



**FOJO:MEDIA INSTITUTE**  
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**BARRIERS TO  
WOMEN JOURNALISTS  
IN SUB-SAHARAN  
AFRICA**



## ABOUT THE STUDY

*Barriers to Women Journalists* identifies obstacles hindering women in sub-Saharan Africa from entering, progressing, and/or staying in journalism. The main objective of this study is to assess the status of women in journalism in sub-Saharan Africa. This report identifies a number of obstacles hindering women journalists, and locates possible strategies, responses and interventions that might increase the number of women journalists in sub-Saharan Africa, at various career levels. The aims and objectives of this study are broken down into three research questions.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the lived experiences of women journalists in sub-Saharan Africa, in terms of barriers of entry, progression and staying in the profession?
2. Why do these barriers exist?
3. How are and might these barriers be challenged in a way that results in an increase in the number, progression and retention of women journalists in sub-Saharan Africa?



Photo by Robert Shunev on Unsplash

## PARTNER INFORMATION

This study is a joint publication by Fojo Media Institute and Africa Women in Media (AWiM), part of the project Consortium for Human Rights and Media in Africa (CHARM), funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The study aims to contribute to **Objective 1: Strengthened advocacy actions that support an enabling environment that promotes human rights and civic and media freedoms, with a specific focus on women, labour, LGBTI, environmental and indigenous rights journalists/activists.**

Beneficiaries of this research include policy and decision-makers as well as media managers who are able to effect positive change in media organisations and the journalism profession based on the recommendations of the report. It will also benefit grant-making bodies and other projects that support women in journalism in Africa, in identifying gaps in existing programmes, and can contribute to addressing the gaps and challenges identified by the report.



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Fojo is Sweden's leading centre for professional journalism training and international media development support, with a mission to strengthen free, independent and professional journalism. Fojo is an independent institute at Linnæus University with a mandate to support journalists and media development in Sweden and globally. For more than 45 years, Fojo has held mid-career training for Swedish journalists, and, since 1991, has been engaged in international media development.



African Women in Media (AWiM) is an international nongovernmental organisation that aims to positively impact the way media functions in relation to African women. AWiM collaborates with a variety of partners to achieve our vision that 'One day African women will have equal access to representation and opportunities in media industries and media content'. AWiM activities create opportunities for knowledge exchange, building networks, and economic empowerment of women in media through their Pitch Zone and Awards.

## RESEARCHER

**Dr Yemisi Akinbobola** is an award-winning journalist, academic, consultant and co-founder of African Women in Media (AWiM). Joint winner of the CNN African Journalist Award 2016 (Sports Reporting), Dr Akinbobola ran her news website IQ4News from 2010 to 2014. Her media work is Africa-focused, covering stories from rape culture in Nigeria, to an investigative and data story on the trafficking of young West African football hopefuls by fake agents. She has freelanced for publications including the UN Africa Renewal magazine, and has several years' experience in communication management in the third sector. Dr Akinbobola holds a PhD in Media and Cultural Studies from Birmingham City University where she is a Senior Lecturer and International Research Partnerships Manager. She has published scholarly research on women's rights and African feminism, and journalism and digital public spheres. She was Editorial Consultant for the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 commemorative book titled *She Stands for Peace: 20 Years, 20 Journeys*.

## DEFINITIONS

*This study defines the terms listed below as follows*

### GENDER

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. (World Health Organisation)

### GENDER EQUALITY

Gender equality is a political concept that emphasises equality between genders. Gender equality is typically defined as women and men enjoying the same opportunities, rights and responsibilities within all areas of life. However, similar to all the other concepts, gender equality can be used in different ways and can convey different meanings. Gender equality might mean that women and men should be treated equally, or differently. For example, it may imply that women and men should be paid *the same* for doing the same work or that they should be treated with *different* medicines and methods in order to make healthcare equal. ([includegender.org](http://includegender.org))

### SEXISM

Sexism is linked to beliefs around the fundamental nature of women and men and the roles they should play in society. Sexist assumptions about women and men, which manifest themselves as gender stereotypes, can rank one gender as superior to another. Such hierarchical thinking can be conscious and hostile, or it can be unconscious, manifesting itself as **unconscious bias**. Sexism can touch everyone, but women are particularly affected. (European Institute of Gender Equality).

(Actions based on) the belief that the members of one sex are less intelligent, able, skilful, etc. than the members of the other sex, especially that women are less able than men (Cambridge Dictionary)



## SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another, when such conduct interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment. While typically involving a pattern of behaviour, it can take the form of a single incident. Sexual harassment may occur between persons of the opposite or same sex. Both males and females can be either the victims or the offenders. (United Nations, 2008)

For more on sexual harassment and sexism read:

<https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/integrity-ethics/module-9/key-issues/forms-of-gender-discrimination.html>

## MISOGYNY

Feelings of hating women, or the belief that men are much better than women.

(Cambridge Dictionary)

## SEXTORTION

The practice of forcing someone to do something, particularly to perform sexual acts, by threatening to publish naked pictures of them or sexual information about them.

(Cambridge Dictionary)

## GENDER BIAS

Prejudiced actions or thoughts based on the gender-based perception that women are not equal to men in rights and dignity. (European Institute of Gender Equality)

## GENDER NORMS

Standards and expectations to which women and men generally conform, within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community at that point in time. (European Institute of Gender Equality)

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## FOREWORD



**Dr Yemisi Akinbobola,**  
Co-Founder & CEO  
African Women in Media



**Agneta Söderberg Jacobson,**  
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During the last decades, the proportion of women in the media workforce has increased in many countries. On the African continent, South Africa has the lead with a relatively gender-balanced workforce. In other parts of the world, such as Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, women on the other hand tend to outnumber men. This, in turn, seems to correlate with lowering status and comparably low pay for those in the profession. Also, when it comes to decision-making and ownership, the gender gap seems to persist. In a fast-evolving Africa context, it is of particular concern to increase the understanding of how gendered power dynamics come into play in news media production.

This study is an answer to this call. It explores barriers that women meet in different stages of the journalistic profession. The focus is wider than sexual harassment, but most obstacles identified are somehow connected to denigration of women, or even misogyny. The picture across the continent when it comes to gender equality in journalism appears both shared and varied, as the culturally rooted experiences of women are generally found to be. Starting from the premise of barriers to entry, we quickly realised there were various points of entry, and thus various types of barriers to entry. The title 'Barriers to Women Journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa', speaks to this variation.

This study is important both for what it finds, but also for the opportunities the findings present for positive action. Both Fojo Media Institute (Fojo) and African Women in Media (AWiM) have worked for years towards media development in Africa, and thus this timely study offers some clarity on the ways forward. It is our hope that the recommendations of this study not just remain as recommendations, but guide agendas and policies towards addressing the key findings. Most importantly, we invite more country-level, organisational-level, and subject-focused research that contribute to positive action towards improving the state of gender equality in newsrooms across the continent.

Fojo and AWiM, have a long-term vision for media development where gender equality is concerned. We look forward to contributing our part to putting into action the key recommendations, and to developing further research and informed insights to achieve our joint vision.

We thank the women who bravely shared their stories with us through the questionnaire, focus groups and interviews. We are also indebted to the various women in media networks and associations who shared this questionnaire with their members. Special thanks also to Dr Rachel-Ann Charles, who offered a critical eye on the final drafts of the study.

This study is important both for what it finds, but also for the **opportunities** the findings present for **positive action**.



## INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is a fundamental human right that many women in journalism are unable to fully enjoy, leading to feelings of disempowerment in the workplace. Although today most countries guarantee gender equality through their constitutions, many contexts fail to achieve it in practice due to significant hindrances. Therefore, this study will explore the barriers faced by women in journalism, specifically within the sub-Saharan Africa region, to better understand their lived experiences, and to consider ways forward so that steps can be made towards gender equality in the industry.

In examining studies on this subject matter, most of the existing research on the representation of women in news media in Africa is more extensive than that of barriers to entry for women journalists. For example, in research on the demographics of journalists in Kenya, Ireri (2017) found that the average Kenyan journalist is male (66%), married (57%), and with the average age of 34. In contrast, a report by Daniels and Nyamweda (2018:34), on gender parity in South African newsrooms, found that while not all media organisations have achieved the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development gender parity target of 50% by 2030, there was a 50/50 split across the 51 media organisations in their study (women 49%; men 49%; other 2%). Although some organisations such as South African Broadcasting Corporation and Mail&Guardian showed a decline between 2009 (when gender ratios were 60% women for SABC, and 55% for Mail&Guardian), and 2018 (when gender ratios were 50% women for SABC, and 52% for Mail&Guardian).

Following a review of available reports, there is limited data available on barriers to entry for women journalists in sub-Saharan Africa. However, some studies done in Nigeria, for example, suggest that barriers begin to manifest with a change in marital status, when cultural expectations assigned to the role of 'wife' begin to interfere with the women's work and career (Emenyeonu, 1991). Similar results are found in research on Arab women journalists (Melki & Mallat, 2016), and in Western media (Engstrom and Ferri, 1998). While Emenyeonu's research found that 69.1% of respondents would not be bothered if their journalism career interfered with their marital life, the respondents were all single at the time of the research. The respondents who would be bothered included all the five married women participating in the research.

This study on gender barriers for women journalists in sub-Saharan Africa aims to fill gaps in established studies and contribute to existing work in this field.

This study considers the following three forms of barriers hindering women in journalism:

- 1. Challenges faced in entering the journalism profession,**
- 2. Challenges faced while in the industry. These challenges relate to factors that make it harder for women journalists to do the job; and,**
- 3. Barriers faced in relation to progression. These barriers relate to getting a promotion or an increase in pay and so forth.**

## STUDY OUTLINE

The study starts with a literature review to set the foundation for the areas of focus of the study. This is followed by a methodology chapter. The study used a mixed-method approach of questionnaire, focus group discussions and interviews. The questionnaire was completed by 125 women journalists from 17 African countries. Two focus group discussions were carried out, both taking a solutions and best practices approach. Outcomes of the questionnaire and focus groups were further tested through six interviews. The methodology section contains a detailed process of data collection and analysis phases of this study.

In the first findings and analysis section, it begins with the main areas of motivation for women journalists: these are passion, societal good and women as role models. The second findings on gendered-barriers to entry and progression focus on five key areas: job stagnation and gendered pay gaps; the gendered nature of role assignment; sexual harassment, bullying, sexism and racial discrimination; family life, particularly in relation to maternity and parental care, but also how gendered pay gaps impact this. The final theme focuses on women and leadership.

The concluding section offers five key recommendations for individuals, training institutions, policymakers, and organisational practices pertaining to women in leadership. The first highlights the need for women to take ownership of their own development and empowerment. The second outlines the need for journalism educators to embed gender training in their curriculum. In the third it highlights the need for organisations to go beyond tokenism when it comes to progression and women in leadership. The fourth emphasises the urgent need to create maternity policies that carefully considers parental needs. The final section outlines the need to hold news media organisations accountable for implementing gender policies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Research conducted on 128 women news anchors in the United States (US), found a shift from barriers to entry, to barriers of maintenance (Ferri and Engstrom, 1998). Ferri and Keller (1986) had found, two decades before, that entry into the profession was the main challenge faced by women journalists. By the 1998 study, it was more a case of maintaining and progressing in the profession, with the top challenge identified being physical appearance. This is not dissimilar to Ochieng's (2017) research on women journalists in Kenya, which found that women journalists are more likely to be judged by audiences and male colleagues on the basis of their appearance and personality traits rather than their professional accomplishments.

In order to dismantle those barriers that exist, many studies have been exploring policies that would better protect women journalists. For example, within a Jordanian context, the labour law stipulates "daily breastfeeding breaks, and appropriate daycare in companies that employ more than 20 women who together have ten or more children" (Najjar, 2013:425); however, within the private sector in particular, this practice has been difficult to monitor. Meanwhile, in Daniel and Nyamweda's (2018) report, they found that in South African media organisations, there was a significant increase between 2009 to 2018 in gender policies that addressed representation of women in journalism through, for example, gender-balanced interview panels and fast-tracking policies. There was a slight decline, however, in gender considerations in succession plans (from 45% in 2009 to 43% in 2018).

Leadership is another area that has been the focal point of the discussions around women in journalism. A number of

studies have examined the importance of the role of women in decision-making positions in newsrooms. In the past, the “ideal” job roles for women were those that were regarded as “an extension of the care-giving role” (Peebles, Ghosheh, Sabbagh and Darwazeh 2004:24). These types of societal positioning of women, and deeply ingrained cultural stereotypes of women, are key factors in the barriers to entry, retention and progression of women journalists in sub-Saharan Africa.

What’s more is that past studies like that of Emenyeonu (1991), on women in newsrooms, premised that women entered the profession with a desire to maintain ‘glamorous’ roles of news anchoring. In this study, which surveyed mass communications students in Nigeria on their reasons for pursuing journalism, 29% of the respondents expressed an interest in television, which the author termed “the glamour tube”. Such perspectives do not take into consideration the implications of the representation of women in roles in the newsroom. The notion of ‘safer’ and ‘glamorous’ roles also needs to be questioned as it belittles the skills needed in these roles. As a consequence of these portrayals of women in newsrooms, male colleagues, who are often in decision-making positions, encourage a gendered role assignment in newsrooms (Nyambate, 2012).

There is a tendency to blame women journalists for the challenges they face. In a study that examined reasons female journalists were being marginalised, Melki and Mallat (2016) surveyed 250 journalists and conducted 26 interviews with journalists in Lebanon. They found that respondents, from various levels of hierarchy, blamed women journalists themselves for making the glass ceiling harder to break by taking ‘safer’ roles when they got married or had children. Similarly, Blumell and Mulupi (2020a) examined sexism in the newsroom in Kenya, South Africa and Nigeria and found “sexual abuse, sexual harassment, unfair job allocations, limited access to power, unfair pay, and overall unsafe work environments as significant problems”. They further identified “slut shaming and victim blaming” as having been normalised, thus perpetuating an environment where harassment and abuse can go unchecked. These studies aid in shedding light on the gender inequalities in this sector, which serves as a useful foundation for this study.

