

# GENDER ASSESSMENT OF NEWSROOM

Gender Equity in Pakistan's Digital Newsrooms;  
A study to identify problems and prospects







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Gender Equity in Pakistan's Digital Newsrooms;  
A study to identify problems and prospects

Undertaken by

IRADA Foundation for Research and Advocacy  
Islamabad Pakistan



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This report is authored by Salwa Rana, with technical review and edits by Muhammad Badar Alam. Data collection for the study, including administration of the survey and KIIs, are led by Myra Imran.

## Executive Summary

This study examines gaps in gender equity, workplace safety and security of women journalists and institutional policies for hiring, retaining and promoting staff in a gender-equitable manner. It also explores opportunities within digital news media organisations in Pakistan for women to grow professionally – both in quantity and quality. The study draws upon a mixed-methods approach combining survey responses from 55 journalists, coupled with qualitative insights from five senior women journalists interviewed as key informants. Together, the quantitative and qualitative findings provide an overview of how newsroom structures, organisational cultures, and institutional practices shape the participation, advancement, and professional experiences of women journalists in Pakistan’s digital news landscape.

The findings of the study suggest that women have a sizeable presence in a range of digital journalism roles, particularly performing editorial and reporting functions. Their presence, however, is not evenly distributed across different parts of newsrooms. Women are more commonly found in desk-based editorial roles and feature-oriented beats than in technical positions and senior editorial leadership. Interviews with experienced journalists reinforce this pattern, highlighting the fact that although women’s presence in newsrooms has expanded over the past two decades, decision-making roles remain largely dominated by men. Many respondents also emphasize that women often reach mid-level editorial positions but face barriers to progress into senior leadership roles which determine editorial agendas and organisational priorities.

Recruitment and career advancement practices further solidify this pattern. The survey’s findings indicate that access to employment opportunities often depends on informal recruitment pathways, including through professional networks and internal referrals,

rather than through open and transparent processes. While many survey respondents perceive hiring and promotion practices as formally gender-neutral, key informant interviews point out that informal networks and the news organisations' internal cultures continue to influence the women's professional trajectories. The key informants also note that women journalists are often encouraged to cover "soft" beats such as lifestyle, weather, sports and cultural activities while political reporting, investigative journalism and crime reporting remain largely male-dominated domains. Although some respondents acknowledge that women are increasingly entering these areas too, opportunities for them to do so remain limited and unevenly distributed across the digital news media.

The study also examines workplace policies and institutional support systems within digital news organisations. The survey responses indicate that many news organisations have established formal policies related to employee benefits and leave. A majority of respondents (34 out of 55) report that written policies governing leave and benefits exist in their organisations and 32 respondents show satisfaction with leave provisions available to them. A notable proportion of respondents, however, reports limited awareness of these policies or dissatisfaction with existing provisions, suggesting that internal communications regarding employee entitlements are not always consistent across news organisations. Basic benefits such as sick leave appear relatively common, reported by 44 respondents. Similarly, flexible working hours are reported by 31 respondents and remote work options by 29 respondents. In contrast, more comprehensive family-supportive policies remain limited. Only 23 respondents report the availability of paid maternity leave. More importantly, just 9 respondents report the availability of paid paternity leave, access to childcare support also appears minimal, with only 5 respondents reporting the presence of daycare facilities within their organisations.

Workplace infrastructure and gender-responsive facilities also vary across newsrooms. While 37 respondents report the availability of designated women's washrooms and 27 respondents report access to private prayer areas, other supportive facilities remain less common. Interviews with senior journalists further highlight that basic workplace infrastructure, including adequate sanitation facilities and supportive spaces for working mothers, is often overlooked within news media organisations. Several respondents emphasize that institutional attention to gender-responsive workplace policies is limited in an industry where, even otherwise, journalists face broader challenges such as job insecurity, delayed salaries, and limited contractual protections.

Institutional mechanisms requiring addressing of workplace harassment constitute an important part of newsroom environment. The survey responses indicate that many organisations have adopted formal anti-harassment policies, with 41 respondents reporting their presence in their workplaces. Awareness about and visibility of these policies, however, remain inconsistent. Only 25 respondents report that anti-harassment policies are prominently displayed within workplaces, while others indicated that such policies are either not displayed or not widely known among employees. Similarly, while 27 respondents report the existence of harassment inquiry committees within their organisations, a significant number of respondents are either unaware of such committees or report their absence. Awareness about harassment reporting procedures appears relatively high, with 40 respondents reporting that they know how to report workplace harassment. Perceptions regarding retaliation, on the other hand, remain mixed. When asked whether fear of retaliation discourages reporting, 20 respondents agree or strongly agree while 23 respondents disagree, indicating that confidence in reporting mechanisms varies across different organisational contexts.

The study also explores organisational culture and monitoring and surveillance practices within newsrooms. Camera surveillance systems appear to be widely used across many news organisations, with 34 respondents reporting their presence at their workplaces. Despite this, only a small proportion of respondents, approximately 18 percent, all women, report feeling uncomfortable due to their presence. Insights from the key informant interviews suggest that surveillance systems are generally used for security purposes rather than to monitor employee performance although the absence of clearly laid down policies regarding surveillance may influence perceptions about workplace monitoring and trust.

As stated earlier, the study combines a quantitative survey with qualitative interviews with the key informants which, in turn, provide important contextual insights into the survey's findings. Senior journalists and media professionals included among the key informants emphasize that while women's participation in journalism has expanded, structural barriers remain embedded within newsroom hierarchies and organisational cultures to increasing their numbers and promoting them to decision-making positions. The key informants highlight several persistent challenges, including the underrepresentation of women in senior editorial roles, limited transparency in recruitment and promotion processes, and the influence of informal professional networks on career advancement. At the same time, the survey respondents note that increased awareness about gender equity issues, the growth of digital journalism platforms, and the more women entering journalism than before are gradually, though slowly, contributing to changes for the better in newsroom cultures as far as the treatment of women staff members is concerned.

Finally, the findings of this study suggest that structural and institutional barriers continue to shape the professional experiences and career advancement of women journalists in Pakistan. Their

improved presence in newsrooms alone does not necessarily translate into equal power within newsroom decision-making structures. Achieving greater gender equity in journalism will, therefore, require sustained efforts to strengthen institutional transparency, expand women's presence in leadership positions, improve workplace support systems, and ensure effective implementation of workplace protections. Addressing these issues is important not only for improving workplace conditions for journalists but also for strengthening the diversity and inclusiveness of news media organisations —factors that ultimately contribute to a more gender-sensitive, gender-representative and accountable journalism.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background and Rationale

News media plays a central role in democratizing societies. It does so by informing citizens about their rights and responsibilities, shaping public opinion on social, political and economic issue and holding the power and the powerful to account. As a key pillar of democratic governance, news organisations contribute significantly to democratic development by influencing public understanding of political, economic, and social issues. Newsrooms, therefore, not only reflect societal realities, but they also play an important role in setting the direction of a society towards a future with better gender equity, inclusion and representation.

In Pakistan, the news media sector has undergone significant transformation over the last two decades, particularly with the rapid expansion of independent and digital journalism and online news platforms over the last 10 years or so. While these developments have created new opportunities for women journalists and broadened people's access to information, they have also highlighted persistent gender disparities within news media organisations. Despite the growing presence of women in journalism, their representation across newsroom hierarchies remains uneven.<sup>1</sup>

Women journalists in Pakistan often encounter structural challenges that affect their entry into the profession and career progression besides determining and affecting their workplace experiences. These challenges include limited access to decision-making roles, gendered allocation of reporting beats, workplace harassment, and difficulties in balancing professional and personal responsibilities in

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<sup>1</sup> Khalid, Ayesha, et al. *The Glass Ceiling Prevails Career Paths of Pakistani Women Journalists*. Media Matters for Democracy. 2023.

demanding newsroom environments.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, informal employment arrangements and limited transparency in recruitment and compensation practices also affect the advancement of women in the news media sector.

Understanding these structural barriers is critically important to strengthen gender equity within news media organisations and to ensure that newsrooms reflect the diversity of the societies they serve. This study seeks to examine gender dynamics within digital news media organisations in Pakistan, focusing on the presence of women in newsrooms, their workplace conditions, institutional policies and cultures that hinder or help them, and the professional opportunities that they may or may not have in digital journalism.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Despite increasing participation of women in journalism, significant gender disparities continue to exist within news organisations in Pakistan. One of the most obvious challenges is the underrepresentation of women in leadership and decision-making positions, including in senior editorial roles and management structures. While women may be present in reporting or mid-level editorial roles, their presence at the highest levels of newsroom leadership remains limited.

Employment conditions within the news media sector also leave much to ask for. Informal recruitment practices, contract-based employment, and limited transparency in salary structures and promotion criteria often contribute to gender-unequal professional opportunities. In some cases, concerns regarding pay gaps and inconsistent employment benefits further complicate workplace equality between men and women.

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<sup>2</sup> Rana, F.K. and Imran, M. Gender audit: Unequal newsrooms in Pakistan, Freedom Network. 2024.



Workplace safety and protection mechanisms are another area of concern. Although legal frameworks exist to address harassment and workplace discrimination, their implementation within news media organisations is uneven at best and almost non-existing at worst. Weak awareness of policies, limited visibility of complaint registration and redress mechanisms, and worries about retaliatory punishment often discourage women from reporting workplace misconduct they face.

These structural challenges highlight the need for a comprehensive assessment of gender equity within digital news media organisations in Pakistan.

### 1.3 Legal and Policy Context

Pakistan's legal framework provides several protections to promote gender equity and safeguard the rights of female employees within the workplace. The Constitution of Pakistan, for instance, guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender. This constitutional provision serves as a foundation to promote gender equity across public and private institutions, including news media organisations.

Other than the constitution, Pakistan has also introduced laws to address workplace discrimination and harassment. One of the most significant of these is the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010. It requires all public and private organisations to adopt anti-harassment policies, establish inquiry committees, and ensure accessible complaint mechanisms for addressing workplace harassment.

Pakistan is also a signatory to several international human rights instruments that promote gender equity. In particular, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) obliges the state to take measures to eliminate

discrimination against women in employment, public life, and access to various opportunities.

Together, these legal and policy frameworks provide a strong foundation for promoting gender equity within news media organisations. The extent to which these protections are implemented within newsroom environments, however, remains an important area for examination.

## 1.4 Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to assess gender equity within digital news media organisations in Pakistan by examining the presence of women in them and the workplace practices and institutional policies that hinder or help them in career progression, job security and personal and professional safety.

Specifically, the study aims to:

- Examine the presence of women across newsroom roles and organisational hierarchies
- Analyse recruitment practices and career progression pathways within digital news media organisations
- Assess perceptions of pay equity, employment benefits, and workplace conditions
- Evaluate the existence and implementation of institutional policies related to harassment prevention and workplace safety
- Identify structural barriers affecting women's participation and advancement within the news media sector.

## 1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on digital news media organisations operating in Pakistan, with particular attention paid to newsroom structures, employment practices, and institutional policies affecting women journalists.

The study examines the experiences and perceptions of women journalists working in a range of digital newsroom roles, including in reporting, editorial positions, management, production, and technical assignments. The study also considers organisational practices related to recruitment, workplace governance, compensation, and harassment prevention mechanisms.

While the study seeks to capture a diverse range of newsroom experiences, its findings are based on responses from selected digital media organisations and, therefore, reflect patterns observed within the participating organisations.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

### Research Design

This research study follows a mixed-methods gender audit approach to examine gender equity, management practices, workplace culture and legal compliance within digital newsrooms in Pakistan. The research is grounded in the internally recognized Workplace Gender Equality Indicators and is aligned with Pakistan's national legal framework, including but the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act 2010 (amended in 2022), the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act (2021), the Maternity Benefits Ordinance (1958), and other relevant provincial labour laws, judicial orders, rules and regulations.

By combining the data collected through a perception-based survey with organisational practices as highlighted by key informant interviews and legal standards, the study functions both as a gender equity assessment and a legal compliance review within digital news media organisations.

### The Study Sample

The sample for the study's survey comprises 16 digital newsrooms in Pakistan. The list includes Hazara Express News, The Current, Balochistan Voices, Nukta, ProPakistani, The Centrum Media (TCM), Soch Videos, Tribal News Network, Balochistan 24, Pamir Times, Taar Media, Voice PK, We News, Naya Daur, Ibex Media Network, IMN, and Dawn.com

The survey's participants include reporters, editors, producers, desk staff, technicians, and individuals working in management or leadership roles in those newsrooms. We have made serious efforts to include participants from both large national outlets and small to medium-sized organisations, including those operating in urban and semi-urban settings. This has been done to capture the diversity of

newsroom structures and employment arrangements within the country's digital news media sector. To complement and supplement the findings of the survey, detailed interviews have been conducted with five senior women journalists who have the experience of working across different media platforms and in different organisations.

## Sampling Strategy

A purposive and stratified sampling strategy has been adopted to ensure representation across key organisational characteristics, including organisational size, geography, gender, seniority level, and newsroom roles. The selected newsrooms represent a mix of regional and national platforms. Within each newsroom, the survey respondents are drawn from different employment levels, including entry-level, mid-level, senior level and managerial level. These respondents also represent a range of editorial beats such as politics, crime, investigative reporting, desk work, production, and social affairs.

Depending on the selected newsroom's size, approximately three to four respondents are targeted from each organisation.

## Data Collection Methods

### *Survey Questionnaire*

The survey data was collected over two weeks through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire was organised around seven key indicators:

- Gender composition at all organisational levels
- Representation in governing bodies
- Gender pay-gap and salary transparency
- Sexual harassment and workplace safety
- Recruitment and promotion practices
- Leave policies and flexible work arrangements

- Gendered segregation of roles and beats
- Workplace environment and surveillance

### *Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)*

To complement the survey findings, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with five senior media professionals. These include Amber Rahim Shamsi, Xari Jalil, Farahnaz Zaidi, Muna Khan, and Arifa Noor. These interviews provide qualitative insights into newsroom structures, gender dynamics, institutional practices, and historical changes in news media workplaces.

The KIIs also capture reflections from experienced journalists and editors regarding women's presence and representation in leadership roles, workplace culture, gendered beat assignments, harassment reporting mechanisms, and broader structural challenges facing women in journalism.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative data collected through the survey has been analysed using frequency distributions, including analysis by gender, role, and seniority level. Responses have been also assessed indicator-wise to develop a profile of each newsroom's gender equality performance.

