

**IAMCR 2022 - International Association for Media and Communication Research:
Communication Research in the Era of Neo-Globalisation: Reorientations,
Challenges and Changing Contexts"**

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Beijing, China

11-15 July 2022

Tsinghua University

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU)

Sampaio-Dias,S, Silveirinha, M., Miranda, J., Cerqueira, C., Subtil, F., Amaral, I., Garcez, B., & Dias, B.S. (2022, jul. 11-15). "It's normal unless it turns into physical aggression": a study of Portuguese Journalists' perceptions of (gendered) online harassment. Paper presented at **IAMCR 2022: "Communication Research in the Era of Neo-Globalisation: Reorientations, Challenges and Changing Contexts"**, Beijing, China.

Título da apresentação: "It's normal unless it turns into physical aggression": a study of Portuguese Journalists' perceptions of (gendered) online harassment

Resumo:

In January 2021, while the country's daily Covid-19 numbers were hitting record highs, Portugal headed to the polls to elect its future head of state. The campaign was marked by the actions and words of a new far-right party (Chega), which held a campaign characterised by violent incidents with journalists. Later in the year, local elections provided new opportunities for these political actors to confront journalists and make female journalists their preferential targets. The attacks were not just face-to-face but also on social media, in reiterated hate speech messages and direct threats, particularly against female journalists (CCPJ 2021). What made these events significant is that hate speech and online harassment became more visible for both the public and journalists themselves. Having a presence online is expected if not required from journalists today. While digital networking helps establish connections and reach a wider community, it also exposes media professionals to abuse. The dangers of hate speech in journalism are well known and hate speech presents a major challenge to today's journalists (Holton, 2021), as it became their "new normal" (Waisbord, 2020). Women in

particular are preferential targets of trolls (Nadim e Fladmoe, 2019; Edström, 2016; UNESCO, 2021; Chen et al, 2020; Adams, 2018). Under different names, such as cyber gender harassment (Citron, 2011) or gendertrolling (Mantilla, 2013), the consequences of gender-based online hate speech are not only to female journalists' mental health and psychological wellbeing but also on public life, as it may have a "chilling effect" in limiting the types of stories and topics that are covered (Townend, 2017; UNESCO, 2021).

With few exceptions (Simões, 2021; Silva, 2021), little is known about online violence against Portuguese journalists. This research examines how online abuse is experienced and tackled by Portuguese journalists by measuring self-reported incidents, effects, and trust in existing safety mechanisms. Further, we specifically address the prevalence of online harassment and violence against women journalists and their perceptions of the issue. Theoretically, the article bridges the research on online harassment, mob censorship and gender in journalism.

Empirically, it draws on a nationwide survey of journalists and, to explore in more detail the meanings of its quantitative data and the gender aspects of experience. Findings are combined with data from semi-structured interviews conducted with women journalists from diverse media and fields.

Professionals feel an increasing hostility aggravated by the digital environment. Half of the surveyed journalists have experienced online violence to some degree, including sexual harassment. Journalists further evidenced low levels of trust in protection mechanisms or a lack of awareness of them. Findings also suggest feelings of resignation towards online abuse, seen as intrinsic to the job, demonstrating a sense of understatement of the attacks. The paper argues that these sentiments contribute to a normalisation of online violence and highlights the need to discuss online abuse within the profession.

Palavras-chave: Women journalists; Online harassment; Journalists' safety