The literature also shows that sexual harassment in the newsroom has resulted in women journalists feeling intimidated and discouraged; furthermore, issues of sexual harassment are hidden and are treated as an issue that women journalists should resolve themselves. These aforementioned issues were outlined in an article entitled “*Damaging and daunting: female journalists’ experiences of sexual harassment in the newsroom*” by Louise North (2014). In one of the largest survey exercises conducted in Australia by North (2014), she found increased levels of sexual harassment across newsrooms within this context. When this issue was further investigated, North (2014) found that respondents did not report the issue, largely because of fear of “victimisation or retaliation”. The evidence in this article also proved that the forms of sexual harassment primarily occurred in male-dominated newsrooms. Therefore, these studies are relevant because they provide a sense of similar issues happening in other contexts, the implications of them and also factors promoting this type of environment.

Recent studies conducted in South Africa and Nigeria have led to calls by scholars such as Blumell and Mulupi (2020b) for a change in newsroom practices in eradicating “newsroom sexism”. These studies were done through the administration of in-depth interviews to journalists and the research objective was to assess the “gendered norms in the newsrooms”. These scholars call for ongoing studies to identify why sexism and other inequalities remain within the journalism sector; as well as to hold organisations responsible for disentangling from the gendered norms that marginalise women in public spheres in order to create better working environments. Work by Harris, Mosdell and Griffiths (2016); IWMF (2013); and North (2016) illustrates the need for addressing gender issues around the world.

Therefore, this study plays an important role in re-establishing the priorities for the workplaces of women journalists and for setting the baseline for discussions on barriers to entry for women journalists within a sub-Saharan Africa context. It also identifies the importance of consideration for internal gender policies of media organisations.

## METHODOLOGY

Desk research and review of existing studies on the lived experiences of sub-Saharan African women in journalism, and the status of gender equality in the profession was conducted at the initial stage of this research. The data and analysis gathered informed the design and focus of the questionnaire, and, combined with the outcomes of the questionnaire, was used to frame the focus of subsequent interviews and focus groups. This ensured that the study built on and updated, but did not replicate, existing studies.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

A questionnaire was developed in English, and an initial pilot study with 25 participants was carried out in June 2020, to test the questionnaire before updating and distributing it more widely. Once the pilot was completed and the feedback incorporated, the questionnaire was distributed on 3 July 2020 through various networks, including African Women in Media (AWiM) newsletter, social media, and contacts. A minimum of 100 respondents was required, and a total of 125 women (only), from 17 countries across the African continent, completed the questionnaire within six days. The questionnaire took approximately 15–30 minutes to complete and included both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The latter helped in gathering lived experiences of respondents, which were analysed using a thematic approach in order to synthesise these experiences. Respondents were asked to provide their email addresses if they were willing to be contacted for participation in subsequent interviews or focus groups. A consent question was included at the bottom of the questionnaire.

## INTERVIEWS

For this data-collection process, interviewees were randomly selected from the list of questionnaire respondents who indicated a willingness to partake in interviews. A total of six semi-structured interviews were conducted between 10 and 16 September 2020 with participants from Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. While care was taken to invite participants from a range of countries, several did not show up. The interview questions focused on the types of barriers faced by women journalists, pay gap, forms of discrimination, gendered role assignments especially in technical roles, being the sole female in a newsroom. The objective was to gather the participants' lived experiences, further explore key findings of the questionnaire, and gather their thoughts on solutions and best practices. All interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams, recorded and transcribed.

## FOCUS GROUPS

In utilising this method, two categories of focus groups were conducted: one set had six participants from Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria, South Sudan and South Africa. This focus group explored a range of themes that emerged from the questionnaire analysis, within a solutions and best practices framework. The second focus group had three



participants (eight were invited) from Botswana, Rwanda and Uganda. This focus group explored the themes that emerged relating to gendered role assignment, and also employed a solutions and best practices framework. It is notable that a focus group on sexual harassment was organised, but none of the participants showed up for the scheduled meeting.

This perhaps further speaks to the difficulties in both speaking about sexual harassment and the challenges faced in tackling it. All focus groups were conducted via Microsoft Teams, recorded and transcribed. No prior contact was initiated between participants.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND OUTPUTS

A narrative analysis method was employed to theme the interviews and focus groups, while a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) approach was used to code responses to the open questions in the questionnaire. Utilising the method of 'grounded theory' means that theory is derived from and fits into data. The theming process went through three stages of coding: open, axial and selective. At the open coding stage, a process of reading all collected data and identifying a list of recurring themes/codes was performed. This was followed by axial coding, where each category determined at the open coding stage was analysed individually, and similar concepts were grouped together to make them workable. Selective coding was the final stage, where the core categories were analysed. From this, a reflective narrative was constructed. Where appropriate, graphs and charts were captured from closed-ended and Likert Scale questions (see figures 1-8 below), alongside the analysis of the narratives shared.

This report has been organised according to the themes that emerged from the coding. The main emerging themes surrounding barriers for women in journalism found in this study were:

- 1). **Job stagnation and salary discrepancies for women in the media**
- 2). **Disparities between men and women in the distribution of job roles**
- 3). **Sexual Harassment, Bullying, Sexism, and Racial Discrimination**
- 4). **Family Life**
- 5). **Women in media and leadership**

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Given the sensitive nature of the study, topics and experiences shared, all participants have been anonymised. While the interviews and focus groups were recorded via Microsoft Teams, this was solely for the purpose of transcription and analysis by the researcher. In order to meet ethical guidelines and global data management laws, namely GDPR, the recordings' viewing permissions were limited-access and private. Similarly, transcripts were anonymised. Quotes used in this study include the location and career level of the respondent. Where the content of the quote holds greater risk of identification, the location has been omitted.

## LIMITATIONS

This study had representation of 17 African countries, with 125 questionnaire responses, six interviews and two focus groups. It must, however, be noted that the majority of the questionnaire respondents were from the East African region. There are 46 sub-Saharan African countries, and country-focused research across the whole continent will give more localised and detailed observations.

Additionally, there are a number of differences within journalistic practices across the African continent that fall outside of the purview of this study. What this study has extracted from the data are the many shared experiences, and commonalities for women in journalism. This study therefore should serve as a starting point in identifying specific issues for future studies, while aiming also to set regional priorities towards improving representation of women in the journalism profession.

It is important to note that this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, travel was not possible due to lockdowns, therefore all aspects of the primary research was carried out virtually. Access, therefore, proved to be challenging in a number of ways; for example, rural and community-based journalists could not be reached due to poor internet connection. As such, their perspectives could not be included in this study. In future studies, alternative methods for data collection could be used to reach those with limited internet access.

In this study, we are also mindful that the journalists' views captured in the study might be reflective of those with easier access to the internet, so this has also been factored as a limitation.

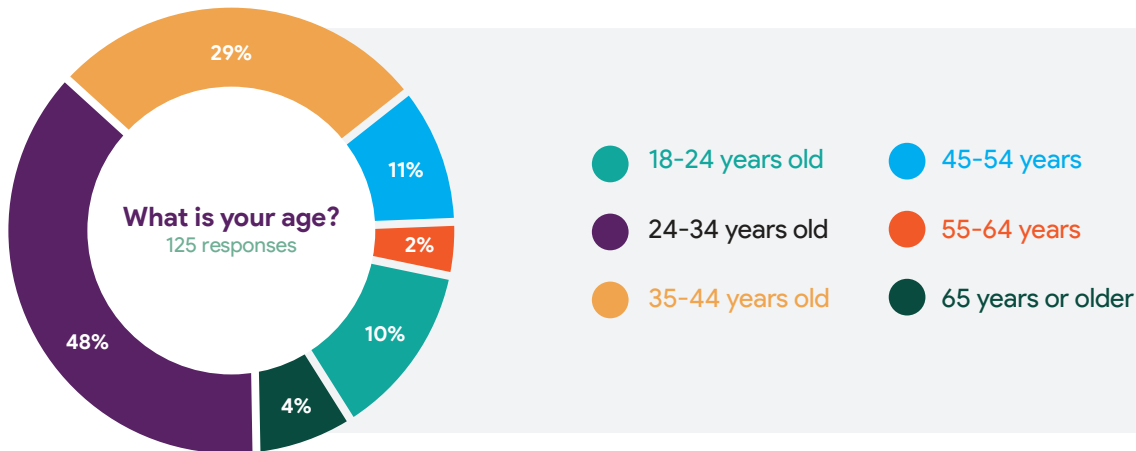
Conducting the survey and interviews only in English also implied a linguistic limitation in terms of which participants the study could be reached, on a continent where over two thousand languages are spoken. This was also reflected in the geographical spread of respondents, with significantly fewer responses from the mainly French-speaking parts of Africa.

## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

This section provides the demographics of the participants who engaged in this study. In terms of **location**, the majority of women journalists who participated were from the East African region. Meanwhile, the second-largest amount of responses came from the West Africa region. Far fewer of the survey participants were from Southern African countries. A similar number of respondents were from Central Africa. This data is illustrated in figure 7 (page 18).

In terms of the **age**, 48% were from the 25–34 age category, 28% were from the 35–44 age category, and 11% from the 45–54 age category; leaving the rest of the respondents in the 18–24 and 55–64 age brackets. *This is illustrated in figure 1.*

Figure 1: What is your age?



As for **marital status**, almost half of the respondents were single women journalists from all regions represented in this study, with the exception of the Central African region where they were mainly married. Questionnaire participants who were married were from all regions represented in this study. A small number of the respondents were divorced, widowed or separated. More than half of the questionnaire participants had **children** whilst over a third of them did not have children.

Figure 2: Marital Status

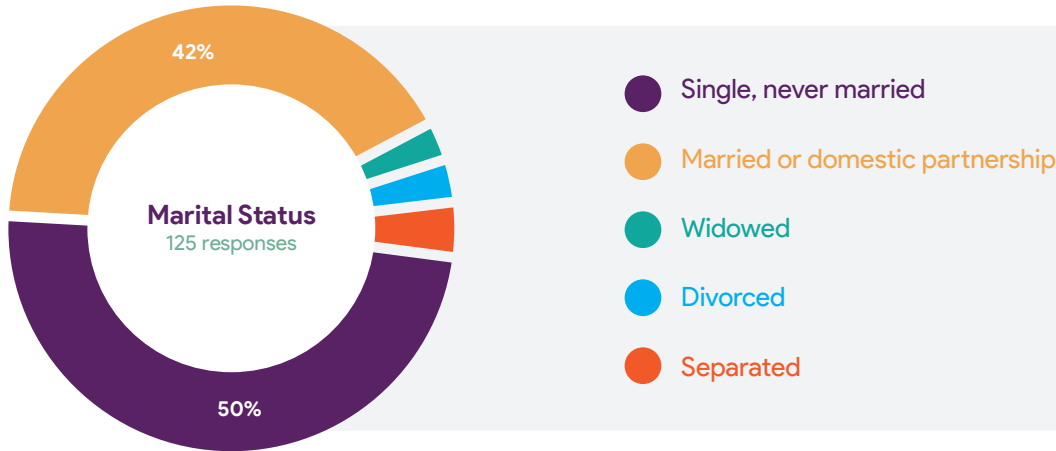
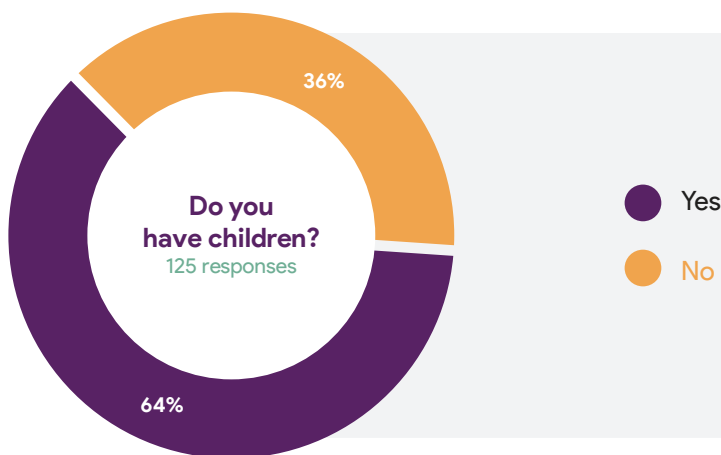
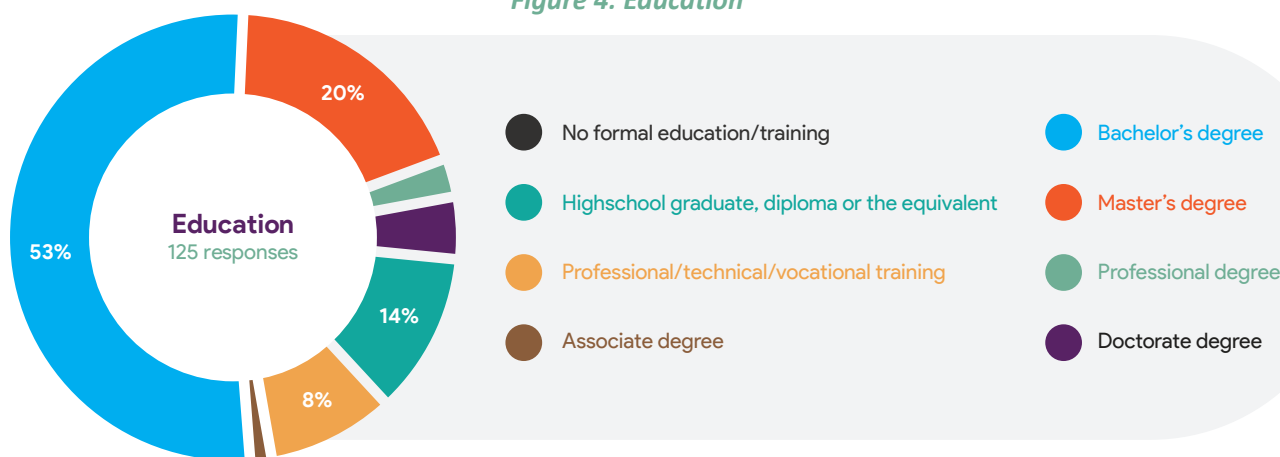


Figure 3: Do you have children?