Qualitative responses from Key Informant Interviews have been analysed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to discrimination, structural barriers, informal practices, and perceptions of workplace safety and career progression.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Given the sensitivity of the issues related to harassment, discrimination, pay equity, and workplace retaliation, strict ethical safeguards have been maintained throughout the study. The survey questionnaire was distributed confidentially to participants either through designated focal persons within newsrooms or through direct outreach. The participation in the survey was voluntary, and

the respondents were clearly informed about the purpose of the study prior to getting their consent. Anonymity and confidentiality have been prioritized to reduce the risk of professional or personal harm to the respondents. No information has been collected that could reveal the identity of any individual respondent and all the data is stored securely. The findings of the survey are also being reported only in aggregated form to ensure that individual respondents or organisations cannot be identified.

### Limitations

The study has several limitations. As it relies primarily on self-reported data, the respondents may have

- 1) underreported the situation due to the fear of retaliation
- 2) normalized discriminatory practices
- 3) failed to contextualize due to limited awareness of their legal rights.

We also had limited access to internal organisational records, such as payroll data, human resource documentation, and internal policy frameworks.

These limitations have been mitigated through diverse sampling, anonymity protections, and the inclusion of qualitative insights to contextualize patterns observed in the data.

Another limitation that we could not mitigate relates to the geographical representation of the respondents. While the research team sought to include digital newsrooms from across Pakistan, representation from Balochistan remained limited, with only two media outlets from that province participating in the survey. As a result, the survey's findings may not fully capture the specific structural, economic, and workplace dynamics affecting journalists in Balochistan.

## Expected Outcomes

The expected outcome of the research study is a comprehensive gender mapping of digital newsrooms in Pakistan, providing both a gender equity profile and a legal compliance snapshot of the organisations participating in that mapping.

The study aims to identify systemic barriers faced by women journalists, highlight gaps between legal frameworks and workplace practices, and develop practical recommendations for digital news media owners, policymakers, and media development advocates. It also establishes a baseline for future monitoring and evaluation of gender equity within Pakistan's digital news media sector.



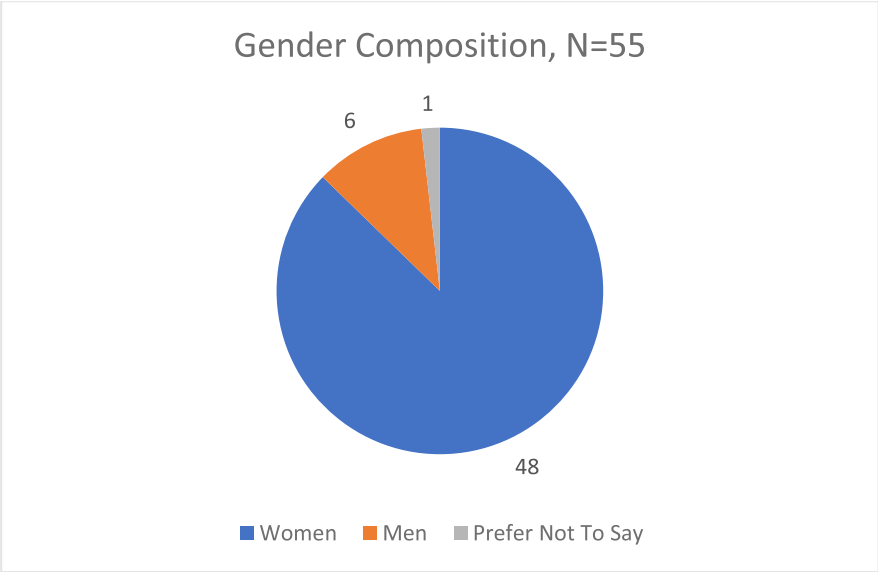
## Chapter 3: Profile of Respondents and Media Organisations

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the demographic and professional profile of the survey respondents. It also delineates the key characteristics of the digital news media organisations in which the respondents are employed. The understanding of the composition of the survey participants and their institutional contexts is essential for interpreting the findings related to gender equity, workplace conditions and women’s representation in leadership roles.

A total of 55 individuals participated in the survey. Of these, 48 respondents identified themselves as women, 6 identified themselves as men, and 1 respondent did not specify their gender. While the study primarily focuses on the experiences of women journalists, responses from the male respondents and those who did not disclose their gender provide additional context to understand the newsroom dynamics.

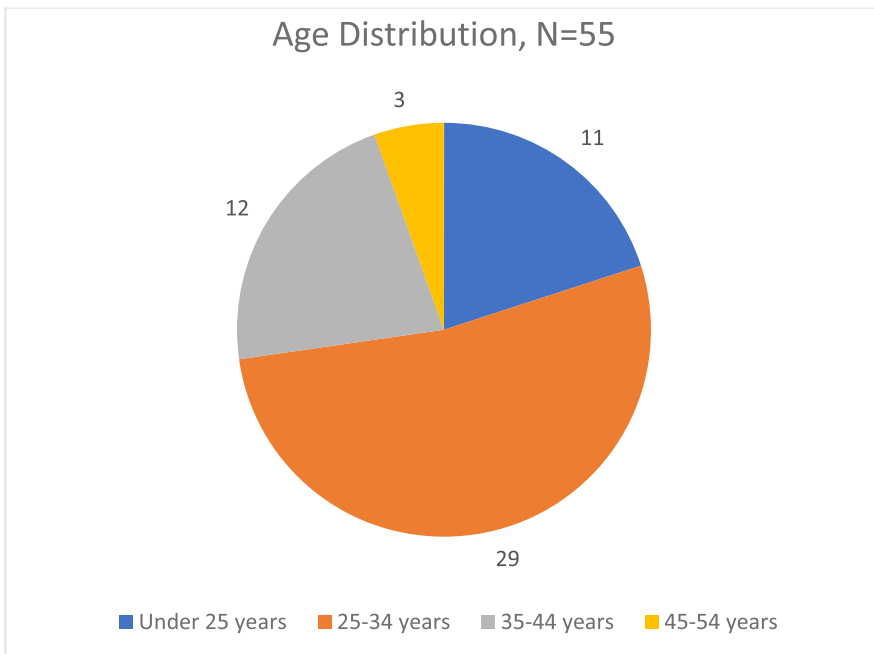
Figure 1: Gender Composition



### 3.2 Age Distribution

The respondents have a predominantly early- to mid-career age profile. The majority (29) are between 25 and 34 years of age. A further 12 falls within the 35–44 age bracket while 11 others are under the age of 25. Only 3 respondents are between 45 and 54 years of age (see Figure 2 below). Overall, the age distribution indicates that the sample is largely composed of younger professionals, with comparatively limited representation from older age groups.

Figure 2: Age Distribution



### 3.3 Professional Experience

Out of 55 respondents, 16 report to have less than two years of experience while 14 says they have been in journalism for two to five years. Another 10 respondents report to have between six and ten years of experience and 15 respondents show that they have more than 10 years of experience in journalism (see figure 3 below). This distribution suggests that the respondents have diverse professional

experiences, with representation from early-career journalists to those in the middle of their careers and finally to those with substantial experience

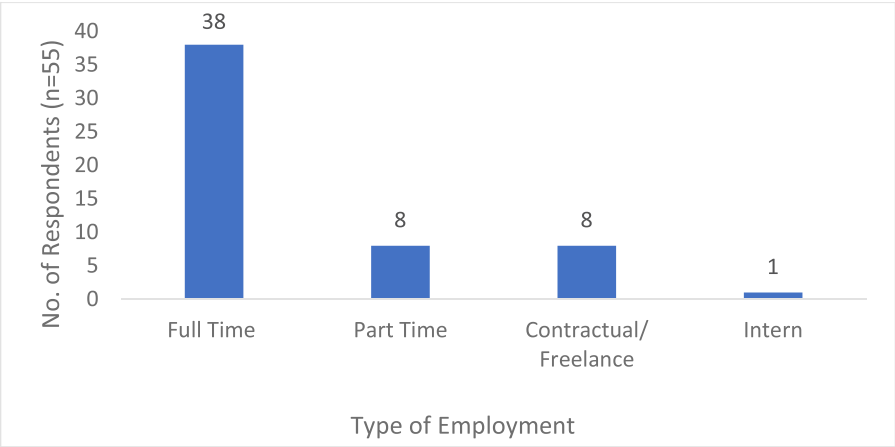
Figure 3: Years of Professional Experience



### 3.4 Employment Status and Designation

The survey respondents report a range of employment statuses. The majority (38) say they have been employed on a full-time basis while eight report to be working part-time. Another eight identify as contractual or freelance contributors whereas one respondent reports being engaged as an intern at the time of the survey (see figure 4 below).

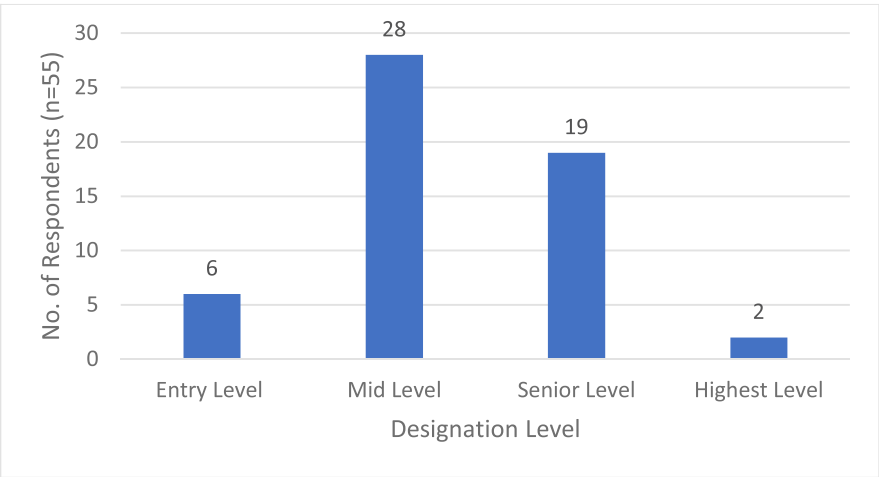
Figure 4: Type of Employment



The survey respondents represent a range of designations. The largest group among them (28) identify themselves as holding mid-level positions while 10 respondents report to be working at senior-level positions. Another 6 identify themselves as entry-level professionals. Only 2 respondents say that they hold positions at the highest level of their organisations (see figure 5 below).

This distribution reflects a strong presence of mid- and senior-level professionals within the sample, with comparatively limited representation of the highest decision-making tier.

Figure 5: Designation Level

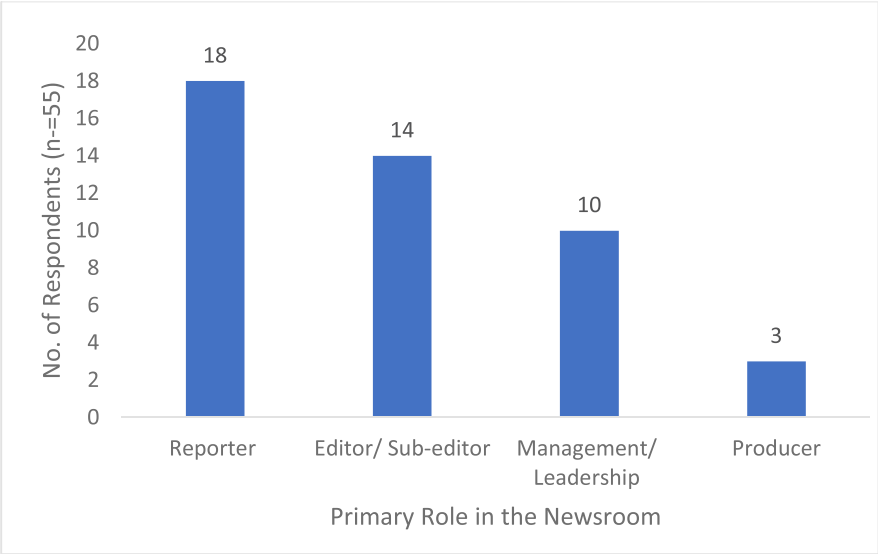


The respondents also report holding a range of roles within their respective newsrooms. The largest group (18) identify themselves as reporters, followed by 14 working as editors or sub-editors while another 10 reports to be working in management or leadership positions (see figure 6 below).

A smaller number of respondents represent other areas, including administration (3), production (3), and desk or research positions (3). Similarly, 2 respondents report to be working in digital media management while another 2 identify themselves as anchor-persons.

This distribution indicates that women in the sample are present across both editorial and non-editorial positions, with their strongest presence in reporting and mid-level editorial roles.

Figure 6: Primary Role in Newsroom

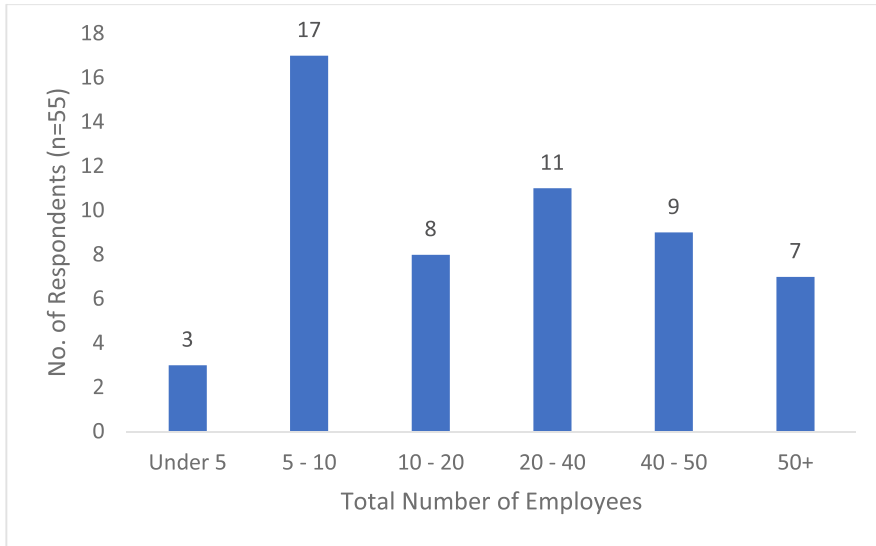


3.5 Organisational Profile

The survey respondents come from a diverse range of newsroom sizes. A small number of these organisations (3) have fewer than five staff members. The majority, 17, have between 5 to 10 employees

whereas 8 newsrooms represented in the survey employ between 10 and 20 staff members. Another 11 have 20 to 40 employees while 9 organisations have 40–50 employees. The remaining 7 newsrooms have more than 50 employees (see figure 7 below).

