to a specific gender.

Additionally, given the fact that women journalists are still far and few within the news media industry in Pakistan, this choice of self-censorship within the women journalist community constitutes a doubly chilling effect on journalistic expression of women.

This research documents the experience of a precious few women in the journalistic field. It is but a mere glance at a picture that is sure to be much more complex than what our findings allow us to comprehend. Thus, this research, a gendered reading of a larger research exploring self-censorship among journalists, does not claim to be conclusive. I aim to continue to explore this issue in a more comprehensive manner. But till then, here is how 54 women journalists in Pakistan are experiencing self-censorship.



Sadaf Khan

Co Founder / Director

Media Matters for Democracy

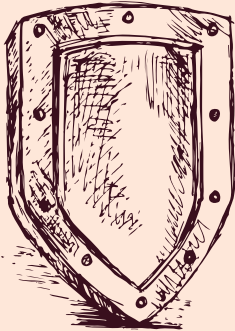
July 2018



MMfD surveyed 54 women journalists, most of whom were working as reporters and worked for national organisations. The primary language of journalism for most women respondents was English followed by Urdu.

93%

Almost all respondents felt it was **important to self-censor**



Seven in 10 women journalists said that self-censorship makes them feel safer



96%

Almost all the participants said they knew colleagues who self-censor

59%

of the women who participated in the survey have been **attacked, threatened or intimidated** for their professional or personal expression



Professional Communication



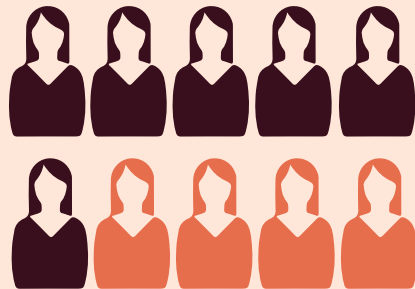
87%

of female respondents said they have practised self-censorship in their journalism

Out of the total female respondents, **83%** identified their “news organisation’s policies” and **81%** termed “sensitive nature of information” as the major reasons for self-censorship in their professional work

80%

of respondents thought self-censorship among Pakistani journalists has increased over time



Six out of 10 respondents said they were “very likely” to self-censor information related either to the security establishment or religion in their professional interactions

Personal Communication

83%

of the women journalist engaged in self-censorship online



52%

of the respondents self-censor during their personal and social interactions offline



Nine in 10 respondents said they self-censor themselves in personal settings due to religious sensitivities





Seven in 10 said they self-censor themselves in personal settings due to cultural sensitivities

74%

of women self-censor due to fear of backlash from the public



50%

respondents said they were “very likely” to self-censor information about religion in personal interactions



Secure Communication Skills

80%

of the women respondents want to learn about safer ways to use technology that can help them with self-expression freely on social media

Most respondents said they would share information they are likely to self-censor with other beat reporters or forego their byline in publication to mitigate self-censorship



Around six in 10 women respondents want to gain more knowledge about using secure communication tools

52%

of women journalists who took the survey wanted to learn about digital risk assessment



61%

of the women
respondents use
mitigation strategies to
challenge factors that
have led to self-
censorship in personal
and professional
expression



35% of the female
respondents didn't know how to
use encryption

41%

said they used encryption
to keep their digital
communication safe




About Media Matters for Democracy

Media Matters for Democracy works to defend the freedom of expression, media, Internet, and communications in Pakistan. The main premise of our work is to push for a truly independent and inclusive media and cyberspace where the citizens in general, and journalists in specific, can exercise their fundamental rights and professional duties safely and without the fear of persecution or physical harm.

We undertake various initiatives including but not limited to training, policy research, advocacy, movement building and strategic litigation to further our organizational goals. We also work on acceptance and integration of digital media and journalism technologies and towards creating sustainable 'media-tech' initiatives in the country.

MMfD recognises diversity and inclusion as a core value of democracy and thus all our programs have a strong focus on fostering values and skills that enable and empower women, minority communities, and other marginalized groups.

Our Digital Rights Monitor initiative provides an alternative source of news reporting on Pakistan's state of digital rights. You can visit mediamatters.pk and digitalrightsmonitor.pk for more details.

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