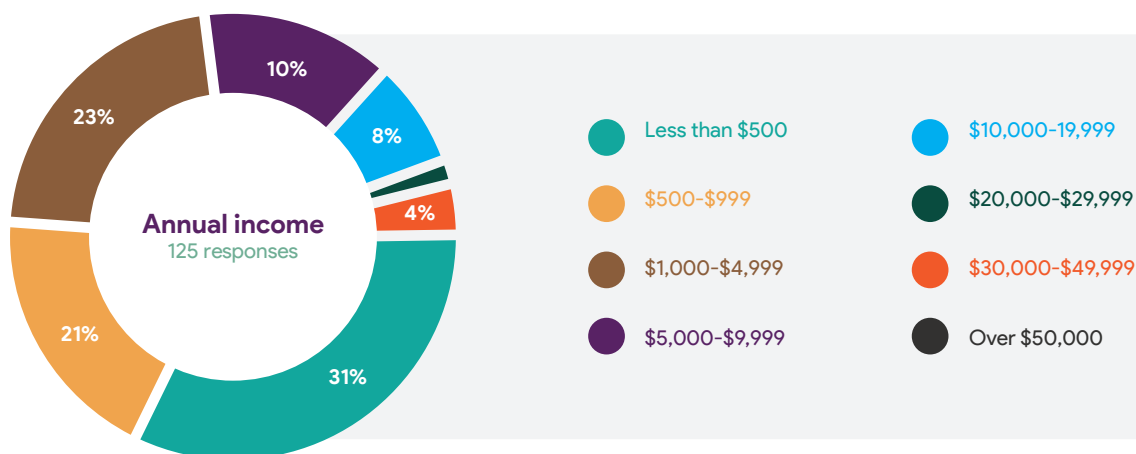
Levels of **education** were widely spread, as over half of the respondents held a bachelor's degree largely across geographic regions, but respondents also held associate degrees, high school diplomas, professional degrees, professional technical/vocational certificates, master's degrees and doctorate degrees. Therefore, this range of qualification amongst the respondents will allow for a range of perspectives. A majority of the respondents were either in mid-career level or middle management; while a majority of respondents were in full-time employment.

*Figure 4: Education*



One area that consistently emerged as a point of contention amongst the participants was salary disparities. Therefore, this part of the demographic data illustrates some of the commonalities and differences regarding the annual income of the participants across the geographic location. The **annual income** for the women journalists who participated in this study shows a number of similarities and differences across sub-Saharan Africa in pay allocated to women in journalism. A majority of respondents said they earn less than \$500 per annum from journalism. Of these women, 15% were from West Africa, the majority of which were in Nigeria. All respondents that made up the 15% in Southern Africa earning less than \$500 per annum from journalism were from Zimbabwe. East African respondents, however, made the majority in this category with 69%, represented by Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, South Sudan and Zambia. Overall, 25% of those earning this amount said they were in full-time employment and from Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Tanzania, and 25% were freelance.

*Figure 5: Annual Income*

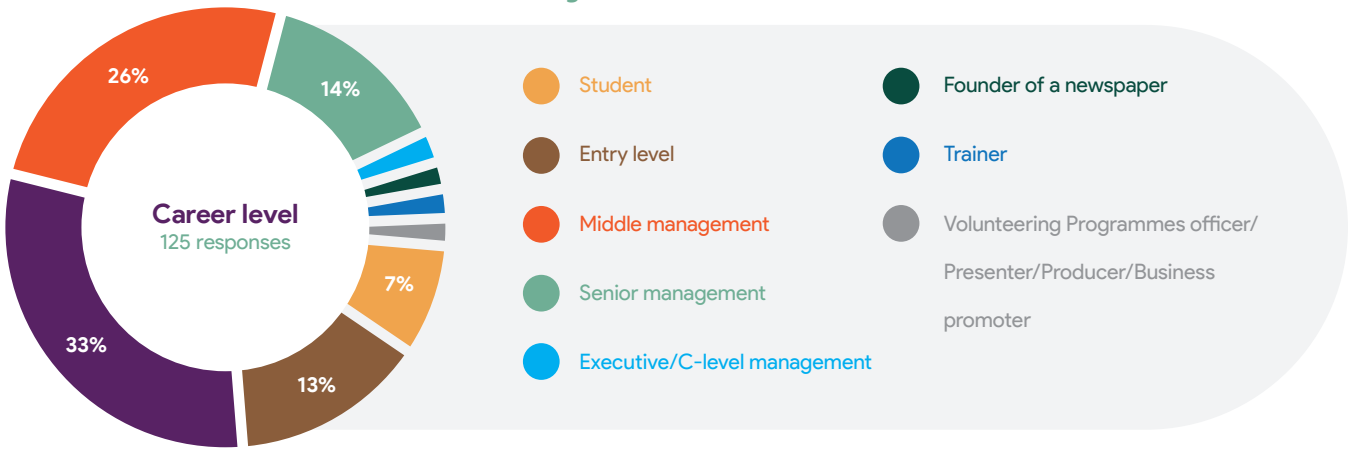




In a similar way, the data showed that women journalists across career levels from Central and East Africa (Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe) were earning less than \$500 and in part-time employment. There were participants from East and West African countries (Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe) who were freelancers or self-employed across career levels and also earning less than \$500. There were fewer respondents who were seeking opportunities, and retrenched. Equally, respondents from Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda, who are earning \$500 to \$999 per annum, were across career levels and primarily in full-time, part-time and freelance job roles.

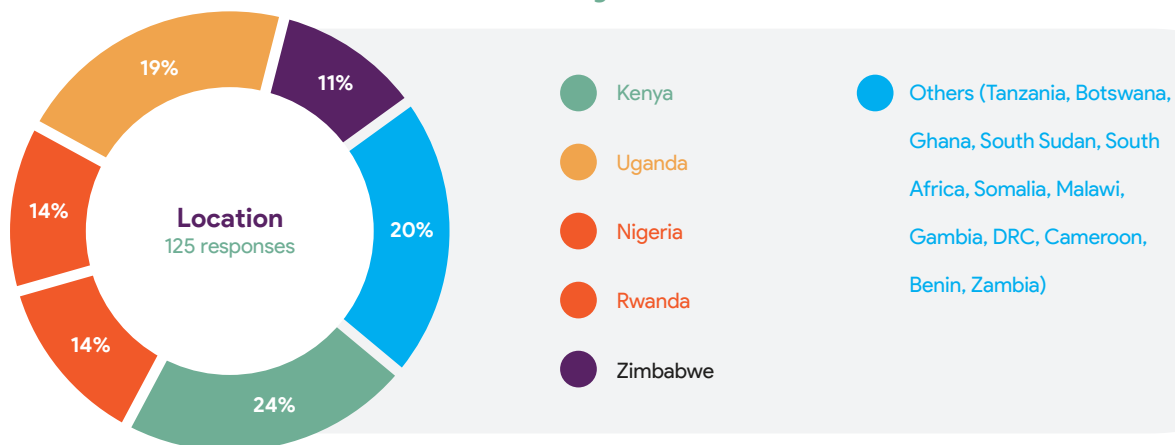
Comparably, 23% of respondents said they earn \$1000 to \$4,999 per annum. Most of the respondents were employed in part-time/full-time roles or were freelancers/self-employed and across career levels. In terms of location, participants in this category were primarily from South, East and West Africa (Zimbabwe, Uganda, Tanzania, South Africa, Rwanda, Nigeria, Malawi, Kenya and Ghana).

Figure 6: Career Level



Those earning \$10,000 to \$19,999 per annum were across all middle level/middle management/senior management career levels and primarily in full-time/freelance job roles from Southern, East, and West Africa (Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda). Comparably, there was one respondent from Nigeria earning \$20,000 to \$29,999 and working in middle management whilst studying.

Intriguingly, there were some respondents primarily in full-time employment, middle level, middle management, senior management and executive management roles earning \$30,000 to \$39,000. There were just a couple of persons in this category who were working in a freelance or self-employed capacity. All of the persons in this category were from East and West Africa (Rwanda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Kenya).

**Figure 7: Location****Figure 8: Employment Status**



## SECTION 1:

# MOTIVATIONS & ASPIRATIONS

“

The words ‘passion’ and ‘love’, were used to convey the emotive connection respondents attach to their role as journalists.



## LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA: MOTIVATIONS & ASPIRATIONS

This study asked women journalists in sub-Saharan Africa, to share their lived experiences. When exploring the main incentives surrounding the question “*Why did you become a journalist?*”, a number of intersecting themes emerged from the responses. Together with their motivations, respondents highlighted their aspirations, which showed a number of positive trends. According to the dataset, 80% of the questionnaire respondents’ motivations and aspirations can be categorised into four main themes, namely *passion*, *societal good*, *women as role models* and *entering the industry*. It was important to ask the question on motivations and aspirations due to previous research that otherwise attributed motivation to ‘glamour’ and other such ethos that one might conclude as belittling.



The most commonly cited terms used to describe motivations and aspirations in the responses relate to *a calling*, *love for the craft*, *advocacy*, and *early influence*. The love for storytelling was a prominent response, and for the most part, this type of enthusiasm was used to describe a commitment to positively impacting the lives of others. The words *passion* and *love* were used to convey the emotive connection respondents attach to their role as journalists. For example, one journalist said in her response:

*“I love writing and it’s the most natural thing to me...”*

**ZIMBABWE, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

And another:

*...I love telling the stories of people from different backgrounds. I feel content every time I tell a story because I know I have impacted on someone else’s life positively. It is our way as journalists to inform and educate our societies on different matters across the globe. Plus, it’s a passion.*

**UGANDA, ENTRY LEVEL**

Respondents also spoke of an appreciation for the reach of specific mediums like radio and television and they expressed how fascinated they were by news presenters they had seen or heard; for example, one respondent said,

*“I loved watching news anchors on screen.”*

**UGANDA, MID-CAREER.**



Beyond that visual appeal, there was also an appreciation for the position of journalists as mediators of information. Access to television and radio platforms played an instrumental role in many respondents' recognition of their own storytelling skills from a young age. In the responses, journalists also reflected on the fact that access to media allowed them to recognise their own skills and abilities to tell stories, resulting in their own pursuit of journalism professionally.

*I love visual storytelling almost as much as I enjoy writing. I find that visuals are particularly effective at conveying sentiments that words cannot adequately describe. I also enjoy investigating and figuring out how things work in relation to one another and making those links known.*

#### **SOUTH AFRICA, MID-CAREER**

The responses also illustrated multi-layered types of passion. As identified above, for some of the respondents, passion emerged from their own desires, which were quite internal relating to their love for the craft of writing.

*I wanted to use my voice on radio and television. I discovered I had a good voice while growing up and was intrigued by presenters on television. I was also good in English right from my primary school days. So, I went ahead to study English at the University.*

#### **NIGERIA, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

Passion was also demonstrated in relation to the way the respondents championed the rights of others. From the data collected, advocacy-focused responses tended to express a strong desire to speak on behalf of marginalised voices.

*I loved the career and still do because I wanted to inform and highlight some issues affecting people in remote communities, and especially with a language they would understand better.*

#### **KENYA, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

Several journalists describe how dedicated they are to ensuring that communities are accurately represented in the local news. A few respondents were even more specific in describing their desire to use local languages in their news stories. This finding on passion connects closely with the second emerging theme below.

## **THEME 2:**

# **SOCIETAL GOOD**

As highlighted in the previous section, advocacy was a predominant motivating factor in the responses, and this inclination was fueled by the respondents' aspiration to do societal good. Overall, the data collected in this study shows that the respondents aim to write socially impactful stories to effect change.

The responses from the journalists can be categorised into three dimensions of advocacy interests:

1. Being a voice for the voiceless
2. Initiating change
3. Fostering fairness.

*"I trained as a journalist so I can be part of the media machine, change the world with powerful stories, influence legislation and other decisions which I could not by myself... I am in the process of developing my own news website and strengthening my multimedia company."*

### **ZIMBABWE, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

Journalists who participated in this study felt a sense of selfless responsibility coupled with humility when they considered their media platforms as an *opportunity* to influence. The responses alluded to speaking on behalf of communities and marginalised groups (such as women, children, and rural communities), whose voices need to be heard. As an extension of that, respondents felt that their roles were to inform, educate, and ensure accuracy, while recognising their potential to initiate change. For example, one of the participants stated

*"I wanted to be impactful in society by telling untold stories that will lead to policy changes, and improving people's lives."*

### **KENYA, ENTRY LEVEL.**

The responses from journalists also recognised the power of information to improve citizens' lives and hold those in power to account. There was also a recognition for the reach of the media as a tool for engagement and shaping perspectives, and most importantly for fostering fairness at the community level.