*Figure 7: Total Number of Employees*



### 3.6 Representation of Women in Newsrooms

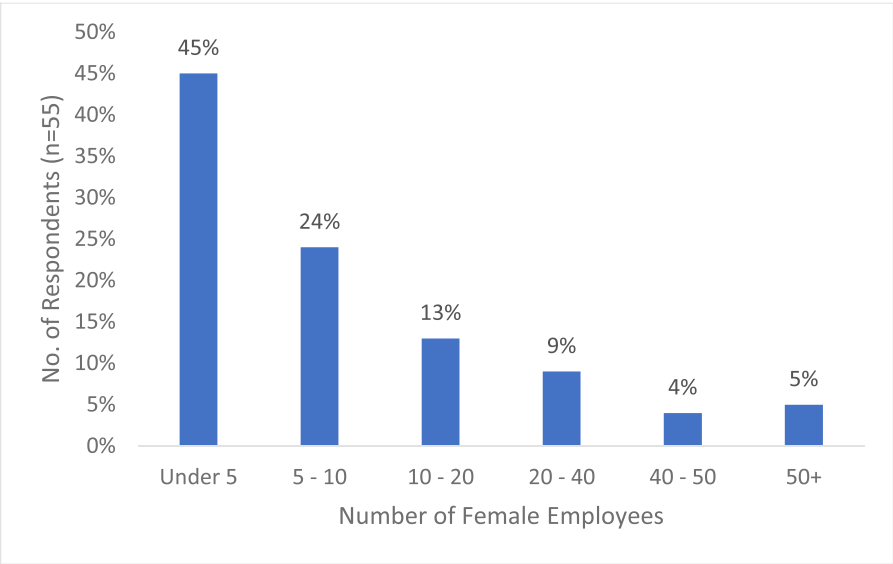
The survey findings indicate that women remain numerically underrepresented in most of the news organisations featured in it, particularly when compared with overall newsroom staffing levels. Nearly half of the surveyed organisations (45 percent) employ fewer than five women, suggesting that female representation in many newsrooms remains minimal relative to total staff strength.

A further 24 percent surveyed organisations employ between five and ten women, indicating that even in moderately sized newsrooms, the presence of women remains relatively limited. Only 13 percent surveyed organisations report employing between 10 and 20 women, while a much smaller proportion reports the numbers of female employees larger than that.

Surveyed organisations with 20 or more women employees are comparatively rare, representing only about 18 percent of the sample. Within this group, very few newsrooms employ more than 40 women, suggesting that substantial female presence tends to occur only in larger news organisations with greater staff strength (see figure 8 below).

These findings suggest that women are often found in relatively small numbers even in medium or large newsrooms, pointing to a persistent structural gender gaps within the digital news media workforce. These small numbers may also be the reason why their presence in decision-making spaces, newsroom hierarchies and other leadership positions remains low.

Figure 8: Number of Female Employees



### 3.7 Conclusion

The demographic and professional profile of the survey respondents highlights that the sample largely comprises of early- and mid-career journalists working in small to medium-sized digital news media organisations. While the respondents do a diverse range of newsroom roles and have different experience levels, women among

them remain concentrated in reporting and mid-level editorial positions, with limited presence at the highest leadership levels.

The profile of the surveyed organisations also indicates that many digital newsrooms operate with relatively small staff sizes which shapes their employment structures, role distribution and opportunities for career advancement. At the same time, the analysis of workforce composition suggests that women are often present in relatively small numbers within news organisations even where overall staff size is quite large.

These patterns, when observed collectively, provide important context for the subsequent chapters of the study, which examine gender dynamics in recruitment, workplace atmosphere, career progression and institutional policies within the digital news media sector.



## Chapter 4: Gender Distribution in Newsrooms

While the previous chapter provides an overview of the demographic and professional profile of the survey respondents and the characteristics of the digital news media organisations included in the study, understanding gender equity within newsrooms requires a closer examination of how women are found across different organisational roles. This chapter, therefore, moves beyond the profiles of the respondents to analysing patterns of women's presence and gender distribution within newsroom structures because it is an important indicator of gender equity in news media organisations. The distribution of women's presence across editorial, administrative, technical, and reporting roles, indeed, provides important insight into how gender dynamics operate within newsroom hierarchies and professional spaces. It seeks to identify areas where progress has been made as well as structural gaps that continue to affect women's participation and advancement within the sector.

### 4.1 Women in Senior Editorial Roles

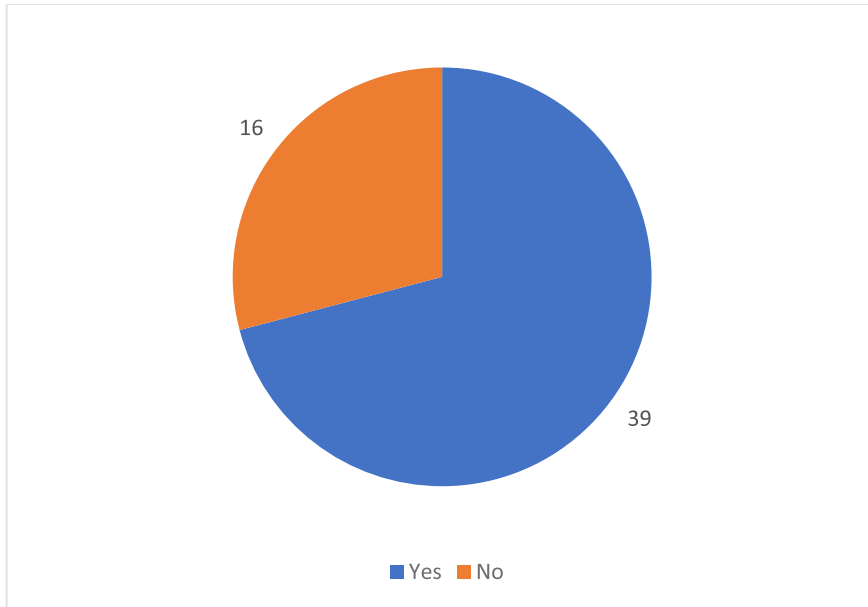
A majority of the survey respondents (39 out of 55) report the presence of women in editorial positions, but a significant minority (16 out of 55) says that no women occupy such roles in their organisations (see Figure 9 below).

Although the overall figures suggest that women have achieved some degree of presence in editorial functions, the survey data also reveals persistent gaps. Nearly one-third of the respondents report the absence of women in editorial leadership in their organisations, indicating that gender parity in decision-making roles remains uneven in those organisations.

Importantly, the presence of women in editorial roles does not necessarily equate with their proportional presence or influence in high-level decision-making. The survey findings suggest that

structural barriers to women's advancement into senior editorial leadership continues to exist even while progress has been made in some newsrooms.

Figure 9: Number of Women in Senior Editorial Positions



## 4.2 Women in Administrative Roles

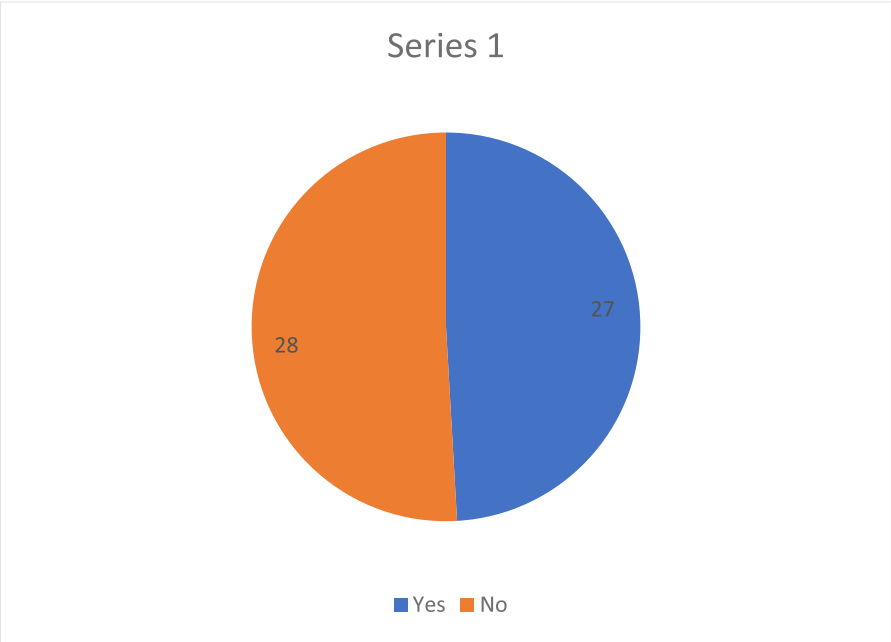
The survey responses are nearly evenly divided when asked whether women are represented in administrative roles within their organisations, including in human resources and finance departments: 27 of them report the presence of women in these roles; 28 respond that there are no women in these roles in their organisations (see Figure 10 below).

These near-equal responses suggest significant variation across news organisations. While some newsrooms demonstrate gender inclusion beyond editorial functions, others appear to lack women's presentation even in administrative or support roles traditionally perceived as more accessible to women.

These findings challenge assumptions that women are concentrated in administrative departments within news media organisations. Instead, their presence appears inconsistent and institution-specific,

pointing to broader structural disparities in recruitment and organisational culture across the sector.

Figure 10: Number of Women in Administrative Roles (e.g. HR, finance, etc.)



4.3 Women in Tech Roles

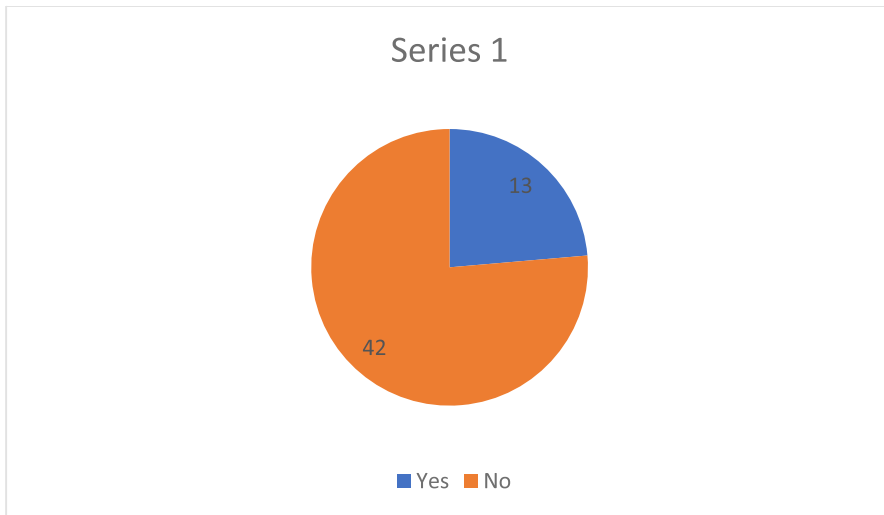
When the respondents are asked whether women are present in technical and IT-related roles within their organisations, a clear majority (42 out of 55) report that women are not present in these roles. Only 13 indicate the presence of women in these technical positions (see Figure 11 below).

This significant disparity highlights a pronounced gender gap in the technical infrastructure of the surveyed newsroom. While women are present across reporting and mid-level editorial functions, technical domains continue to be male dominated.

The under-presence of women in IT and technical functions has broader implications for their career progression, the

acknowledgement of their digital proficiency knowledge and their decision-making power within Pakistan's evolving news media ecosystem. As newsrooms increasingly rely on digital platforms, data systems and other technologies for producing and disseminating their content, women's exclusion from technical roles risks reinforcing the already existing structural inequities within the digital media landscape.

Figure 11: Number of Women in Technical Roles (e.g. IT or Tech department, etc.)



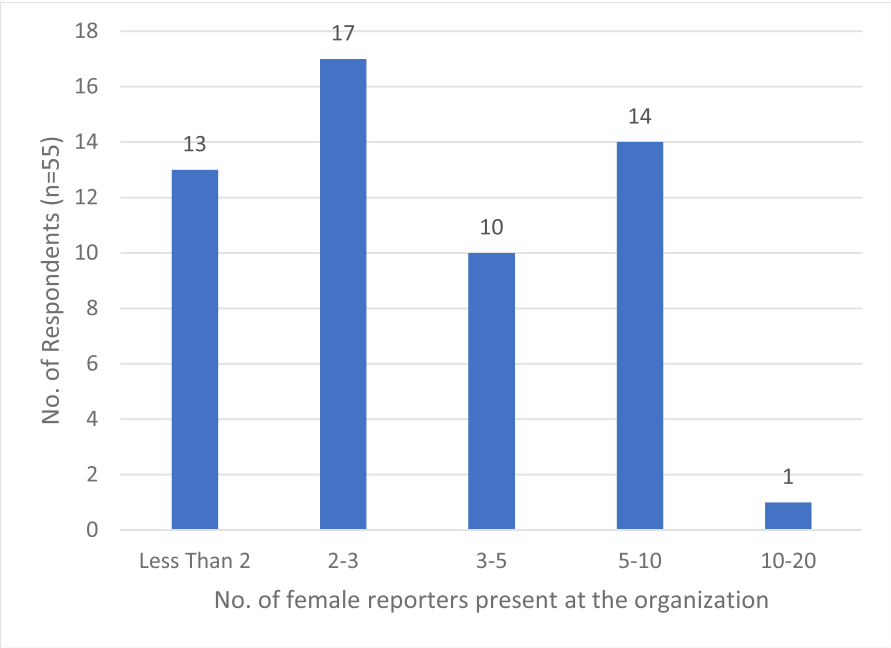
#### 4.4 Ratio of Female Reporters

When the respondents are asked about the number of female reporters present in their organisations, 17 of them report that their organisations employ only between two and three female reporters. Another 13 respondents say that less than two female reporters are working in their organisation while 10 respondents report their number to be between three and five. Only 14 respondents report that their organisations have between five and 10 female reporters. More importantly, just one respondent says that the number of female reporters in their organisation is between 10 and 20 (see Figure 12 below).

The survey findings suggest that in a substantial number of organisations, the number of female reporters remains low. While

some newsrooms have moderate presence of women, their larger presence in reporting positions is a rare phenomenon. This pattern points to a continued gender imbalance in frontline reporting roles across the sector.

Figure 12: Number of Female Reporters at Each Organisation



### 4.5 Insights from Key Informant Interviews

As explained earlier, the survey findings are contextualized through insights from five key informant interviews (KIIs) conducted with senior women journalists and media professionals working in print, broadcast, and digital media outlets. These interviews provide first hand perspective on women’s presence in newsrooms and the structural factors shaping their participation in other editorial and professional roles.

Some of the key informants note that women’s participation in Pakistani newsrooms has increased over the past two decades, particularly in digital media platforms. They, however, emphasize that this increased participation has not always translated into equal

influence for women within newsroom decision-making structures. At least one interviewee observes that while women are frequently visible as anchor-persons or reporters in broadcast media, men continue to dominate positions that shape editorial agendas. Positions such as bureau chiefs, news directors and senior editors, thus, remain largely in men's hands, suggesting that visibility in public-facing roles does not necessarily correspond to women's equal presence in positions of editorial authority.

The Interviewees also reflect on how gender composition of newsrooms has evolved across different parts of the digital news media sector. Some of them note that English-language print publications historically have relatively higher presence of women in editorial decision-making roles, particularly in magazine sections and feature desks. In contrast, broadcast media outlets often have women in visible roles, but their editorial decision-making remains concentrated elsewhere. These observations highlight how women's presence varies across different types of news outlets.

The interviewees also point to regional variations in women's presence in newsrooms. They say that newsrooms in Karachi have historically demonstrated greater gender diversity compared to those in other cities. Those who have worked in newsrooms in urban centres other than Karachi describe limited female presence in reporting roles and editorial decision-making spaces. These observations suggest that gender dynamics in newsrooms vary across geographic contexts within the news media industry.

The interviewees also note that women's presence differs in different newsroom functions. For instance, they have achieved a stronger presence in magazine journalism, feature writing, and desk-based editorial roles but field reporting, particularly in areas associated

with 'hard' news, has historically seen lower female participation.<sup>3</sup> Some interviewees attribute this pattern to longstanding assumptions about that women's do not have the mobility due to concerns about their safety to do cover hard news. For the same reasons of safety and mobility, they also generally assumed to be unable to do irregular working hours associated with field reporting.

At the same time, however, the interviewees point to gradual changes in these patterns. Some of them note that younger women journalists are increasingly covering political developments, court proceedings and other public affairs issues, reflecting a gradual expansion of women's participation in traditionally male-dominated reporting domains. Digital journalism is also said to have created new entry points for women journalists due to its relatively flexible workflows.

Overall, insights from the KIIs reinforce the survey's findings that while women's participation in journalism has expanded in reporting and editorial roles, their presence remains uneven across newsroom functions and organisational hierarchies. These findings suggest that strengthening women's presence in editorial leadership and decision-making roles is an important step towards fostering more inclusive newsroom environments and advancing gender equity within the news media sector.

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<sup>3</sup> "The Challenges of a Female Reporter in Pakistan / IFJ." Ifj.org, 24 July 2014, [www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/human-rights/article/the-challenges-of-a-female-reporter-in-pakistan](http://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/human-rights/article/the-challenges-of-a-female-reporter-in-pakistan). Accessed 10 Mar. 2026.

## Chapter 5 – Recruitment, Career Progression, and Access to Opportunities

Recruitment practices, promotion mechanisms, and access to professional development opportunities shape not only who enters journalism but also how journalists progress within newsroom hierarchies. While formal policies may promote fairness and merit-based advancement, informal practices such as network-based hiring, unclear promotion criteria and/or gendered allocation of assignments can influence professional trajectories in significant ways.

This chapter examines the structures as well as perceptions that surround recruitment, career progression and access to professional development opportunities within digital news media organisations. It analyses the way journalists get their jobs, perceptions about gender neutrality in recruitment processes, opportunities for promotion, and the allocation of influential reporting beats. The chapter also explores how workplace practices, such as leave policies, intersect with perceptions of professional advancement. It, thus, seeks to identify both formal and informal factors that shape career opportunities for journalists within the digital news media sector.

### 5.1 Recruitment Practices and Entry Pathways

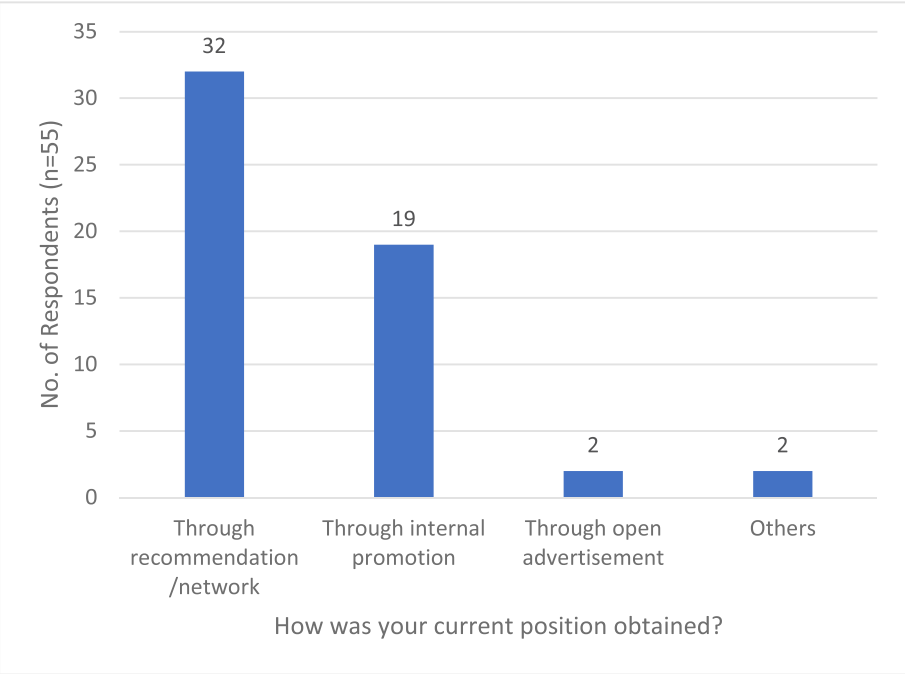
When the survey respondents are asked how they obtained their current positions within their organisations, a majority (32 out of 55) report securing jobs through professional networks or recommendations. Another 19 say they got their current jobs through internal promotion. In contrast, only two respondents report to have obtained their positions through open advertisement while another two say they were selected through other ways (see Figure 13 below).



These findings indicate a strong reliance on informal recruitment mechanisms within digital news organisations. While internal promotion appears to function as a pathway for career advancement, the limited use of open advertisements suggests that formal and transparent hiring processes are not consistently institutionalised.

The predominance of network-based recruitment raises important equity considerations. Where hiring relies heavily on informal networking, access to employment opportunities remains uneven, potentially reinforcing existing power structures and limiting entry for those outside the established professional orders.

Figure 13: Respondents share how their current position was obtained.



5.2 Perceptions of Gender Neutrality in Recruitment

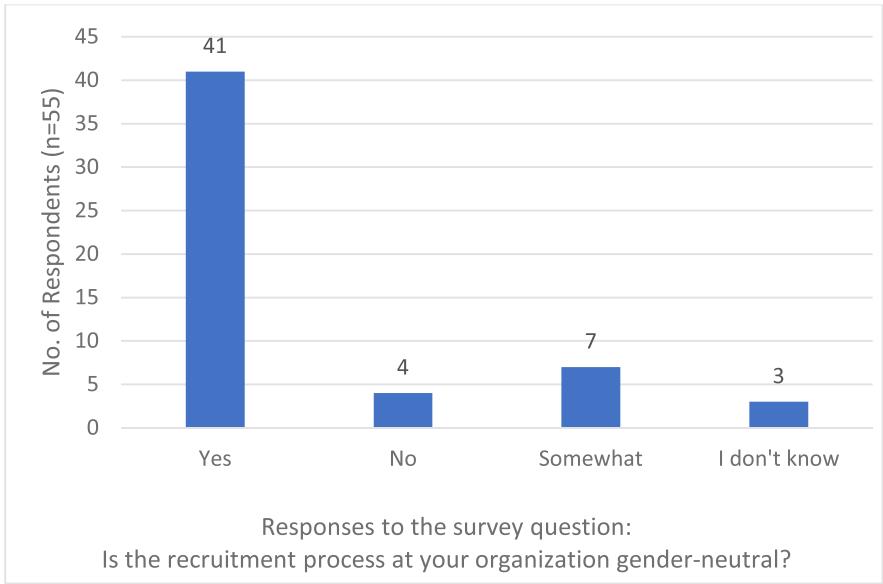
A majority of the survey respondents (41 out of 55) perceive recruitment practices to be gender-neutral, suggesting that women face no discrimination during the hiring process. Another seven respondents, however, say that these processes are only somewhat

gender-neutral while four of them report that they are not gender-neutral (see Figure 14 below).

While these results show that the dominant perception among the respondents is that recruitment processes are fair gender-wise, this data needs to be analysed very carefully. By acknowledging the presence of gender bias in recruitments, the respondents would be self-incriminating -- that their own appointments were made through an unfair system. It is also important to distinguish between perceived neutrality and structural neutrality. Even where processes are viewed as fair, reliance on informal hiring pathways, such as networks and personal recommendations, inadvertently disadvantage those without access to the established professional circles. These circles are famously dominated by men as is demonstrated by the press clubs' leaderships and hierarchies in journalists' unions.

Equally importantly, the dissenting notes also warrant attention as approximately a quarter of the respondents either question or lacked clarity regarding the neutrality of recruitment processes. This indicates that, despite generally positive responses, recruitment transparency is not a uniform experience across the surveyed organisations.

Figure 14: Respondents share if the recruitment process at their organisation is gender-neutral

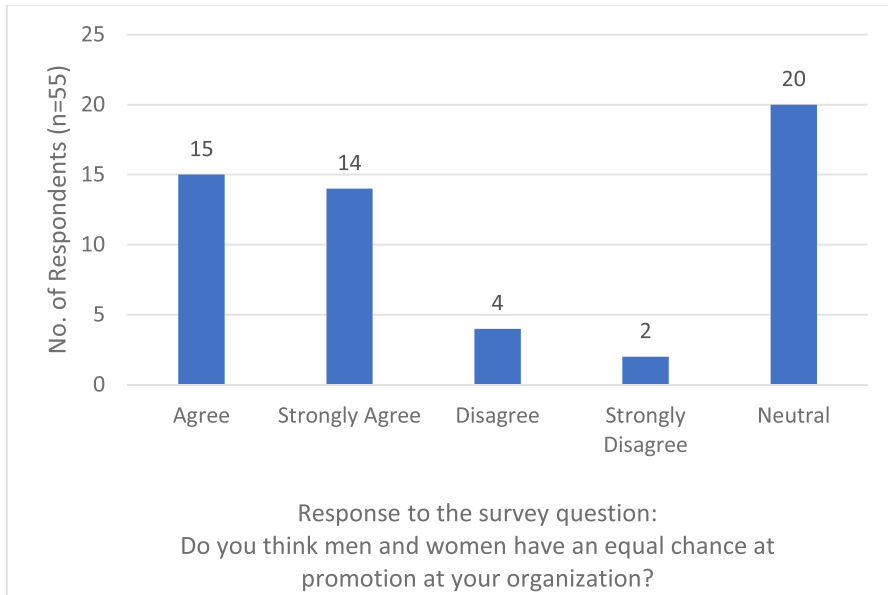


5.3 Promotion Policies and Career Advancement

When asked whether men and women have equal chances of promotion within their organisations, 15 respondents agree and another 14 strongly agree. Another 20 respondents, however, select a neutral position while four respondents disagree and two strongly disagree (see Figure 15 below).

While a majority perceive promotional opportunities to be equitable, the high proportion of neutral responses is notable. More than one-third of respondents neither affirm nor reject the question, suggesting uncertainty, lack of information and/or limited insights into the promotion processes. The presence of dissenting views, although smaller in number, also indicates that the perceptions of advancement equity are not uniform across the surveyed organisations.

Figure 15: Respondents share their opinion on whether they believe men and women have equal chances of promotion at their organisation



## 5.4 Gendered Allocation of Beats and Professional Visibility

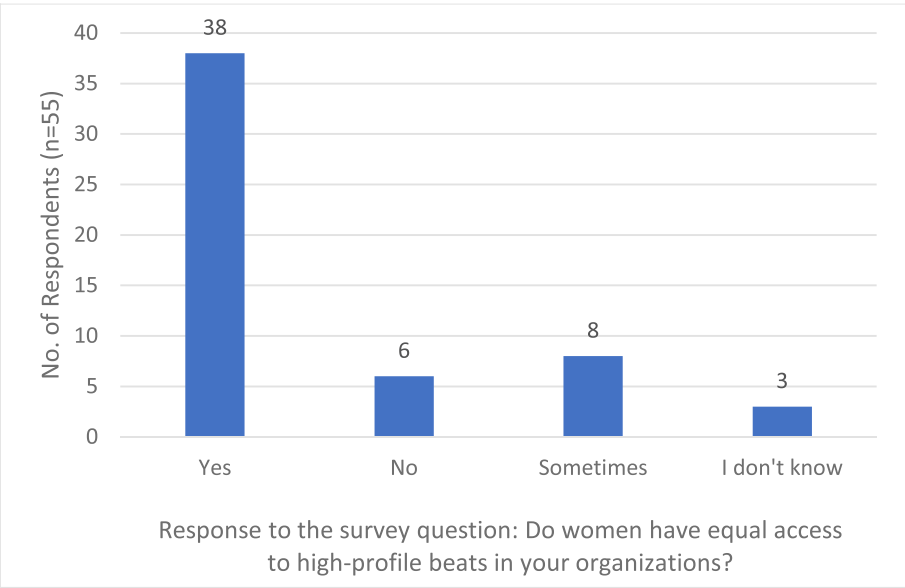
### *Access to High-Profile Beats*

Access to high-visibility assignments is closely linked to professional recognition, editorial influence, and leadership pathways within journalism. Even limited inconsistencies in beat allocation practices, therefore, can easily have serious implications for the career progression of female journalists. When asked about the issue many of the respondents (38 out of 55) say that women do have equal access to high-profile beats within their organisations. Another eight respondents, however, report that this access is equal only sometimes while six more respond that women do not have equal access. Three respondents say they do not know (see Figure 16 below).

Although the dominant perception suggests a high level of equitable access to prominent reporting assignments the presence of conditional and negative responses cannot be overlooked as approximately a quarter of the respondents are either uncertain or

dissatisfied with it. These findings also underline the study’s limitations. Since it is focused only on digital news platforms, it does not fully capture the overall situation in Pakistan. This finding also runs counter to an earlier insight offered by the key informant interviews that women are often more present in English language journalism and there too in features and magazine sections which are not considered as much ‘hard’ beats as daily crime reporting or court and political reporting.

Figure 16: Response to the survey question: Do women have equal access to high-profile beats in your organisations?