*Because I saw that good radio content that has good educational and informative programmes can change society, and as you know, a lot is needed to get our people out of... so many undesirable conditions like poverty, domestic violence, sexual abuse of the girl child and so many issues.*

### **UGANDA, STUDENT**

Respondents also expressed a desire to cover stories around issues of health, politics, human rights and judicial reporting. The desire to highlight social justice issues and women's issues was prominent in responses relating to advocacy. Respondents expressed the desire to promote better-quality reporting on women's issues because they were often trivialised. These responses reinforce the ongoing need for fair treatment and the role of journalism in this persistent fight for justice.

*I aspired for advocacy through journalism, because I experienced the genocide in Rwanda aged 7... I was still in primary school. I witnessed the sexual violence and murder of my family members. My motivation unfortunately stems from this traumatic experience in our history.*

### **RWANDA, STUDENT**

In conclusion, a significant number of respondents were motivated by an appreciation for the role of journalism as an actor for societal good, through its ability to influence legislation and politics, tell untold stories, be educational and informative and to propel change.

## THEME 3:

# WOMEN AS ROLE MODELS

Several respondents indicated that motherly figures served as role models. Though there was other familial influence, as respondents narrated personal stories of early encouragement by a family member to include fathers, grandfathers and uncles. However, the responses showed that the encouragement came mostly from their mothers.

*What motivates me to this role was that my parents, especially mom, appreciated the female journalists because they were doing a good job in reporting community problems like gender issues. So, I wanted to be that girl my mom and community in general admired, due to their good work. I aspired to practise journalism for the sake of the community, and to be someone's role model.*

## TANZANIA, MID-CAREER

A majority of the respondents spoke of being inspired by a female journalist. Some gave specific names like Catherine Kasavuli, Oprah Winfrey, and Rosemary Nankabirwa, and several spoke of their admiration for the skills and knowledge displayed by the presenters. Only one respondent spoke about how the presenter looked, and even then, this was in addition to a demonstration of skill.

*From childhood... I felt they [news anchors] looked so smart, beautiful, bright, and knowledgeable. They were good communicators and I considered them to be so perfect in everything.*

## UGANDA, MID-CAREER

However, for others there was a lack of visible women journalists while growing up, which led to them being their own role models. Although a small percentage of the respondents learnt on the job, for the most part, these sources of inspiration encouraged them into an educational path that led to journalism and media studies.

*"Since my childhood, I have admired female presenters... so that is why at the University I chose to study mass communication and journalism"*

## UGANDA, ENTRY LEVEL.

The findings in the study showed that because the respondents followed the advice of their early role models or mentors, in pursuing journalism and mass communication programmes, they were able to develop a number of useful skills for the journalism world of work. For example, 53% of the respondents spoke mostly to the skills developed that helped them navigate their career path, such as the ability to negotiate salaries, career planning, and general preparedness for their role as journalists. Some respondents were quite specific on the kind of skills they were happy to have developed during journalism training, with a majority in line with journalism ethics.

*I appreciated learning about fact checking. I strive to always tell my audience the truth, and to analyse the information given by the source. Also, us journalists sometimes need to regulate ourselves, because the law can be a barrier at times.*

**RWANDA, FOUNDER**

Respondents talked about their sheer admiration for influential persons in their lives,

*“My educator... she always encouraged us to love journalism...”*

**RWANDA, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

Many of the respondents talked about the positive encouragement they received from their female educators, while others admired the successes of instructors who themselves were successful journalists.

*My educator is a passionate senior journalist, an activist who went to jail for three years. She always encouraged us to love journalism as it's one of the ways to fight for our rights as women in the media industry.*

**RWANDA, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

Now that we have explored the main areas of motivations and aspirations in this study, we will look at the ways in which journalists entered the field.

## THEME 4:

# ENTERING THE INDUSTRY

There was an almost equal footing between those who were able to enter the industry in roles that suited their career aspirations, and those who were not. A majority of those who did not enter with roles matching their aspirations were in the 25-34 years old age bracket, most of whom described their career level as middle level/management, one as executive/C-level management, while only a few were at entry level. Of those that responded 'No', when asked if they entered the industry in the role to which they aspired, less than half of them had yet to attain their original goal.

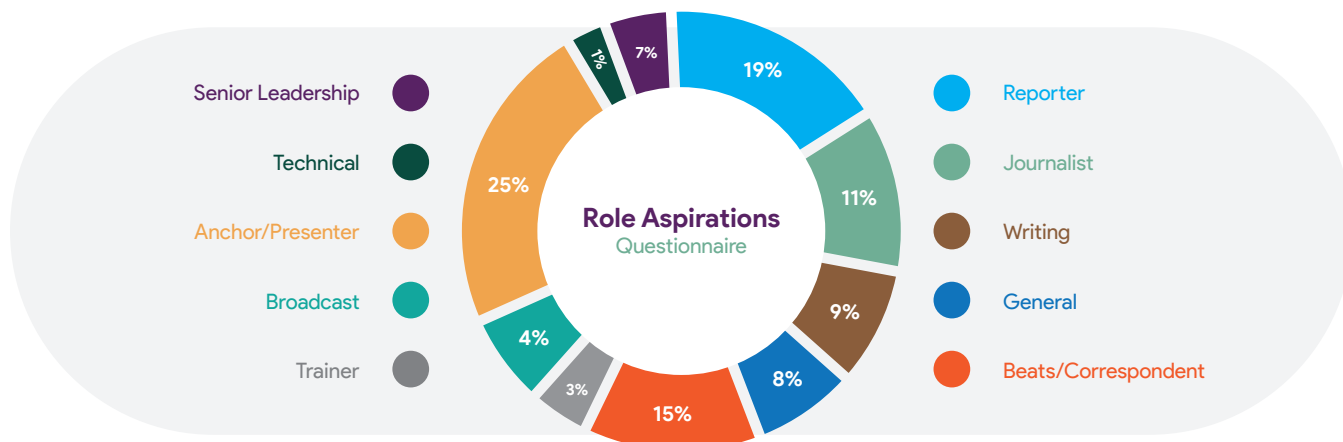
They have instead changed their goals within journalism, are still climbing the ladder or are not employed as staff members within news media organisations. For half of the respondents who did not enter the industry with a role to which they aspired, it took them approximately 0-3 years to attain that role, and for the other half who did not enter at their desired role, it took them 4-5 years to attain their desired position. They have instead changed their goals within journalism, are still climbing the ladder or remain unemployed. For half of the respondents who did not enter the industry into the role to which they aspired, it took them approximately 0-3 years to attain that role, and for the other half who did not enter at their desired role, it took them 4-5 years to attain their position.

Only 6% of respondents indicated an aspiration to a senior leadership role in journalism on entry, while 24% aspired to a presenter/anchor role. A majority of respondents aspired to roles relating to reporting, journalist, writing and specific beats. These made up 53% of roles aspired to, a smaller proportion aspired to technical and trainer roles (3%).

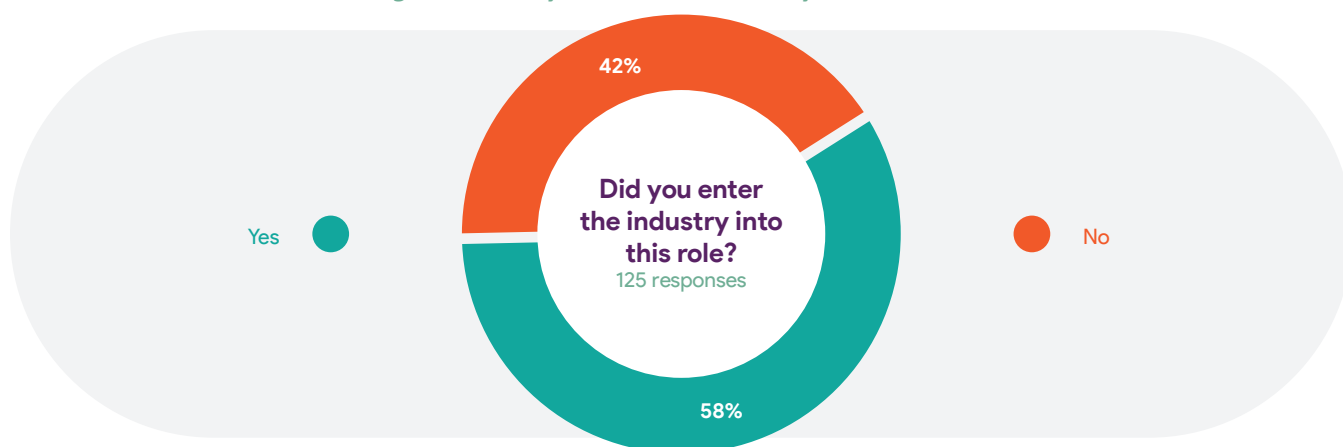
In narrating their experiences of applying for the role they aspired to, less than a quarter of the respondents described their experience as good or fair. However, a quarter of the respondents faced barriers when trying to enter the industry, and a similar amount of the respondents experienced barriers at the start of their career. Further, once respondents entered the industry, they faced a number of issues such as poor pay, challenging environments, sexual harassment and gender discrimination, which will be explored in the next chapter of this report.



**Figure 9: What role in journalism did you aspire to before you started your career?**



**Figure 10: Did you enter the industry into this role?**



## SECTION 2:

# GENDERED BARRIERS OF ENTRY & PROGRESSION

GENDERED-BARRIERS OF ENTRY & PROGRESSION

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*Experiences of gendered-barriers of progression include pay disparity, gendered role assignment, sexual harassment, family life and women in media and leadership.*

*The first barrier was low pay, work demanding many hours and hard work on a tight calendar. It becomes hard to persist with such a low income. Not having a female role model that can mentor me and understand my experiences as a fellow female journalist was also a hindrance. Being assigned work based on our gender discouraged me and my fellow female colleagues. It meant we were not always able to showcase our skills.*

#### **RWANDA, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

## **GENDERED-BARRIERS OF ENTRY AND PROGRESSION**

At the core of the issues surrounding barriers to entry and progression for women journalists in sub-Saharan Africa, gender remains central to all of the findings, which will be explored in two parts within this study. As part of the survey, we asked respondents for their position on the following statement: *'I believe I have experienced barriers of entry into the journalism industry because I am female.'* More than half of the respondents, 58%, believed they experienced barriers of entry because of their gender. Whilst 24% disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement, primarily because they considered other (non-gender) attributing factors (See figures 1-5 below).

Based on the responses received in this study there are five emerging themes.

- 1). **Job stagnation and salary discrepancies for women in the media**
- 2). **Disparities between men and women in the distribution of job roles**
- 3). **Sexual Harassment, Bullying, Sexism, and Racial Discrimination**
- 4). **Family Life**
- 5). **Women in media and leadership**

### **THEME 1:**

# **JOB STAGNATION AND SALARY DISCREPANCIES FOR WOMEN IN THE MEDIA**

This part of the report explores barriers to progression and issues pertaining to **pay disparities** as discussed by the participants in this study. A number of the participants in this study made connections between their inability to progress because of factors such as **gender-allocation of opportunities for training, gender-role assignment, which has resulted in knock-on effects such as gender pay gap**. The data collected shows that almost half of respondents said they experienced **barriers of entry at the point of progression**, while less than half of the respondents selected **'limited opportunities for progression for women'**. Therefore, the following paragraphs outline these issues in more detail.

A breakdown of the annual income was provided in the demographics of the participants. Overall, participants are experiencing poor pay. Most of the participants associated poor remuneration to a gender-pay gap.

*I left journalism because I could not afford the clothes to wear on the news any more, the make-up, the basics, as the salary was much too little .... The harassment from the fans if your hair was not nice was too much. You would be paraded on social media and people would say nasty things.*

### **ZIMBABWE, MID-CAREER**

A majority of respondents, 65%, selected poor pay as having had the most negative impact on their career progress, and as shown in figure 15 in the appendix, 43% of respondents felt their experiences of poor pay were gendered. Further, gender biased pay saw men being paid higher, or experiences of salaries of men being paid while female journalists were paid late.

Gender-pay gaps were explored further during interviews, and here the study found that pay gaps exhibited in many ways. Issues around transparency and the lack of it, in terms of pay rises but also in terms of promotion, further contribute to gender-pay gaps. For interview participants, limited opportunities to do work that would lead to promotion, limited and gendered approach to job training and development, also mean that male colleagues get better opportunities for promotion, and therefore had an increment in pay as a result. For one interviewee, the lack of transparency in promotion and pay increment meant that she was promoted without consultation on what her remuneration would be following the promotion. Despite the increased responsibility that came with her promotion, she earned five times less than male colleagues at her level. The lack of transparency in pay increments and promotion can prove devastating, and for one respondent this contributed to her considering leaving the journalism industry.