*Informal Gender Perceptions in Beat Allocation*

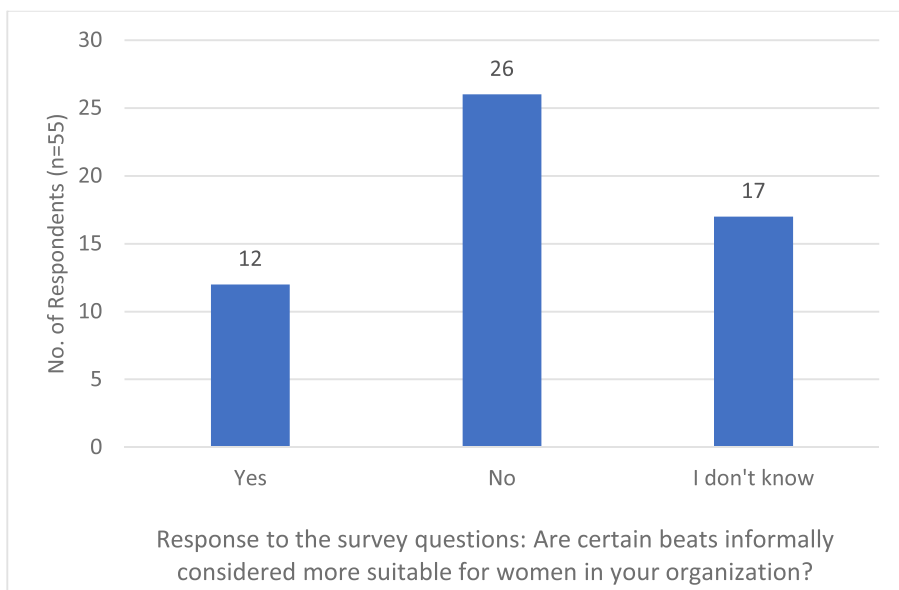
Nearly half of the respondents (26 out of 55) say that no beats are informally considered more suitable for women within their organisations. Another 12 respondents, however, reported that certain beats are indeed informally perceived as being more suitable for women, indicating that some degree of informal stereotyping persists in many news organisations.

Yet another 17 respondents state that they did not know if such categorization exists within their organisations (see Figure 17 below).

This relatively large number of respondents being uncertain suggests that informal practices surrounding beat allocation are not always explicitly acknowledged or discussed within newsrooms.

Even globally, women journalists are often associated with 'soft beats' such as lifestyle, culture, education, or social issues -- while men are more frequently assigned to 'hard beats' including politics, crime, defence, or investigative reporting.<sup>4</sup> Although the survey findings do not suggest universal presence of such gendered allocation of beats in digital news organisations, other responses show that such practices continue to influence beat allocation in many newsrooms.

*Figure 17: Response to the survey questions: Are certain beats informally considered more suitable for women in your organisation?*



<sup>4</sup> "The Challenges of a Female Reporter in Pakistan / IFJ." Ifj.org, 24 July 2014, [www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/human-rights/article/the-challenges-of-a-female-reporter-in-pakistan](http://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/human-rights/article/the-challenges-of-a-female-reporter-in-pakistan). Accessed 10 Mar. 2026.

*Distribution of Reporting Beats*

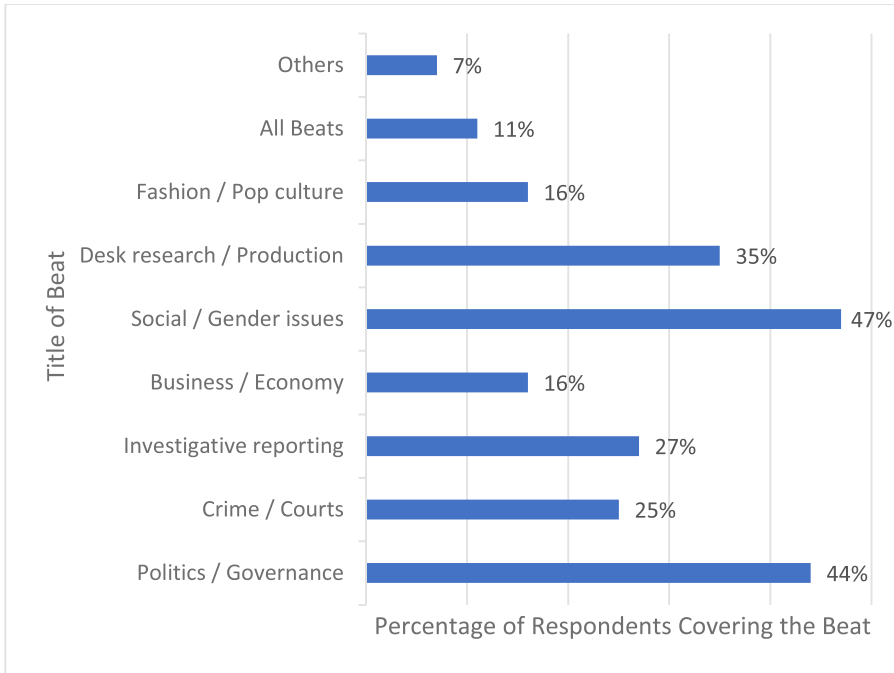
When asked to identify their primary beat within their organisation, women respondents report to be engaged in a wide range of reporting areas including both traditionally 'hard' and 'soft' ones.

The largest number of respondents (47 percent), however, reports to be covering social and gender issues, followed by 44 per cent saying that they cover politics and governance. A significant share of respondents (35 percent) also reports working in desk research and production roles. Additionally, 27 percent respondents say that they are involved in investigative reporting and 25 percent report covering crime and courts.

A smaller but notable portion of the respondents (16 percent) reports working on business and economy. A similar percentage of the respondents say they cover fashion or pop culture (16%) and another 11 percent report that they cover all beats (see Figure 18 below).

Overall, these findings suggest that women journalists are not confined solely to traditionally gendered areas of reporting. Their presence across politically and institutionally significant beats such as politics, crime, and investigative reporting indicates their expanding professional roles. Their highest presence in social and gender issues beats still reflects continued stereotyping that women are not suited to cover certain beats.

Figure 18: Response to the Survey Question: What is your primary beat at your organisation?



## 5.5 Impact of Leave on Career Progression

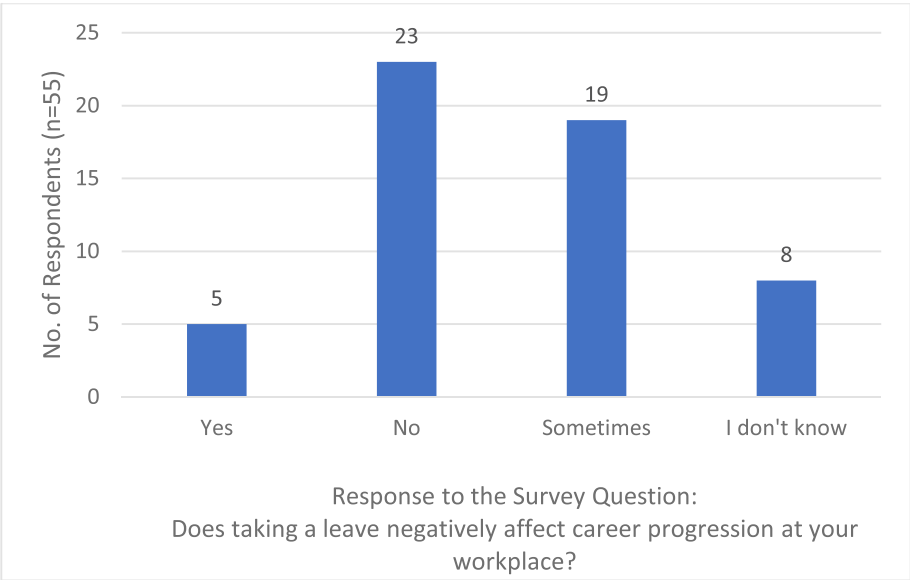
The survey respondents report mixed responses when asked if taking leave negatively affects their career progression.

A plurality of respondents (23) reported that taking leave does not negatively affect their career progression, but 19 respondents say that leave sometimes affects their career progression. A smaller group (five respondents) states that taking leave always negatively affects their career progression while eight respondents report that they did not know about it (see Figure 19 below).

These findings indicate the persistence of informal workplace norms that influence how leave is perceived in relation to professional commitment and advancement.



Figure 19: Response to the Survey Question: Does taking a leave negatively affect career progression at your workplace?



### 5.6 Insights from Key Informant Interviews on Recruitment and Career Progression

The findings of the key informant interviews differ significantly from the survey responses as far as recruitment practices, promotion opportunities and access to professional assignments is concerned. Most of the interviewees point out that recruitment in the news media industry often relies on informal professional networks rather than on fully institutionalized hiring systems. They say that while news organisations increasingly advertise vacant positions and express commitments to gender diversity, recommendations, personal networks, and professional familiarity continue to influence hiring decisions. This means that individuals already connected to the established professional orders may have greater access to job opportunities compared to those who are outside these networks.

The Interviewees also point out that gender norms and workplace expectations can influence the roles offered to women journalists. Most of them note that, early in their careers, women are frequently

encouraged to pursue desk-based editorial roles or magazine journalism rather than field reporting positions. In some cases, newsroom managers express concerns about the women's mobility and safety and mention irregular working hours when assigning reporting roles to women. As a result, women are often pushed towards beats perceived as more socially oriented, including culture, lifestyle, education, and other social affairs.

At the same time, however, the interviewees point to gradual shifts in these patterns. Several of them note that younger women journalists are increasingly covering political developments, court proceedings, and other public affairs issues -- trends that corroborated the survey's findings. Though the expansion of digital news platforms is also acknowledged as having created more opportunities for women to participate in reporting and content production, the interviewees argue that access to influential assignments still varies across news organisations and depends upon newsroom cultures and leadership practices.

As far as promotion pathways are concerned, the interviewees seem to be divided. While some of them believe that career advancement is linked to professional competence and experience, others note that promotion processes are not always governed by clearly defined criteria. The second group points out that in environments where promotion decisions are not transparently laid down and communicated across the organisation, employees have limited understanding of the factors that shape their career progression. Some interviewees also suggested that the elevation to editorial leadership positions is influenced either by relationships with senior management or by ownership structures of news media organisations.

The interviewees, however, agree that institutional leadership plays an important role in shaping opportunities for women journalists. They observe that the organisations that have women in senior

editorial or management roles often demonstrate greater openness to inclusive recruitment and assignment practices. Female newsroom leaders are also seen as being more likely to encourage women reporters to pursue challenging beats and to create professional environments where younger journalists feel supported in developing their careers.

## Chapter 6: Pay, Benefits, and Employment Conditions

Salary structures and employment benefits are important indicators of workplace equity and institutional transparency. Pay gap, opacity in salary determination and lack of access to employment benefits influence not only employee satisfaction but also make an organisation discriminatory towards its employees. In the news media sector, where employment conditions vary widely across organisations, understanding how journalists perceive compensation practices provides important insights into broader workplace dynamics.

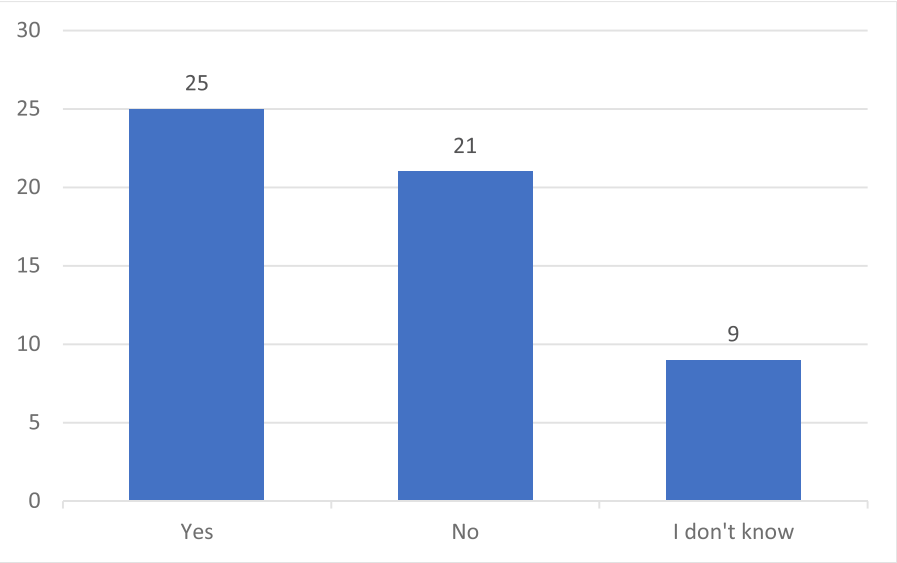
This chapter examines the survey respondents' perceptions of pay equity, transparency in salary-related decisions and real or perceived gender disparities in compensation. By doing so, the chapter seeks to assess whether women experience these remuneration-related practices differently compared to their male counterparts.

### 6.1 Pay Equity

When the respondents were asked whether men and women in similar roles receive equal pay within their organisations, their opinions are almost equally divided. While 25 of them believe that men and women receive equal pay, 21 of them say that women and men do not receive equal pay, suggesting that gender-based disparities in compensation exist in their organisations. Additionally, nine respondents report that they do not know whether people of different genders receive different salaries in their organisations. If nothing else, these responses reflect the absence of transparency in salary-related matters in their places of employment (see Figure 20 below). Together, the latter two responses suggest that salary-equity and transparency about salary-related issues both remain significant problems within digital newsrooms in Pakistan. Without clear, transparent and equitable compensation frameworks, it becomes

difficult for women employees to know and assess if they are being discriminated against.

Figure 20: Response to Survey Question: Do men and women in similar roles receive equal pay?