These lived experiences of respondents demonstrated that poor pay can have demotivated them from progressing, and from experiencing new learning opportunities abroad and left the journalist feeling quite despondent. This reality proves that gendered consequences lead to barriers of entry, progression and retention. Consider the following statement from one of the respondents:

*Poor pay had a significant impact on my career progression because it robbed me of an opportunity to attend a media conference outside the continent. I was denied a visa because my pay package was low.*

### **NIGERIA, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

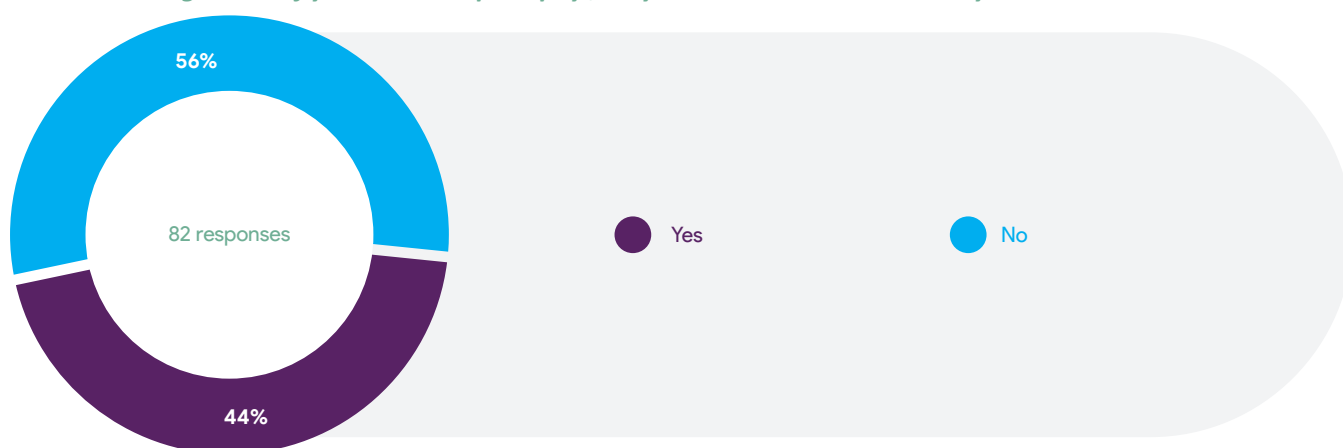
Poor pay was also generally attributed to **unpaid internships**, as is common in the industry, but also exploitation, on some occasions attributed to gender. Take for example the story of a respondent in Uganda, who worked long hours for low pay, and attributed this to a boss who considered the complaints of male workers more seriously than female workers:



*“My day would start at 6am in the morning with the breakfast show, and end at 12 midnight as I was added another responsibility of being programme manager. The meagre pay came after working for a year without pay. My male colleagues however would complain and get heard. The boss would always give them something small to silence them because they would strike once in a while. I did not have any solidarity from my female colleagues who feared losing their jobs.”*

#### UGANDA, SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Figure 11: If you selected ‘poor pay’, do you think this was because you are a woman?



In sharing experiences about the impact of low pay, some respondents said it had led them to take the **freelance route**, one highlighting that this was also her approach to juggling work and family. Others mentioned doing other jobs on the side to make up their financial needs.

*“I kept on working and gained more and more experience until I started freelancing.... But I can divide my time for my children and my work more than in the past when I was given a lot of assignments; I did not get time for my kids, yet I was not earning.”*

#### UGANDA, MID-CAREER

When freelance respondents were asked why they chose freelancing, 45% said it was due to challenges getting full- or part-time employment, while 21% said it was their personal choice.

Interview participants also highlighted the **knock-on effects of gender-allocation of opportunities for training, gender-role assignment, and the lack of transparency in promotional strategies resulting in gender-pay**. Overall, this means that male colleagues have better opportunities for promotion and thus an increase in income. According to a respondent from Rwanda, who is in middle management, she believes that because she is not afforded opportunities for training in journalism this has also impacted her ability to progress and earn a higher income. Although the aforementioned scenario shows women experiencing a lack of training opportunities, which results in a lack of promotion, there seems to be a state of double standards, as several others also highlighted that their qualifications were used against them. Consider the following example *illustrated by a Kenyan respondent (entry level)*: “Some employers are really adamant in employing people with bachelor’s degrees because they always term us [with higher degrees] ‘overqualified’.” The respondent went on to describe being told that employers cannot afford to pay them in line with their qualifications.

More than half of the questionnaire respondents who are married/in a domestic partnership said their status had some kind of impact on their career progression. Less than half of the respondents who are married/in a domestic partnership indicated experiencing barriers at the start of careers because of their marital status. Of this 63%, the



marital status of 28% had an impact at the start of their career, while 17% was equally shared across impacts before entry and at point of promotion. A significant 36% attributed their barriers of progression to the **lack of a gender policy focusing on progression** at their organisation. The study has also found that where gender policies exist, they have not necessarily led to transformative change within the respective context.

From the responses collected in the study, job stagnation and salary discrepancies for women have had an overall negative impact on women journalists, leading a number of the respondents to formally give up their position. According to a senior manager based in Nigeria, *“Male dominance, sexual exploitation, lack of incentive, promotion and poor payment are responsible for my resignation from print media.”* Unfortunately, these challenges lead women journalists to resign.

Although there is the appearance that opportunities for progression are being fairly offered to women, experiences shared by respondents also suggest they [women] were accused of being responsible for their own barriers of entry, as **some women journalists were blamed for turning certain roles down**. However, some of the feedback of this study showed that women did not progress because men viewed them as those who only occupy ‘soft’ roles. Therefore, in the next section these types of gender disparities in the distribution of job roles will be discussed.

## THEME 2:

# DISPARITIES BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF JOB ROLES

Gendered allocation of resources and assignments was the area that respondents shared experiences about the most and, overall, they seem to be largely affected by these disparities. Gendered allocation of opportunities and resources ranged from the kinds of stories women journalists were permitted to cover, to the kind of roles they could occupy in their organisations. Consider the following responses:

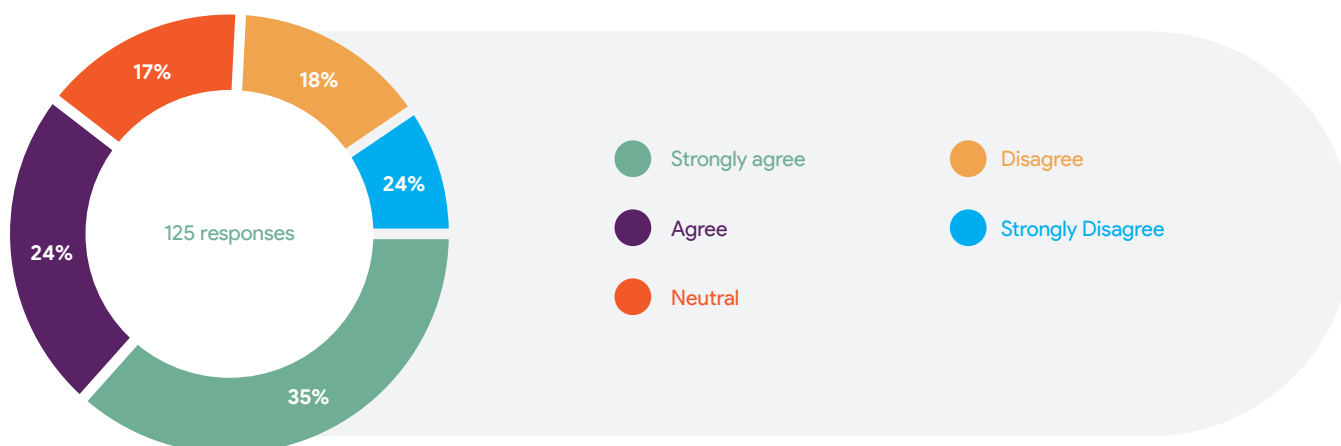
*“I have beats that have kept me limited, I have had to fight my supervisors anytime that I want to venture into investigative reporting, and my boss always makes demeaning remarks about all of my stories. It is difficult convincing them to allow me to travel out of state for the kind of humanitarian stories that I like; their excuse is always the fact that I am a woman.”*

**NIGERIA, MID-CAREER**

*“There is a challenge of being given the lighter tasks whereas tasks deemed serious are reserved for the men, even if as a female I could do a better job at it. Because there is not so much room to prove ability, progress is slow.”*

#### UGANDA, ENTRY LEVEL

**Figure 12: I believe I have experienced barriers of entry into the journalism industry because I am female**



A couple of respondents began by saying they had not experienced gender discrimination, yet proceeded to describe what clearly amounts to gendered role assignment. The following is an example of this:

*“To a large extent, I have not been treated differently because I am a woman at my place of work. However, on a few occasions where I felt it happened might be a figment of my imagination. Male colleagues might be assigned a job that is supposedly hard with the intent that I might not be able to deliver because I’m a woman.”*

#### NIGERIA, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT

Further, the kinds of roles respondents said they were discouraged from pursuing included technical roles, like camera operating, stories that required entering environments of conflict or protest, aspiring to editorial leadership roles, and some women were told by their managers that because they were married they could not take up technical roles.

Respondents who shared experiences and reflections on gendered assignment allocation generally spoke of gendered roles within the newsroom. References to women as the weaker gender was a major issue highlighted both in terms of actual physical strength of the women, but also in terms of the kind of stories and roles considered softer and more appropriate for women.

*“I believe I have experienced barriers to the industry of journalism because of the discrimination in our companies and fields where an editor regards me to be weaker than my male colleagues and assigns me to weak and occasional stories.”*

#### UGANDA, ENTRY LEVEL

I believe I have been treated differently in my journalism career as a woman, because;

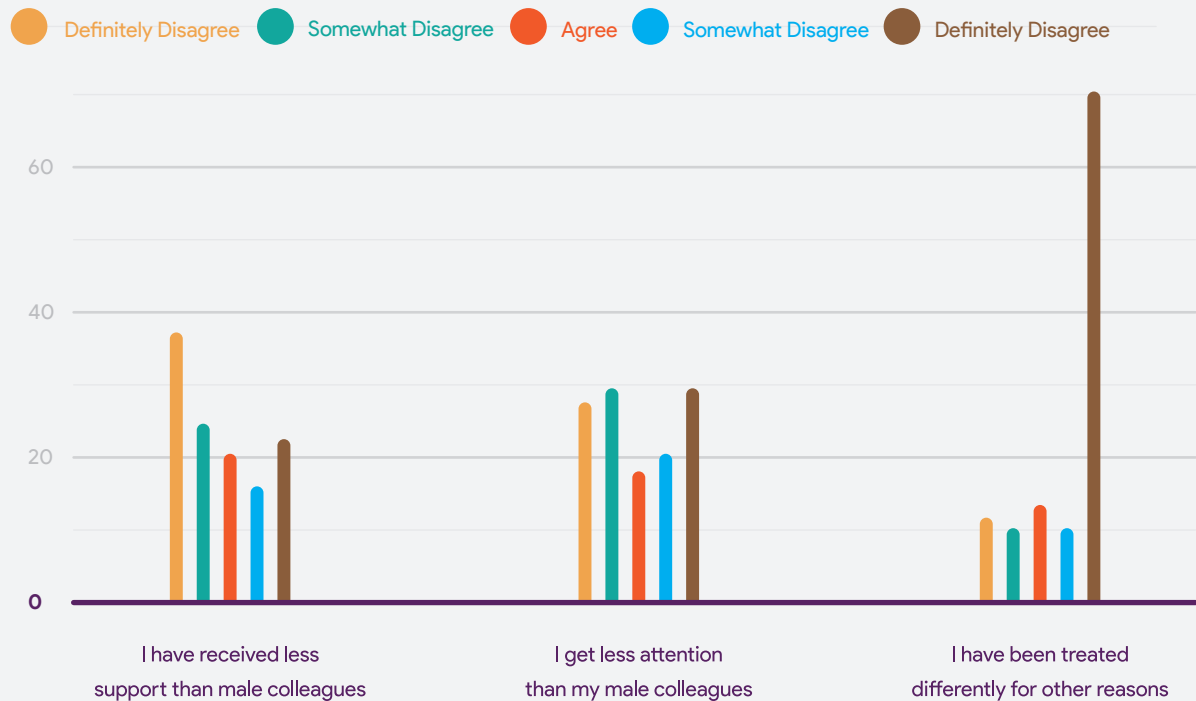


Figure 13: I believe I have been treated differently in my journalism career as a woman, because

Only 10% of the respondents shared positive experiences of not being treated differently due to their gender. Of these 10%, two acknowledged the male dominance of the roles they have occupied.

*"I believe that I have been given a chance to map the route I want to take in the industry. I am a sports journalist at the moment and growing into a role I believe is a male-dominated field yet I have not been challenged directly or deterred. I am confident I will grow to inspire other women that seek to grow in the same space."*

### MID-CAREER

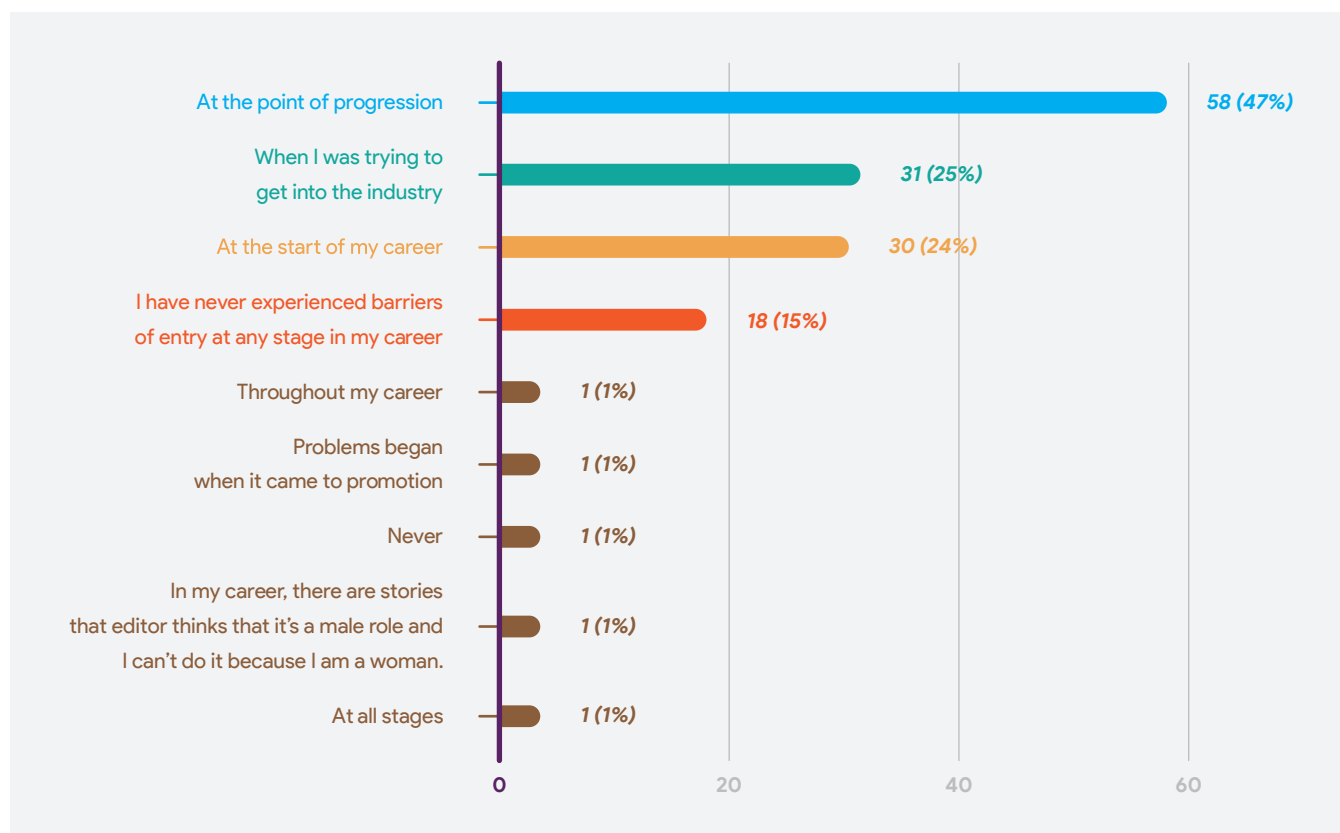
In some cases, respondents talk about the consequences of having a male-dominated newsroom, and its impact not only on entry but also on assignments given.

Several respondents described being passed over, or not being given opportunities to report stories that would have led to promotion; health and safety being used as a reason by editors for example for not being assigned to cover conflict. The 'soft news' versus 'hard news' spectrum emerged as a typology for determining what women journalists can do, and what should be reserved for men.

*"I was not given some assignments because it was 'tough' for women, like political, conflict-based stories interviewing high-profile personalities. I was told to stick with 'soft' issues."*

### UGANDA, SENIOR MANAGEMENT

**Figure 14: At what stage in your journalism career have you experienced barriers of entry?**



Although participants expressed that some organisations had adopted improved hiring processes that prevent gender bias at the hiring stages, gender bias still appears in other areas such as role allocation. Consider this response for example:

*"The organisation for which I work for is gender-sensitive, largely recruitment is not gender-biased but men could be given upper hand though in handling certain positions or covering particular events but it is not glaring."*

#### **CAMEROON, SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

While this respondent describes her organisation as being gender-sensitive, the experience she shares of gendered role allocation suggests otherwise.

Participants also pointed out the role of media managers in perpetuating and shaping the focus of women journalists early in their career towards the coverage of so-called 'soft news' of health, fashion, entertainment, irrespective of the skills the women journalists brought to the table. The idea that there are "female" topics that only women should report on, and that these in some way require lesser skills of newsgathering and investigation not only creates the sense of being undervalued, but it undervalues the topics in question.

It is particularly harmful to limit opportunities for continuous development through training and events to male colleagues. It means therefore that when it comes to the point of progression or producing the kind of stories that result in recognition, the gendered nature of training allocation means the women are already disadvantaged.

*The approaches used by the respondents to navigate these barriers ranged from persistence, to silent support for male colleagues with expertise, to quitting. For example, one participant talks about receiving "less support because there are topics that were thought to be female-oriented... Sometimes they recommended males in training" because they were perceived as more capable for the job role.*

#### **RWANDA, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

One participant described her experience as the only female reporter in a community newsroom as having to constantly prove herself capable of being a field reporter. This motivated her to continue to improve her skills.

*The guys were not used to working with females, and they held stereotypical views about the role of women. Some look at you as a sex object. Others don't want to cooperate with you, because they feel a female cannot really perform like a man. So, until you prove yourself, you keep proving, improving, improving, improving for everyone, so that you can say 'guys look, we can do this too'.*

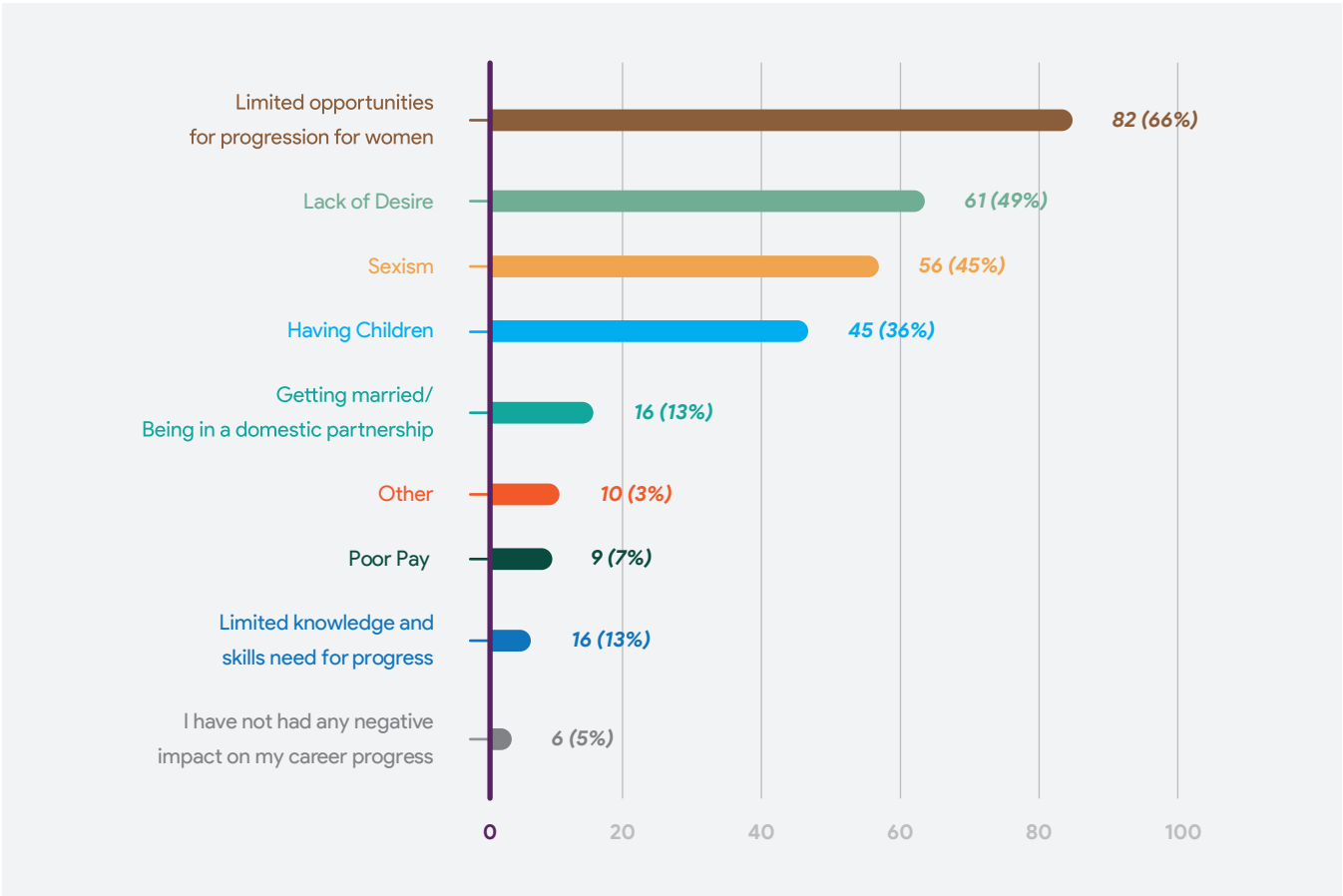
#### UGANDA, MID-CAREER

Gender-biased environments are described as toxic, discouraging, frustrating, diversionary, 'pull her down syndrome' by respondents. While for some, the feeling of discouragement further leads to more women journalists exiting the industry. For others they manage to overcome this limitation by taking the responsibility themselves to address the challenges:

*"They are really a problem, but I managed by proving them wrong because I did better than the male counterparts."*

#### KENYA, ENTRY LEVEL

Figure 15: Which of these has had the most negative impact on your career progress?



One of the respondents spoke about the level of tenacity and determination she demonstrated to avoid discouragement.

*"From the beginning I have never felt that I cannot do something simply because I am a woman."*

#### RWANDA, SENIOR MANAGEMENT.

Below is a testimonial from a questionnaire respondent that summarises the main points raised in this section.





### HER STORY

“I was in my third year of working for the company when the management introduced convergence in efforts to reduce labour expenses. We were encouraged to showcase our talents, and I grasped the opportunity; leading to my first time reporting in front of a camera. Unfortunately, my aggressiveness did not go well with some male editors. One male editor demonised me, saying I was out to take away other people’s jobs, and that I should stick to my job description. When I proved to be unstoppable, he started making sexual advances. He could send me carrots with p\*nis images on WhatsApp. On realising that I ignored him; that marked the start of him frustrating me. My pitches during briefs and debriefs could not make it for stories on air. I advanced and made a proposal for weekly segments; a different male editor, heading another department downplayed my proposal because I had turned down his offer for a coffee date. I did not give up. I approached our boss who fortunately was a woman, and she gave approval to my proposal. I can shoot, script, edit and voice my story myself, so I did not waste time.

However, the third week after shooting, the same editor refused to sub my script, he alleged that my segment has no views, and described it as a waste of airtime. How it ended is a story for another day.

On another occasion, I pitched a story in an editorial meeting and I was ready to go out for a shoot with a more senior reporter, only to be shortchanged on the basis that the shoot of that particular feature is more involving, and so a woman won’t hack it; forgetting that it was the same woman who pitched the story in the first place!

When top management of the company changed, I had looked forward to having my job description and contract changed for the better. So, I approached a male managing editor to intervene so that my pay can be increased, he asked me to send him a sample of my work (remember this is an individual who sits in most editorial pitches and also sees my work on air every day when I successfully pitch). It has been two years, and I am still waiting for that pay rise! Perhaps I failed to ‘speak sweetly’?! Things are not yet smooth; it is survival of the fittest because at the sunset I need to make ends meet!”

### MID-CAREER

## THEME 3:

# SEXUAL HARASSMENT, BULLYING, SEXISM, AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

This section explores the second-most shared experience, and testimonies: **sexual harassment**, which relates mainly to sexual advancements by superiors and male colleagues. Experiences of sexual harassment as a condition for work was wide-ranging across respondents from Southern, East, and Western African regions. These forms of sexual harassment include everything from suggestive propositions for a sexual relationship in exchange for work, to online sexual harassment and physical assault including aggravated assault at gunpoint.

*“...I was lucky to get a chance at one of the mainstream media houses... then my immediate boss... kept me as a hostage in the office in the evening when everyone was away. He made advances with the promise of giving me a job, he threatened me at gunpoint...”*

## ANONYMOUS

The perpetrators of sexual harassment ranged from bosses, to male colleagues, recruitment interviewers, intermediaries between interviewees and interviewers, and news sources. Online sexual harassment included sexually suggestive text messages and requests for “body pictures” from male colleagues.

Several respondents highlighted the fact that their male counterparts were aggravated when they rose above the challenges faced at the workplace, which sometimes led to the belittling of talent and assumption that women who progress did so by sleeping their way in.

*“It was not a barrier really, but people assume that you are sleeping with someone at the top because you have gotten into TV. Most TV bosses are male, so you have to engage with them to give you the opportunity. It’s very saddening when that is interpreted as sleeping with them and can really demotivate you. I, however, ignored the rumours and forged on.”*

## KENYA, MID-CAREER

Sexual harassment also comes to the fore in experiences relating to promotion, either as a prerequisite of promotion, or as something to condone.

*“The line between casual chatter and uncomfortable dialogue is easily crossed. A fellow female told me I should ignore certain comments if I want to survive the industry and the media establishment.”*

### **ZIMBABWE, MID-CAREER**

Although salary disparities have been discussed in the previous section, it is worth highlighting that most respondents whose responses were related to poor pay spoke of this in the context of sexual harassment. There were two ways in which these narratives were shared: either in the context of poor pay being yet another challenge to contend with on top of sexual harassment, or that poor pay can lead to accepting the advances of male superiors.

*“Such barriers are actually dominant in the industry. The mere fact that the whole chain of workplace superiors is male dominated is not welcoming for female cub reporters. The issue of meagre salaries can also end up subjecting young ladies to the demands of male superiors. So basically, it’s gender-based harassment, sexual harassment and intimidation, limited growth opportunities in the newsroom are major barriers of entry.”*

### **ZIMBABWE, MID-CAREER**

The experience of sex for pay also came up, namely the opportunity it presents for those in decision-making positions to use sexual exploitation as a weapon against low-paid women journalists who are desperate to make ends meet. Again, another way in which poor pay across the industry in the countries represented in our survey has particular consequences for women journalists.

The response on the previous page which begins with “it was not a barrier really” is revealing of the ways the respondents perceive barriers and suggests a need for a better understanding of how these issues are barriers. Consider also this response from a mid-career respondent when asked whether they had experienced barriers of entry into the journalism industry because they are female?

*“Neutral because so many bosses in the media industry take advantage of us females by using us as the ticket in the media. If you will not give out yourself to the boss, then you cannot get the job you wanted even if you qualify for that job.”*

### **KENYA, MID-CAREER**

This respondent was among the 17% that selected ‘neutral’ in the question on experiencing gendered barriers of entry, despite going on to describe sexual harassment as a rife condition of entry. Another respondent who also selected ‘neutral’, narrates gendered experiences as a woman journalist, and individualises the solution, the need for tough skin and resistance being how she has overcome the challenges she faced:

*“Some cultures and families can criticise negatively female journalists, but it’s up to you as female journalists or any other person to prove that you are able to change bad things to good things. I never accept that kind of humiliation and harassment at work.”*

### **RWANDA, SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

Stories of sexual harassment and sexual violence also emerged here, particularly those perpetrated by superiors, which when refused, impact opportunities for promotion negatively. Normalisation in some environments leaves the women journalists with no recourse.