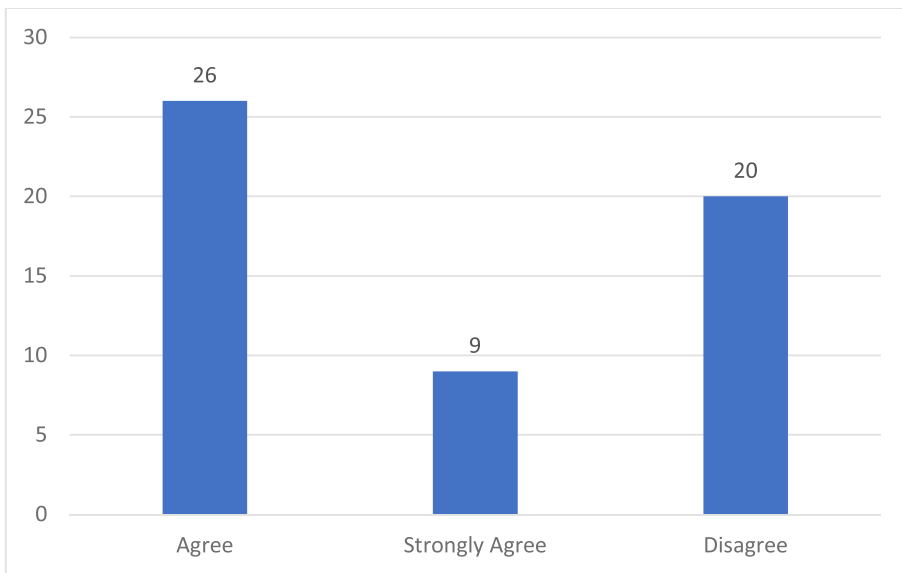
6.2 Transparency in Salary Structures

Mixed responses are received when the respondents are asked if decisions related to salaries and compensation in their organisations are made transparently. A total of 35 respondents believe that these salary decisions are made transparently within their organisations – with 26 of them agreeing with the statement and nine agreeing strongly. Even though these respondents form a clear majority in the total sample, another 20 respondents disagree with the statement. Since this is a significant minority (representing close to 40 percent of the sample), its responses cannot be overlooked as they suggest that concerns regarding opaque or unclear salary-setting processes persist in several newsrooms (see Figure 21 below). These responses also suggest that salary structures and decision-making processes are not consistently and clearly communicated to the employees in every organisation included in the survey. In environments where

compensation frameworks are not clearly articulated, employees find it difficult to assess whether pay decisions are based on objective criteria such as experience, role, and performance or they are being made based on any biases such as gender stereotypes.

The survey findings, therefore, highlight the importance of establishing clear and transparent compensation policies because these generate greater trust among employees and help ensure that compensation practices are perceived as fair and equitable.

*Figure 21: Response to survey question: Do you think decisions related to salaries and pay in your organisation are made transparently?*

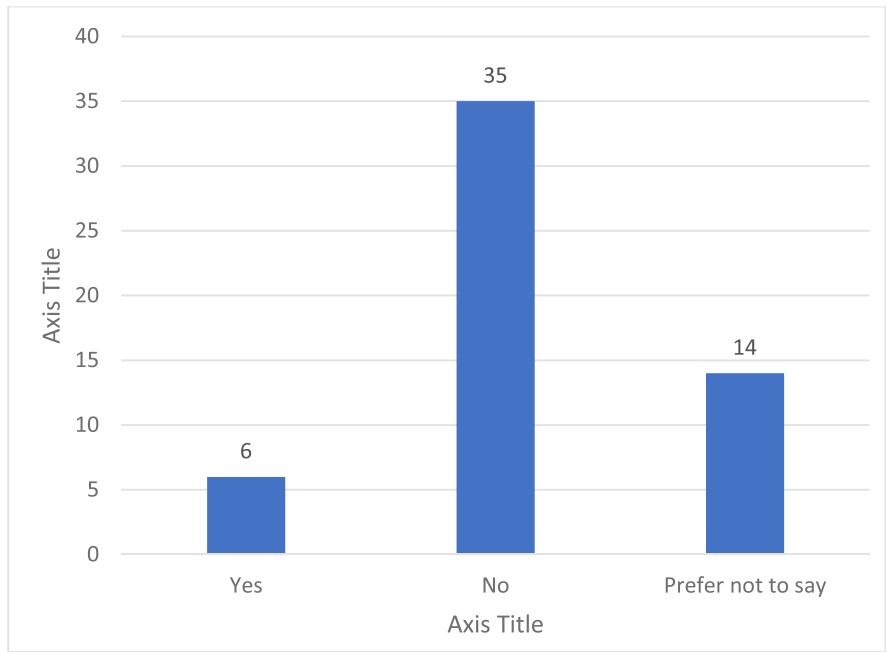


### 6.3 Perceptions of Gender-Based Wage Gaps

While most the respondents do not believe they are personally being underpaid due to their gender, a notable minority expresses concerns or chooses not to disclose their views. A vast majority, 35 respondents, say that they do not feel underpaid due to their gender. On the other hand, six respondents report that they are being underpaid. In addition, 14 other respondents preferred to stay silent on the issue (see Figure 22 below).

The relatively high number of respondents who declined to provide a response indicate the sensitivity surrounding the issue which remains a common challenge in workplace research. It also reflects lack of information or uncertainty among women journalists about how their salaries compare with those of their colleagues in similar roles.

Figure 22: Response to survey question: Do you feel that you are being underpaid due to your gender?



### 6.4 Insights from Key Informant Interviews on Pay and Employment Conditions

Most of the Interviewees argue that salary structures in the news media industry often lack transparency. Women journalists typically have limited information about the compensation levels of their colleagues working in similar roles, making it difficult to determine whether remuneration practices are equitable. As a result, even when news organisations claim to follow equal pay principles,

employees may remain uncertain about how salaries are determined and whether gender plays a role in that determination.

Some interviewees also report observing situations in their journalistic careers where male colleagues with comparable or lower levels of experience received higher salaries or additional benefits than their female counterparts. They, however, acknowledged that such disparities are difficult to confirm or deny because the information about salaries is generally kept confidential within news media organisations.

Equally importantly, the Interviewees point out that broader structural conditions within the news media industry influence compensation structures more than anything else. They highlight financial instability within the sector, including budget constraints and problems in income generation as major reasons behind generally low salaries, delay in the payment of salaries and even job security. These problems, according to them, affect journalists across the profession, at times regardless of gender. These also limit the capacity of the news organisations to establish standardised pay structures or comprehensive benefit systems.

Interviewees additionally note that women presence or absence in leadership positions is a major factor in determining whether, overall, women journalists are being paid less than male journalists. Since senior editorial and managerial positions typically carry higher salaries and benefits, limited female presence in them contributes to the broader gender pay gap. Even when men and women receive similar pay while working on comparable positions, unequal access to senior roles certainly affects overall gender-based compensation patterns.

The interviewees are also mindful of the fact that some news organisations are making serious efforts to introduce equitable employment practices across genders. They explain how some



companies have implemented maternity leave policies, flexible work arrangements, and improved workplace benefits to support the well-being of their female employees. These examples illustrate that compensation structures can be equitable if an organisation's leadership has the will and the capacity to devise and implement them.

Overall, the interviewees reinforce the survey's findings by highlighting the complexities involved in pay gap or pay equity within the news media sector. While an overt or institutionalised wage discrimination may not always be present in news organisations, limited or absent transparency in salary structures, unequal presence of women in higher-paying leadership roles, and broader financial constraints within the news media can influence perceptions of fairness in remuneration. Strengthening transparency in compensation structures and expanding equitable access to leadership opportunities may, therefore, promote greater gender-based pay equity within the news organisations.

## Chapter 7: Workplace Environment, Well-being, and Institutional Support

Beyond recruitment, career progression, and compensation, the broader workplace environment plays an important role in shaping women journalists' professional experiences and well-being. Institutional safeguards, workplace support systems and the availability of clear organisational guidelines about workplace conduct can significantly influence how women navigate professional responsibilities, personal commitments, and gender-specific workplace challenges.

This chapter examines the extent to which digital news organisations in Pakistan provide institutional safeguards, workplace support structures and codes of conducts for interactions between different genders. It also explores if women are aware of workplace policies, availability of special gender-based facilities and perks (such as maternity and menstrual leave) for them and the broader organisational environment that can guarantee them a safe environment to do their work.

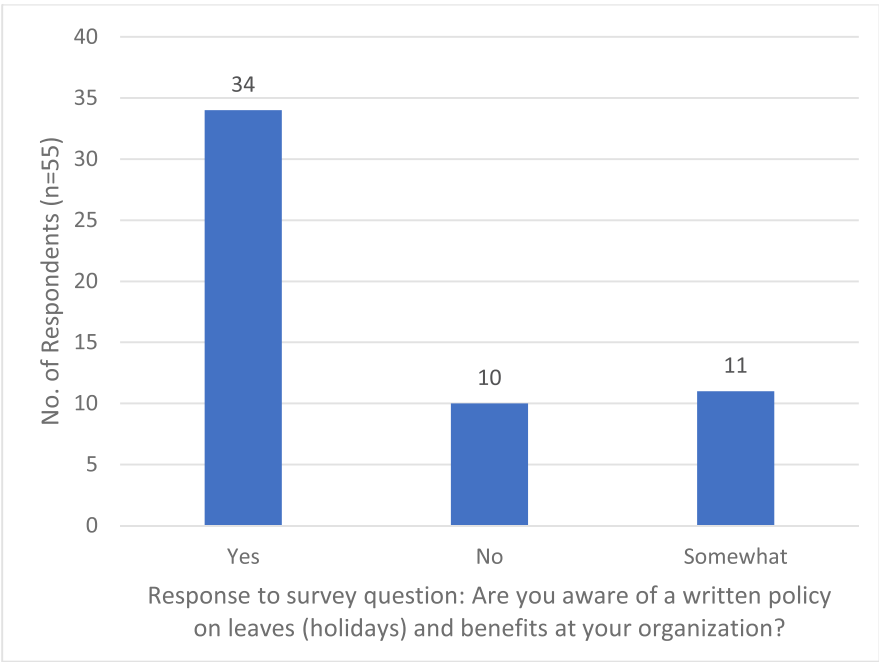
### 7.1 Leave Policies and Employee Benefits

#### *Awareness of Written Leave and Benefit Policies*

Most of the survey respondents (34 out of 55) say that they are aware of a written policy governing leaves and employee benefits within their organisations. Another 10 respondents, on the other hand, report that their organisations do not have a written policy while 11 others say that they are only partially somewhat aware of the existence or the contents of such a policy (see Figure 23 below). The latter two responses suggest that gaps in awareness and communication of these policies are quite widespread or, even worse, these policies do not exist. The absence of a written policy means that the administration in an organisation without a clearly laid down rules and regulations governing leaves must be running in

an arbitrarily, depending on the personal choices of the administrators. Women will clearly feel uncomfortable in such a situation, especially while seeking leaves for their gender-specific problems.

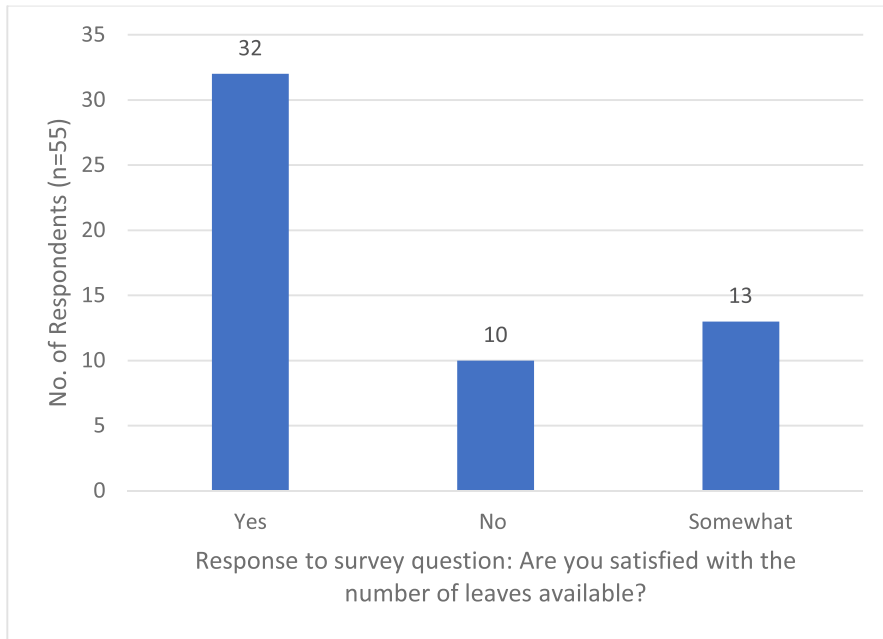
Figure 23: Response to survey question: Are you aware of a written policy on leaves (holidays) and benefits at your organisation?



*Satisfaction with Leave Provisions*

A majority of the survey respondents (32 out of 55) report that they are satisfied with existing leave provisions in their organisations, but another 13 respondents say that they are only somewhat satisfied and yet another 10 respondents say they are not satisfied at all (see Figure 24 below). This sizeable presence of partially satisfied or dissatisfied respondents suggests that news organisations that leave policies do not meet their needs. This type of work environment can be especially gruelling for women because some of their needs for obtaining leaves are integrally associated with their gender and/or their responsibilities of childcare and cooking etc.

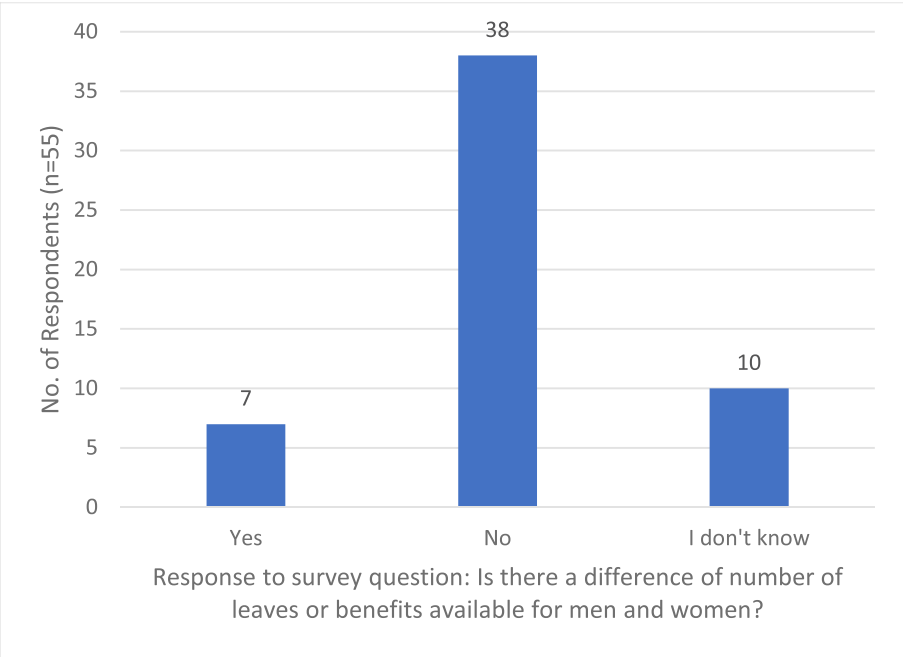
Figure 24: Response to survey question: Are you satisfied with the number of leaves available?