*“I have experienced sexual abuse from almost all of my supervisors, I have had to fight one boss off and another almost raped me and my refusal to date any of them caused me so much harm. I was given terrible beats, treated badly by my bosses and when I complained to my fellow female colleagues, I was told that it was normal.”*

### **ANONYMOUS**

There is a vicious cycle of sexual harassment and sexual corruption, often amounting to **sextortion**, emerging from the narratives. Beyond unwelcome sexual advances, participants talked about their experiences with the extortion of sexual favours, commonly referred to as **sexual corruption**. These forms of corruption range from sex for work, sex for pay, sexual harassment by sources, sexually charged rumour-mongering about women journalists and the lack of organisational approaches to deal with sexual harassment, leaving several respondents with the feeling that the issues are simply “swept under the carpet”.

The respondents in this study expressed similar perspectives that ultimately placed the responsibility on the victims to deal with sexual harassment. *According to one of the respondents (Anonymous), “Sexual harassment has always affected me negatively since I have gone through this in all the media houses I have worked for. Sometimes I would feel like quitting.”* This participant detailed how she was violated by a wealthy government official to whom she was sent to cover a story. Following the incident, she could not face her news editor, who kept blaming and further harassing her.

Some of the respondents shared that they had left the job and are now actively involved in affirmative action processes to reduce sexual harassment

*“Especially now that I am in the trade union for journalists. We register very appalling cases of sexual harassment, trolling, bullying, salary cuts, layoffs especially this season of the C-19 pandemic!”*

**ANONYMOUS**

Other responses highlighted a level of casualness, which could indicate a lack of awareness on both perpetrator and victim side of the scope of what is defined as sexual harassment.



There was a time one of my male counterparts shared a very sexually suggestive email and I felt so disgusted [because] I work with this person closely daily. Then others harassed me on email! Really gross. My boss promised me immediate promotion “if I complied arrrrgh” I missed a training opportunity in the US because I declined sexual advances. I still work with all these people. I have learnt that I have to empower myself and not wait for handouts from my bosses. I have learnt how to say No! I look out for online interfaces like this (this is a first). The rest I would get invited and travel physically. Every day is an opportunity to win a battle for me and journalism against safety issues of female Journalists. Even in conferences sometimes you speak up and get frozen out, but you keep me talking.

**UGANDA, SENIOR MANAGEMENT**



Although issues relating to family life are discussed in the next section, it is important to point out that 57% of married respondents said being married/domestic partnership had either a high, significant or medium impact on their career. Half of respondents with children said having children had a high, significant or medium impact; 15% being high impact on their career.

*“I couldn’t [meet] my boss’s sexual wish and lower my dignity or break[-up] my family. I was repeatedly bullied and feared that for my own security I would almost leave my job. Misogyny is discouraging [and] can lead one to leave journalism.”*

#### **KENYA, MID-CAREER**

This quote above also highlights the ways in which sexual harassment and bullying are experienced simultaneously by women journalists who engaged in this study.

**Bullying** emerged within newsrooms and online. Experiences shared included being shut down for being vocal, experiences of bullying based on the kinds of stories the respondents work on, which in one case led to cyberbullying being used to intimidate and threaten the life of the journalist. It was also highlighted that bullying came from both men and women. For some respondents of our questionnaire, the impacts of cyberbullying ranged from lowered self-esteem, to fear of social media. The wider consequence, of course, is the limited visibility of African women journalists on social media platforms like Twitter, which for many journalists around the world has become a vital part of both newsgathering and dissemination.

Bullying, cyberbullying and cyber misogyny were also mentioned by several respondents. Some spoke of cyberbullying leading to fear, others related it to intimidation tactics due to a story they were pursuing. Consider for example:

*“Cyberbullying has always scared me. It has not happened to me but I fear for those who have gone through it. It’s hell and scary, being threatened for doing some stories because you [are] a woman, sexual harassment [is] the biggest reason for me wanting to quit. I never fail to get advances that have made my work difficult. I have to give out my body in order to get an opportunity for stories or do this to get that. Media is known to have [become] flocked with people, making job opportunities very scarce.”*

#### **KENYA, STUDENT**

*“Social media users would also say nasty things about the clothes, make-up, the way I smiled, the way I spoke, my accent, my weight, everything, and it hurt. I had to keep my head high and take the hurt but it took so much of my confidence away, I could have done more with my career.”*

#### **ZIMBABWE, MID-CAREER**

**Sexism** was also quite evident in this study, with 44% of the respondents indicating that they have experienced it. However, responses demonstrated a lack of clarity on this; for example, one questionnaire respondent used visibility of sexism as valuation on the extent to which it exists, though she also highlights that many women were in leadership (as editor and chief of section) positions at her place of work, without clearly making the connection to why she did not experience sexism.

**Racial discrimination** experiences were discussed by respondents from South Africa, unfortunately leading to the resignation of one respondent. For one focus group participant, their organisation developed an internal committee to address racial discrimination, and while agreed that the idea of committees is great in principle by the participants of the focus group, the culture of fear around job security contributes to members of such committees not truly being empowered to effect any transformative change.

## THEME 4:

## FAMILY LIFE

As part of the study, participants were asked whether or not their relationship status affected their entry into the journalism industry; while 41% of respondents were married, a majority of these respondents (44%) did not select being married or in a domestic partnership as having any impact on their entry into journalism. However, 33.6% of respondents that were married and/or in a domestic partnership, said this status did have some impact on their entry to journalism. This compared to 22.4% who said their relationship status had either had no impact or had a positive impact on their entry into the journalism sector. Only 12% said 'Having children' had a negative impact on their career progress, making up only 20% of the overall 80 respondents who have children. Similarly, only 7.2% of respondents selected being married and/or in a domestic partnership as having the most negative impact on their career progression. This was only 17% of the overall number of respondents who are married and/or in a domestic partnership.

Societal impacts on the experiences of respondents in relation to being married and/or having children, ranged from having to slow down career progress to focus on family, the sexual harassment of women in media considered 'loose' because they work in media, and the varying faces of missed opportunities. Consider the following statement by one of the respondents:

*"The outdated gender tropes portraying women in traditional roles of women being housewives [and] mothers affected my entry into journalism since no one could believe that even women can fill big places in society and be listened to while gathering information. Some men reached to [the] extent of telling my husband that he has left his wife into prostitution since female journalist[s] meet many high profiled men."*

#### UGANDA, ENTRY LEVEL

Such examples of the impact of societal perspective on women in journalism as 'loose women' and that they are not 'wife material' again add to both an internal and external battle with societal expectations of women. They also serve as examples of the many faces of sexual harassment, and how we might consider the different types of sexual harassment that are tied to societal perspectives. Here is another quote provided by one of the respondents that describes this form of harassment:

*"Men who worked with me harassed me because I am a girl, I missed time for caring for my children because I worked during the night. Other women harassed me and told me that I am sex worker because I work during the night."*

#### RWANDA, SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Several women expressed having to slow down and not being able to do certain kinds of stories due to childcare needs. Consider the following statement made by one of the participants in this study:

*“Having children automatically means increased roles and responsibilities. That alone reduces one’s zeal and enthusiasm to excel and go for greater opportunities. The media should be supportive towards women not discriminate because one has a family or children.”*

#### **ZIMBABWE, MID-CAREER**

Respondents shared experiences regarding the complexities of managing the needs of their family life while working full time. The feedback indicated that employers do not consider the childcare responsibilities of mothers, who were often given hours that were difficult to combine with caring for a child. On the other hand, employers also used the family situation as an excuse to limit work or as a constant reminder that mothers should be at home looking after their children. Here are the views of two respondents:

*“Frankly, at entry level, I got in because I seemed capable and because of my degrees. But as I progressed, there was resistance to even being named head of a desk I was already leading. And I witnessed a lot of textbook motherhood penalty situations.”*

#### **NIGERIA, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

*“I have been given less opportunities because at a certain point, I requested to have my roles reduced because I had young children. Since then, my bosses say that I am lazy and I do not want to work, so they always skip me when there are opportunities.”*

#### **UGANDA, MID-CAREER**

A majority of respondents (52%) said they felt they were treated differently because they have had less support than male colleagues, while 51% either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement ‘I have been given less opportunities than male colleagues.’ Experiences shared in this regard include the negative attitudes towards maternity and parental responsibilities.

Although we have spoken about discrepancies in salaries for women and men in a previous section, it must be mentioned here that there is a correlation between poor pay of women, and its impact on the wider family finances. It is interesting that some examples given by the interviewees of this study highlighted the practice of employers paying men more because of their assumed familial breadwinner role assigned by society, despite the fact that women and mothers have since long entered the workforce. In the below quote, and also mentioned in others, were suggestions of using personal resources to cover costs of delivering a story.

The issue here is the extent to which organisations are gender-conscious enough to, firstly, be flexible to adjust to the needs of parents, and secondly, not letting it impact promotion, or rather having a more gender-conscious approach to work allocation and promotion, that is considerate of these societal allocations of roles.

*“I have passed up two great opportunities because, one, I was married, I didn’t want to change location, and second, I was married and expecting our first son, even though I want[ed] it I flunked the interview (didn’t put much [in]to it because my husband didn’t really want it)...”*

#### **NIGERIA, MID-CAREER**

The example above also speaks to external factors that contribute to barriers of entry for women journalists. The missed opportunity described above is clearly linked to her husband not wanting her to take a job. That she adds that these were with international news organisations shows the value she places on these missed opportunities.



Some respondents also mentioned the impact of spousal support, or lack of it, on the extent of their career progression, and the following example also speaks to the relevance of the spaces and places where opportunities are discussed, for example in bars and clubs, and how they are not always culturally considered to be gender friendly due to the actual type of place, or time when these discussions happen. Meeting at the bar after work is not always easy for women who have a family and children and in certain cultural contexts, she is being judged because of it.

*“I believe my education played a role in cushioning my progression. I have [a] healthy support in my marriage but dealing with a patriarchal system at work was hard. There is a boy’s club where men meet and network where women especially married cannot do the same...”*

#### **ZIMBABWE, SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

With the experiences and reflections shared on the impact of childcare and familial responsibilities were also several mentions of the need for, and lack of, mentors for women in these situations. In the below example, we also see another dimension of the cultural mindset that would prevent one complaining about the experiences of motherhood, and acceptance that any challenges faced are part and parcel of a life choice, alongside the sense of demotivation perpetuated by poor pay. In building supportive organisational environments, the respondent wished for mentorship and a culture of nurture.

*“I chose to have the children, so this cannot be a barrier to me. But, [I don’t have a] mentor who can give me the courage to do what I wanted to do in the media. Most people... Can you [imagine working] 15 years and you don’t gain enough money to feed your family and your job is at risk.”*

#### **RWANDA, SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

Experiences of being married and/or having children also highlighted both organisational and personal barriers. Several respondents mentioned the impact of their work pattern on their marriage, for example:

*“In terms of marriage, this is one centre of conflict where female journalists need to negotiate their way to make [their] partner understand our job. Marriages are breaking due to inconsiderate men who think they dominate their partners’ work and choices. I ended up divorcing my husband because he was inconsiderate and had become a barrier to my professional development.”*

#### **ZIMBABWE, MID-CAREER**

In an interview on barriers to entry, a Tanzanian respondent spoke to several cultural barriers in relation to marriage for women journalists. Firstly, the culturally expected name change gives a task of reconnection with audiences as they get used to the new name. She also spoke on the impact of stereotyping of women journalists, on the attitudes of some husbands:

*“You know, journalism, some people consider this a job for men, so when you say that you are journalist, a TV presenter, most men, they say ‘No, I don’t want my wife to be there exposing herself for news, exposing herself to talk over the radio, or to be presented at the TV screen’.”*

#### **TANZANIA, SENIOR MANAGEMENT**



This level of barrier speaks to a **cultural perspective** that assigns certain roles to husbands and wives that are gender-unequal where the husband is considered as the breadwinner and decision-maker, while the women are regarded as the primary carers. Such prescriptive cultural norms mean that women are saddled with most of the childcare and domestic work and thus the impact on their career progression is at a greater scale than their male colleagues.

This also speaks to the excuses given by some employers as to why male staff earn more than women on the same level. The male decision-makers in these organisations have grown up with these cultural norms, and therefore present another reason why organisational policies are important so that decisions are not based on individual opinions, but on organisational guidelines.

*“At this stage I was married and bore a child. Yes, when married responsibilities are increased more challenges come in your way. The point is I am working towards a successful career, but people tend to think that you can no longer give much attention to work and they also make some decisions for you based on your status without consent. For example, when pregnant, your employers may not recommend you for some training or other opportunities just because they think it is too demanding ... There are also opportunities given to unmarried females, like some training trips outside town that required them to spend one or two nights away, but not grant them to you because they think you can't leave your husband. The point is they think and decide on our behalf without our consent or any comment.”*

**RWANDA. MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**



“

In the focus group discussions, participants from Nigeria, Uganda and Rwanda spoke to a disparity in the maternity policies in private and public media in the countries, with public media organisations having more favourable maternity pay periods.

Only four respondents mentioned societal roles as an impact on entry to desired roles, and with the exception of a respondent whose challenge was a lack of spousal support, others described community positioning of women and girls that contribute to the limiting of girls' education.

*"I experienced discrimination when my brothers were offered an opportunity to study while I was left out to care for my ailing grandmother. I realised in my village that many girls faced the same dilemma. My grandmother however sacrificed to see me through school. I eventually became a role model to my fellow village girls. I became passionate about reporting on their stories of suffering with the hope that the government will help. I enrolled for a professional course in journalism. Today, I report more on women's challenges, achievements and innovations."*

#### **KENYA, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

In the next section we will examine the final responses that emerged in this study around women and managerial positions within journalism.

#### **THEME 5:**

## **WOMEN IN MEDIA AND LEADERSHIP**

*"I got an opportunity to replace my boss who was transferred to another unit. I applied to that position, but they told me that only men occupied that position. I insisted and finally they accepted me. But in the day-to-day activities, my boss reminded me that I have to show that women are also able to lead."*

#### **RWANDA. EXECUTIVE/C-LEVEL MANAGEMENT**

This response was one of several examples of this type of barrier due to leadership roles being historically occupied by men, and thus the insistence that such traditions should persist. That the respondent has to fight for the role, not because of a lack of skill, but due to her gender is a clear barrier to progression. The daily reminder that it is up to her to show women are capable to lead is again shifting the responsibility to the women. These are only examples of the stereotyping of the capabilities of women journalists. The consequence recognised by this respondent is the limitation it places on progression, thus on pay rises. The confinement of women journalists to certain beats can be

seen elsewhere in this study, and always in the context of media managers deciding for the woman journalist what she is or isn't capable of.

Other consequences of having an all-male editorial leadership for example, as was found in the study, is that stories pitched by male reporters are more likely to be approved than those pitched by their female colleagues. Male-dominated environments also meant one respondent was bullied because her high level of education intimidated the male leadership. One respondent describes how the others at her workplace perceived her qualifications:

*"It was always met with scorn especially from the older males in newsroom management. Because none of them had degrees, they felt intimidated by my qualifications and made it their work to frustrate me from applying for further roles or aspiring to be in any management positions."*

### **ZIMBABWE, ENTRY LEVEL**

Focus group participants shared examples of consequences of a tokenistic approach, and for several participants this resulted in the blame being placed on the few women promoted to leadership to ensure transformation, and at worst has meant promotion without training. The former requires organisations to consider the equity of the leadership positions and not just the quota, and the former makes the early training and mentoring essential.

One participant mentioned that despite there being more women in media leadership in her country, the culture of sexism and intimidation of women journalists still persists, and thus suggests a need for whole organisational reorientation and training of the male media management on gender consciousness.

*"The decision-making levels are all occupied by men and that makes it possible [for] female journalists to remain stagnant at one position if they are not ready to dance to the tune."*

### **GAMBIA, MID-CAREER**

Another participant highlighted her experience that while there, as a result of women being in leadership in her organisation, has been more airtime given to women's issues, the construction of the narratives about women still presents women in a stereotypical way.

Indeed, addressing stereotypical narratives about women can also go a long way in addressing deeply held perspectives about women in leadership. One of the areas discussed in the focus group was female leadership to understand some of the wider issues women journalists were facing in this area. Though there was general consensus on the need for more women leaders in media organisations, in the focus group discussions, participants also shared their own negative experiences of having women in media leadership. Women leaders were described as generally unapproachable.

As such, we can conclude that a deliberate move to improve women's representation in leadership should be part of an organisational-wide cultural change that also includes a deliberate rethinking of how women are represented in the content produced. In leading this deliberate cultural shift, and in the capacity-building of women journalists, participants from Tanzania and South Sudan suggest the importance of media associations and networks, but also that larger media organisations should be taking a lead to support smaller organisations. Some of the points for reflection in the focus group discussions relate to the wider recognition of male leaders in the newsroom in building alliances and becoming increasingly involved in effecting change in leadership practices.

### Reasons respondents left/considered leaving their journalism career



**Figure 16: What impact have the following had on your reasons for leaving/considered leaving your journalism career?**





*Figure 16: What impact have the following had on your reasons for leaving/considered leaving your journalism career?*

Now that we have explored the five themes surrounding barriers of entry and progression in the workplace for women journalists, we will now move on to the main conclusions and recommendations of this study.



# CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS



Women should feel empowered and feel equal to their fellow journalists. They should be given equal opportunities to what's given a man to showcase all the abilities that she is able to provide and compete with others without any restrictions or boundaries. Employers should perceive that a woman can cope with the changes and still be as productive as she was if you talk to her about the options regarding her status at the time. Employers should stop thinking for their employees, especially women, whether married or not, whether pregnant or not, whether having children or not, and they should give them options available for them and let them choose. Their will or chosen options should have a voice that should be taken into consideration towards decisions taken in their work. That she may be given the opportunity to do what she decides, and if she fails, then move her into another role but after having given her a chance to do her best. Then here the increase of pay can come as another point of consideration in addressing barriers of entry. This has been an issue for years and it continues to be. Many women drop out of journalism when they get married. Family responsibilities, such as childcare, are expensive, but as explained above, employers tend not to provide chances for progression. This may cause some to quit journalism and find other work. Sexual harassment also means that women journalists are treated as fair game for sexual exploitation in return for promotions or pay rises. Gender equality monitoring institutions should apply policies to keep an eye on such injustice, mistreatment and inequality.

**RWANDA, MIDDLE MANAGEMENT**

The aim of this study was to examine the *barriers* hindering women in sub-Saharan Africa from entering, progression and/or staying in journalism. This study also sets out to identify possible strategies, responses and interventions that might increase the number of women journalists in sub-Saharan Africa, at various career levels.

The report highlighted the motivations and aspirations of participants in this study. However, overall, the testimonies derived from this study also demonstrated the various ways in which respondents experience barriers. This study proves that these barriers exist at various points in the professional and personal life cycles. The main barriers of entry faced by the respondents in this study were:

- 1). **Job stagnation and salary discrepancies for women in the media,**
- 2). **Disparities between men and women in the distribution of job roles,**
- 3). **Sexual Harassment, Bullying, Sexism, and Racial Discrimination,**
- 4). **Family Life, and**
- 5). **Women in media and leadership.**
- 6). **Many of these barriers mentioned above overlap and occur at the same time.**

When asked who was responsible for addressing barriers to progression of women journalists, a majority of the respondents said **everyone is responsible**. Other respondents were of the view that **government and policy, media owners, women journalists, senior management, associations and media bodies, human resources departments, heads of departments, and line managers should all be held accountable in addressing the barriers that women journalists encounter (see figure 17 below)**. The collated responses demonstrated that a joint effort is needed in order to address these barriers. Therefore, all stakeholders are a part of the solution. However, the question we are left with is whether the stakeholders outlined above are ready and willing to make that change? In the following paragraphs we examine the role of some of the stakeholders who can begin to make the change as seen in a number of best practices.



**Figure 17: Who do you think should be responsible for addressing barriers to progression for female journalists?**



The best practices shared in this study emerged from the participants in the questionnaires, focus group discussions and the interviews, and there were a mix of examples showing the role of the individual, training, women leaders, maternity policies and gender policies.

## INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Participants found that one of the ways barriers could be addressed is at an individual level. The sense of taking ownership of one's empowerment was prominent in most interviews and focus group discussions.

*"Personally. You know that question is very tricky. I'm saying very tricky because, if you are a hard worker, you can't see anything. You can see just things moving, so I'm the one who has to work harder, [who] wants to work on myself and see the results for myself."*

### TANZANIA, SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Participants of the focus group on solutions highlighted the need for women journalists to take an entrepreneurial approach to both skilling up and using their skills as a way to combat the issue of job security. Digital skills development was identified as key to this.

However, the notion of individualised women's empowerment, that places the responsibility on the woman journalist herself, has the danger of missing the barriers beyond the control of the women and assumes only that it is because the woman is not hard-working enough that she has these experiences.



## EARLY TRAINING ON GENDER BIAS

Another way respondents thought barriers could be curtailed is through the provision of early training on gender bias. Journalism schools were specifically mentioned, in their role to better support women journalists preparing to enter the industry. Several participants highlighted the need for journalism schools to fully equip students with the skills and tools needed to navigate the realities of the industry. This included transferable skills of negotiation, and resilience among others. However, in considering the male colleagues who create and perpetuate the barriers experienced by women journalists, such early training should be offered to all journalism students. Participants were also of the view that the course content should include gender-conscious training to tackle the biases and barriers that include sexual harassment, bullying, sexism, among others, early on. Media houses and managers would also benefit from courses on the development and implementation of gender policies.

## WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP BEYOND TOKENISM

In addressing the barriers, participants shared that women in leadership and mentoring were the key areas of focus. One of the points taken from the discussion is that role modelling starts from the positive representation of women in media content, and also at different levels of leadership in media organisations. Another point raised by the participants is that mentoring should come from both men and women colleagues.

The focus group discussions on women in media leadership expressed the need for a less tokenistic and somewhat moral licensing approach to women in leadership roles. Instead, the participants talked about the early and deliberate establishment of funnels to leadership starting early with women journalists joining organisations, so there is a clear plan towards the roles they aspire to, in particular leadership. A bottom-up approach, argue participants, will ensure management is not simply placing women in leadership as part of a tick-box exercise, but as a deliberate effort to shift the culture of the organisation to a more gender-conscious environment.

Women should be at the table as decision-makers, and this is one more reason why transparent processes, and the need to diversify opportunities for progression, are important. According to the participants, solutions in tackling these impacts at entry range from mentorship to creating gender-conscious and open approaches to promotion. In the approaches to gender consciousness, the generalisations that lead to the barriers of entry and progression for women journalists must also be considered consciously so that the realities of one woman's work/life circumstances are not used in judgement of her nor other women.

## MATERNITY POLICY

Focus group participants discussed the need for amending **maternity policies** in line with the growing number of women journalists who are mothers. In the focus group that discussed solutions for barriers, participants from Nigeria, Uganda and Rwanda spoke about the disparity in the maternity policies in private and public media in their own countries. Their own view is that public media organisations have more favourable maternity pay periods. Rwanda has a national maternity benefits scheme that covers all mothers irrespective of sector. According to one of the participants, media houses should establish in-house crèches as this will both benefit breastfeeding mothers, but also accommodate the unpredictability of working hours of journalists.

The grievances shared in the focus groups range across the spectrum of not being given childcare-friendly hours, to having contracts terminated due to pregnancy, and being accused of working too much, as opposed to taking time for childcare.

The participants in the focus groups also discussed the glaring need for access to alternative ways of working, which they saw as key in reconciling work, caring responsibilities and access to childcare. This relates both to workload allocation and work hours, and in ensuring maternity and parental considerations are not used to penalise women journalists. They also shared the importance of working in environments that afforded them 'choice' in balancing work and family through the creation of fairer maternity policies.

## GENDER POLICY

This section contains all of the viewpoints regarding the ways gender policy can be improved and implemented in addressing barriers for women in journalism. This was explored in detail in the focus group discussions, which was particularly significant as it consisted of six participants from different countries with varying experiences of **gender policies**. However, while there was agreement amongst the respondents that gender policies can be an effective mechanism in addressing some of the barriers women journalists face, they emphasised the danger of a policy without implementation.

From the overall focus group discussions, South Africa was presented as an example of best practice of the benefits of gender policies when implemented well. South Africa is ahead with 47% of editors being women. Their gender policies are implemented nationally and have had a positive impact on the media. For example, when sharing her viewpoint, the participant from South Africa, placed importance on the national implementation of the gender policy as a key catalyst in the development and implementation of gender policies in media organisations. She also highlights that this first comes with identifying and accepting that there is a problem of gender inequality before it can be addressed; as well as a need for a multi-layered approach to gender policies, at national level, buy-in at industries level, and then at organizational level:

*"The first battle is to have specific policies to identify that it is an issue, because you cannot solve the problem without people acknowledging that it was a problem. The second step is then to see the policy through to implementation with people and women are promoted, and then the third follow-up would be to have supporting policies to that policy, of having women empowered, to ensure that female editors earn as much as male editors, that you know how are they treated in terms of issues like everyday sexism, workload etc. And then the third issue is the mentorship and grooming."*

### SOUTH AFRICA, SENIOR MANAGEMENT

This was the experience shared by the Rwandan, Tanzanian and Ugandan participants who **all shared the view that while gender policies existed in their countries, implementation was ineffective in the media**. The participant from Nigeria highlighted the efforts of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) in Nigeria, in engaging media leadership on gender issues. The majority of the participants, across the six countries represented in the focus group, shared their experiences of poor implementation of gender policies. According to the participant from Rwanda, while there is gender parity in parliament, policy implementation becomes problematic. When it comes to South Sudan, a country still in conflict, as compared to the post-conflict environment in Rwanda, we see that there are sector-wide challenges that are top of the agenda before they begin to drill down to specifics of gendered barriers in the media. However,

as a feedback from the other focus group participants, they suggested that the sector-wide challenges should be tackled alongside the gender barriers. As well as external support from nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and associations, which can support media organisations in developing and implementing internal gender policies. The success in South Africa should be researched to inform agendas at implementing gender policies elsewhere.

## GOING FORWARD

AWiM and Fojo hope that this study will contribute to the creation of enabling environments for African women who work in media industries, and change the way African women are represented in media content.

The findings of the study, and recommendations presented above, could be starting points for the various stakeholders to take positive action by designing activities and interventions that will effect lasting change. Training, capacity-development, mentoring, development and implementation of policies require a joined-up approach, sustainable funding and a willingness to move beyond tokenistic gestures.

We welcome further research at regional, national, and organisational levels, and encourage collaborative and supporting efforts between organisations. We particularly encourage more research that looks at the ways in which women journalists are mobilising and actively addressing the challenges they face in the industry. Such research will further empower women as active change-makers in the profession.

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**FOJO:MEDIA INSTITUTE**  
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