### *Gender Equality in Leave and Benefit Policies*

A large majority of the respondents (38 out of 55) report that there is no gender-based difference in obtaining leaves or receiving other workplace benefits. Another seven respondents, however, say that such differences do exist while 10 more respondents state that they did not know if such differences exist (see Figure 25 below). The latter two responses clearly point out that gender-based discrimination is quite common in Pakistani digital newsrooms even when it has been eradicated from most other digital news outlets.

Figure 25: Response to survey question: Is there a difference of number of leaves or benefits available for men and women?



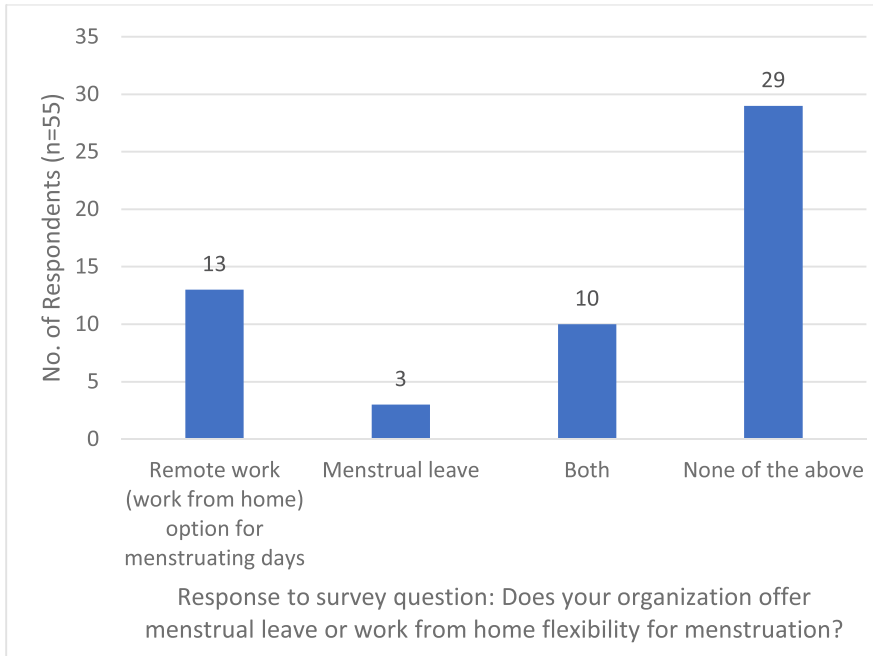
## 7.2 Gender-Responsive Workplace Policies and Benefits

### *Menstrual Leave and Flexible Work Arrangements*

When asked if their organisations provide menstrual leave or work-from-home flexibility during menstruation, most respondents say that such policies remain relatively limited in Pakistan’s digital newsrooms. Most of them (29 out of 55) report that their organisations offer neither menstrual leave nor work-from-home flexibility during menstruation. Only 13 respondents say their organisations allow remote work during menstruation while just three respondents report the availability of menstrual leave. An additional 10 respondents say their organisations provide both menstrual leave and work-from-home options (see Figure 26 below).

These responses clearly indicate that these policies are neither being universally implemented nor are they consistent and uniform across different news organisations.

Figure 26: Response to survey question: Does your organisation offer menstrual leave or work from home flexibility for menstruation?



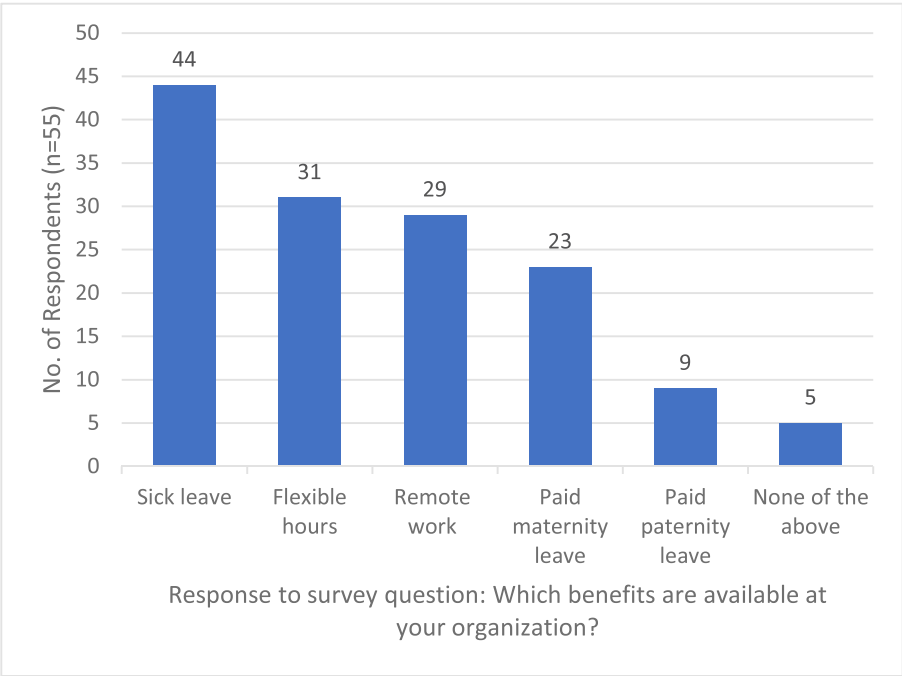
### *Availability of Workplace Benefits*

When the respondents are asked to identify the types of non-financial benefits or available to them, many of them acknowledge the presence of some basic benefits within their organisations. For instance, 44 respondents say that they can avail a certain number of sick leaves each year. Another 31 respondents that they have flexible working hours while 29 more say that they have the option to work remotely. More significantly, five respondents report that none of these benefits are available to them. This suggests that some of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century work practices still exist in some Pakistani digital newsrooms (see Figure 27 below).

As far as rather advanced benefits are concerned, the situation is even worse. Less than half of the survey respondents (23 out of 55) report that their organisations provide paid maternity leave while just nine of them state their organisations offer paid paternity leave.

These responses suggest that Pakistani digital newsrooms still have some way to go before bring their workplace policies up to date with the times.

Figure 27: Response to survey question: Which benefits are available at your organisation?

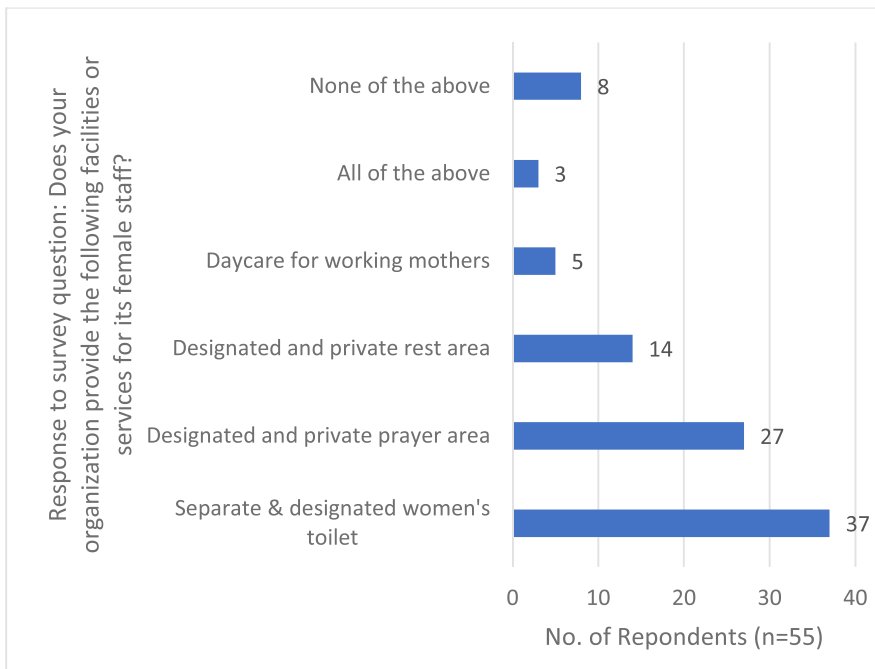


*Workplace Facilities for Female Staff*

The survey respondents acknowledge the presence of some basic women-specific facilities or services at many workplaces; most Pakistani digital newsrooms do not offer a comprehensive gender-responsive infrastructure to their female staff. For instance, 37 respondents say women have separate toilets at their workplaces. Another 27 respondents say women have separate prayer areas at their workplaces but only 14 of them acknowledge the presence of a designated rest area for women working in their organisations. Facilities supporting childcare at work are reported to be far less common. Only five respondents report that their organisations have such facilities. Even more importantly, only three respondents says

that their organisations provide all the women-specific facilities whereas a much larger number of respondents, eight to be exact, say their workplace do not offer any of these facilities (see figure 28 below). This means that most of the digital newsroom covered in this study are still to create a work environment that is conducive for women to work with mental and physical peace.

*Figure 28: Response to survey question: Does your organisation provide the following facilities or services for its female staff?*



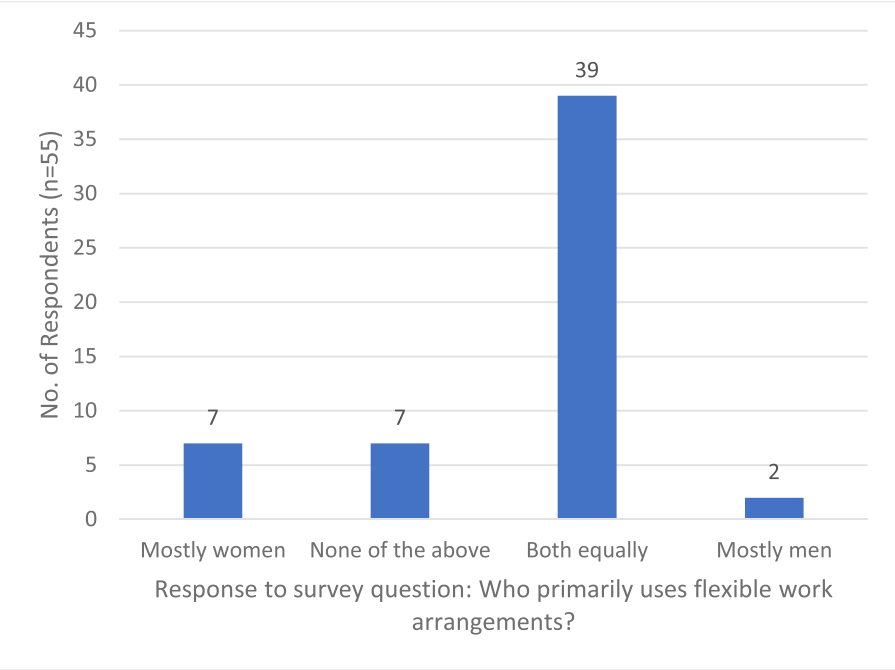
### 7.3 Use of Flexible Work Policies

When asked who primarily uses flexible work arrangements within their organisations, most of them (39 out of 55) say that such arrangements are used equally by both men and women. Another seven respondents, however, report that flexible work arrangements are mostly used by women while two respondents say that these are primarily used by men. An additional seven respondents say no one in their organisations enjoys flexible work policies (see Figure 29 below).



Overall, these findings acknowledge the presence of flexible work policies in most Pakistani digital newsrooms, but it is also obvious that these policies are neither universally available nor is their implementation consistent and always friendly towards women.

Figure 29: Response to survey question: Who primarily uses flexible work arrangements?



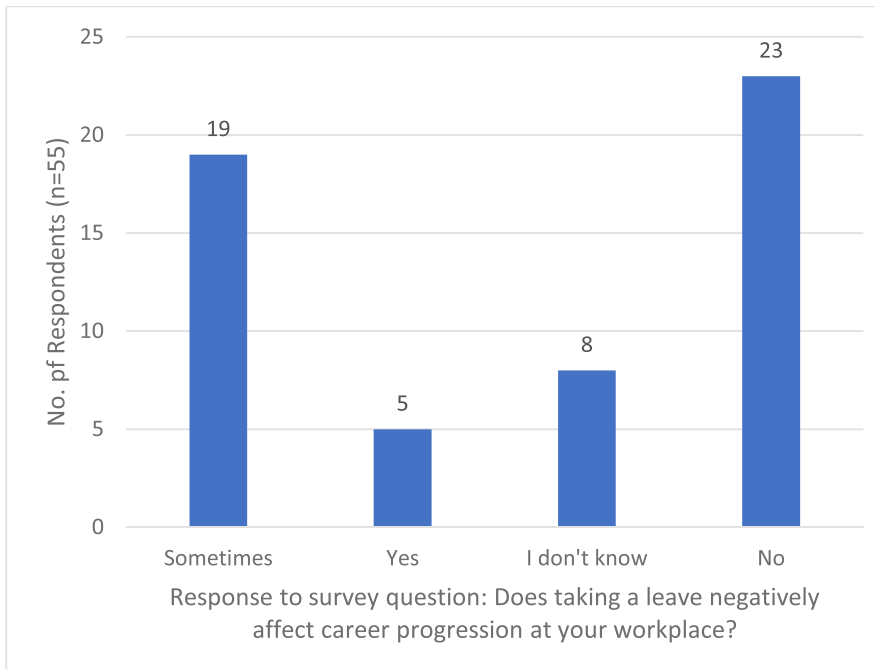
7.4 Perceived Impact of Leave on Career Progression

The survey respondents offer mixed responses when asked if taking leave negatively affects their career progression within their organisations. Less than half of them (23 out of 55) report that taking leave does not negatively affect their career progression but 19 of them say that it does sometimes affect their career progression. Another five respondents report that it always negatively affects their career progression. Eight others say they did not know if it has any effect or not.

These findings suggest that informal workplace norms and practices persist and influence how leaves are perceived both by the

employees and the employers in relation to professional advancement. This situation appears especially disadvantageous for women due to their special physical needs as well as childcare and other domestic responsibilities.

Figure 30: Response to survey question: Does taking a leave negatively affect career progression at your workplace?



## 7.5 Insights from Key Informant Interviews on Workplace Environment and Institutional Support

The participants in key informant interviews note that workplace culture within news organisations has evolved over time, particularly in relation to awareness of gender equity and professional conduct. Compared to previous decades, they say, journalists today appear to be more aware of their workplace rights, harassment laws and gender-sensitive professional norms. They attribute this shift to increased awareness through social media, legal frameworks, professional training initiatives and broader public discussions around workplace protections.

The interviewees, however, point out that increased awareness has not always translated into consistent and uniformly available institutional practices. They highlight significant variation across news media organisations and platforms as far as a women-friendly work environment is concerned. Some note that English-language newsrooms historically offer relatively more conducive work environments for women while workplace arrangements for women in broadcast and digital news media organisations differ greatly, depending on each organisation's size, culture and management practices.

The interviewees also point to generational shifts within the profession as an emerging influence on newsroom culture. Many of them observe that digital news platforms often employ younger journalists who may demonstrate greater openness to gender diversity and collaborative work environments. At the same time, they also note that generational differences can sometimes create tensions between younger reporters and more senior journalists, particularly in rapidly evolving digital newsrooms.

Workplace infrastructure and support facilities emerged as another important theme in these interviews. The interviewees report that while some organisations have introduced supportive policies, such as maternity leave, flexible working arrangements, or transport allowances, many workplaces still lack facilities that address the needs of women employees. They cite the absence of designated spaces for nursing mothers, limited childcare support, and inadequate sanitation facilities in many newsrooms as examples of this situation. Such infrastructural gaps, according to them, can affect women's mental and physical peace, performance at work and even participation in the workplace.

The Interviewees also underscore the broader economic context of the news media sector as a key factor influencing workplace conditions. Financial instability within many news organisations, they

say, are resulting in delayed salaries, layoffs, and job cuts which is having negative impacts on the well-being of their staff. In such circumstances, the interviewees note, institutional attention to work-life balance, employee support systems, or workplace reforms has become secondary to immediate operational concerns.

They also identify organisations that are making serious efforts to create more women-supportive work environments, through the introduction of flexible work arrangements, remote work options and other supportive practices to accommodate the gender-specific problems and responsibilities of their women employees.

## Chapter 8: Workplace Harassment, Safety, and Reporting Mechanisms

Ensuring a safe and gender-sensitive workplace is a critical component of gender equity in Pakistan's digital news media institutions. Policies and actions to address workplace harassment, staff training on gender sensitivity, and effective reporting mechanisms for gender-based safety and sensitivity play an essential role in protecting employees and fostering inclusive newsroom cultures. In Pakistan, legal frameworks such as the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010<sup>5</sup> have already established institutional obligations for employers to adopt anti-harassment policies, establish anti-harassment inquiry committees, and ensure accessible and effective complaint mechanisms.

This chapter examines the extent to which digital news media organisations in Pakistan have adopted and implemented institutional measures aimed at preventing workplace harassment and setting up safe reporting mechanisms against workplace harassment, abuse and lack of safety. It explores the availability of gender sensitivity training and awareness, presence of anti-harassment policies -- such as the establishment of inquiry committees -- and employees' knowledge about the existence of reporting mechanisms.

### 8.1 Gender Sensitivity Training and Institutional Capacity

#### *Internal Gender Sensitivity Training*

Gender sensitivity trainings play an important role in promoting inclusive newsroom cultures, addressing unconscious biases and strengthening awareness about workplace rights, responsibilities and gender-sensitive conduct with female colleagues. Notwithstanding the significance of these trainings, the survey

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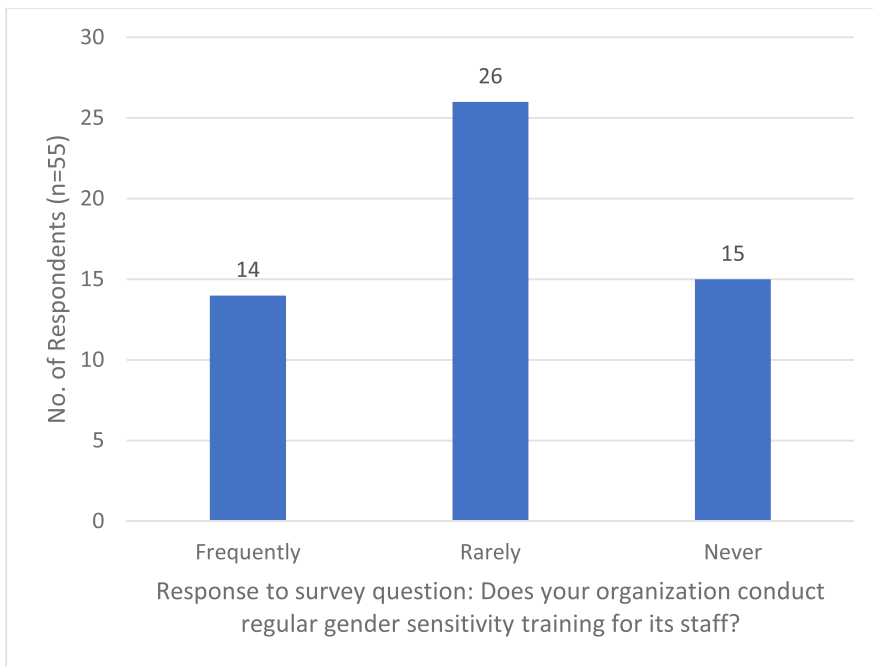
<sup>5</sup> The Protection Against Harassment Of Women At The Workplace Act, 2010

respondents say that their organisations do not organise them in an institutionalized and consistent manner.

The largest group of respondents (26 out of 55) reports that gender sensitivity trainings are conducted rarely within their organisations. Another 15 respondents say that such trainings are never conducted. Only 14 respondents report that their organisations conduct gender sensitivity trainings frequently (see Figure 31 below).

These findings suggest that, although some digital news organisations have begun integrating gender awareness initiatives into their workplace practices, regular and systematic training remains limited across Pakistani digital newsrooms.

*Figure 31: Response to survey question: Does your organisation conduct regular gender sensitivity training for its staff?*



### *Participation in External Gender Training*

When the respondents are asked if they are their colleagues have attended gender sensitivity trainings organised by other

organisations, 26 of them reported that their colleagues have participated in such trainings. On the other hand, eight respondents say that none of their colleagues have attended external gender sensitivity trainings. Another 21 respondents report that they do not know whether anyone from their organisations have attended such trainings (see Figure 32 below).

The last number suggests limited internal communication regarding professional development opportunities within digital news organisations. Similarly, while the participation in externally organised gender sensitivity programs indicates growing engagement among Pakistani journalists with gender equality initiatives, the survey findings also suggest that such initiatives are not systematically integrated into the organisational practices of Pakistani newsrooms.

These findings also highlight the need for institutionalizing gender-related capacity-building within these newsrooms. Rather than relying solely on external training opportunities, Pakistani news outlets must institutionalise trainings on this issue if they are serious in ensuring gender equity among their employees. With a broad staff participation across genders and roles, these trainings can contribute to strengthening awareness of gender equity and fostering inclusive newsroom environments.

Figure 32: Response to the survey question: Has any staff member in your organisation ever attended training on gender sensitivity organised by any other organisation?



## 8.2 Anti-Harassment Policies and Legal Compliance

### *Existence of Anti-Harassment Policies*

Presence of and awareness about anti-harassment policies is an important component of workplace safety and institutional accountability. A large majority of the survey respondents (41 out of 55) report that their organisations have adopted such policies as required under the 2010 anti-harassment law.<sup>6</sup> Only four respondents say that their organisations do not have an anti-harassment policy. Another 10 respondents say that they do not know whether such a policy exists within their organisation (see Figure 33 below).

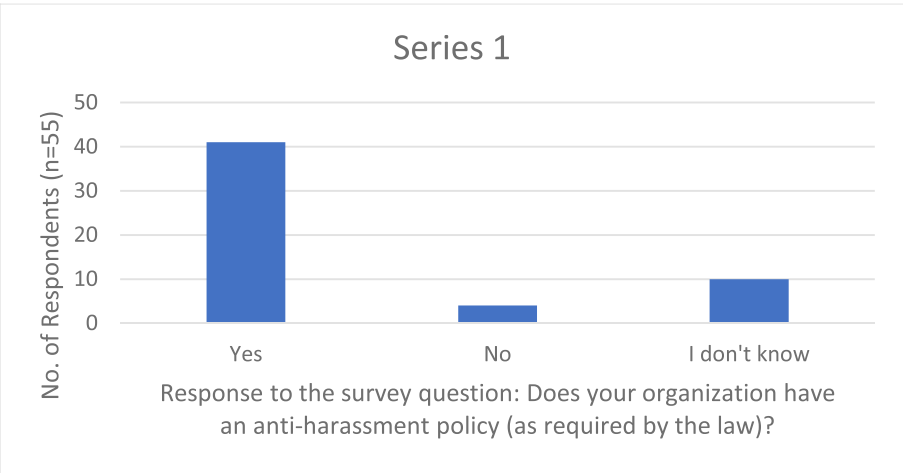
The last finding is particularly significant. If an organisation has an anti-harassment policy, it must inform its employees about its

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



existence as well as about the mechanism to invoke that policy if and when needed. Otherwise, that policy is worth only the paper it is written on. Equally importantly, almost a quarter of the respondents report that their organisations are not complying with the relevant law in this case since that law explicitly bounds each employer to not just implement anti-harassment policies but inform their employees about them as well. Filling this gap in legal compliance requires urgent and appropriate action by the newsrooms concerned.

Figure 33: Response to the survey question: Does your organisation have an anti-harassment policy (as required by the law)?



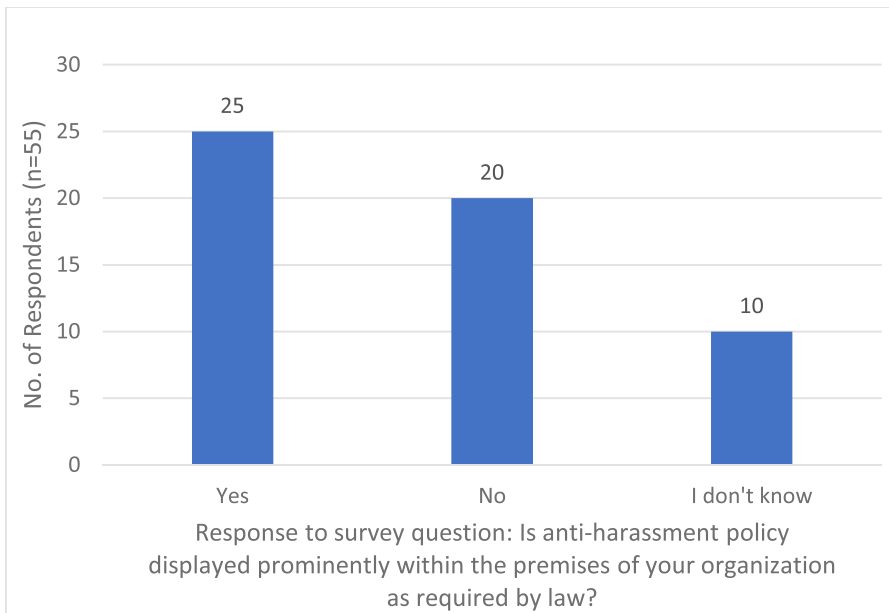
Visibility of Anti-Harassment Policies

Only 25 respondents report that the anti-harassment policy is displayed prominently within their workplaces. Another 20, on the other hand, say it is not displayed at all while 10 more respondents report that they do not know if it was displayed (see Figure 34 below) which, at the very least, suggests that it is not displayed at a place where it is visible to every employee.

These findings clearly suggest that more than half of the surveyed respondents are alleging their organisations to be violating the anti-harassment law – either by not displaying the anti-harassment policy at all or not displaying it prominently enough. This is a real problem

for the newsrooms concerned to address: If anti-harassment policies either do not exist or employees are not sure about their existence, they are unlikely to invoke the anti-harassment law and its supplementary mechanisms if and when they face unsafe work environment. This, in turn, could become a major hurdle in ensuring gender equity within digital newsrooms.

Figure 34: Response to survey question: Is anti-harassment policy displayed prominently within the premises of your organisation as required by law?



### 8.3 Harassment Inquiry Committees

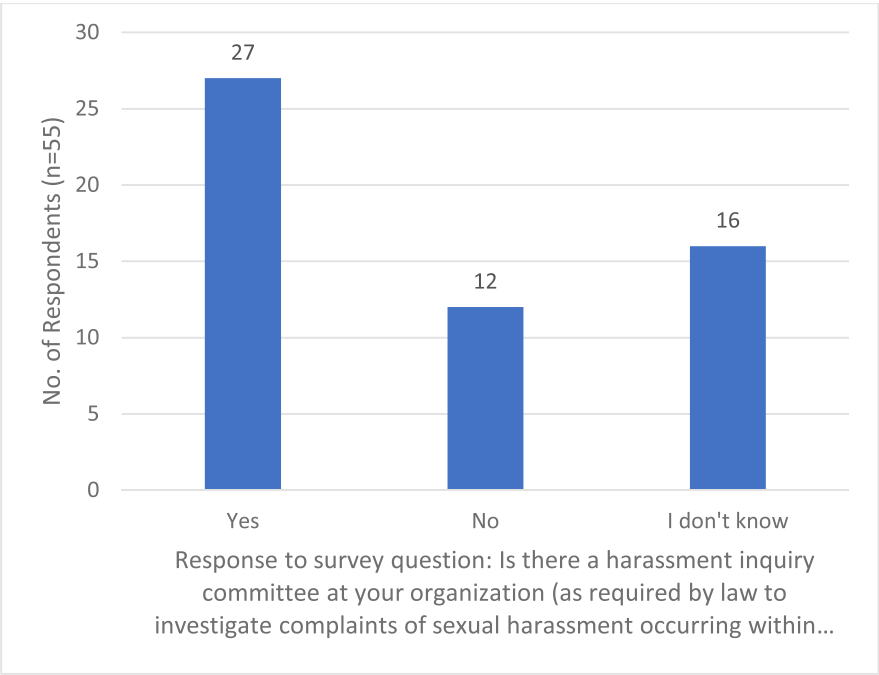
#### *Existence of Inquiry Committees*

Harassment inquiry committees are a key component of the legal framework designed to ensure safe and accountable workplace environments, but when the survey respondents are asked if their organisations have established a harassment inquiry committee responsible for investigating complaints of workplace harassment, only half of them (27 out of 55) respond in the affirmative. On the contrary, more than 21 percent of them say that no inquiry committee exists within their workplace. Another 16 respondents

say that they do not know if their organisations have a harassment inquiry committee (see Figure 35 below).

With more than half of the respondents reporting either the absences of the committee or the lack of knowledge about its existence, the anti-harassment law is certainly being violated at a large scale in Pakistani digital news outlets because this law not just makes the setting up of this committee mandatory but also provides that every employee must know about its existence. This situation, again, shows that the newsrooms concerned are failing to ensure the presence of key institutions required for promoting gender equity in Pakistani news media.

Figure 35: Response to survey question: Is there a harassment inquiry committee at your organisation (as required by law to investigate complaints of sexual harassment occurring within an organisation between workers)?



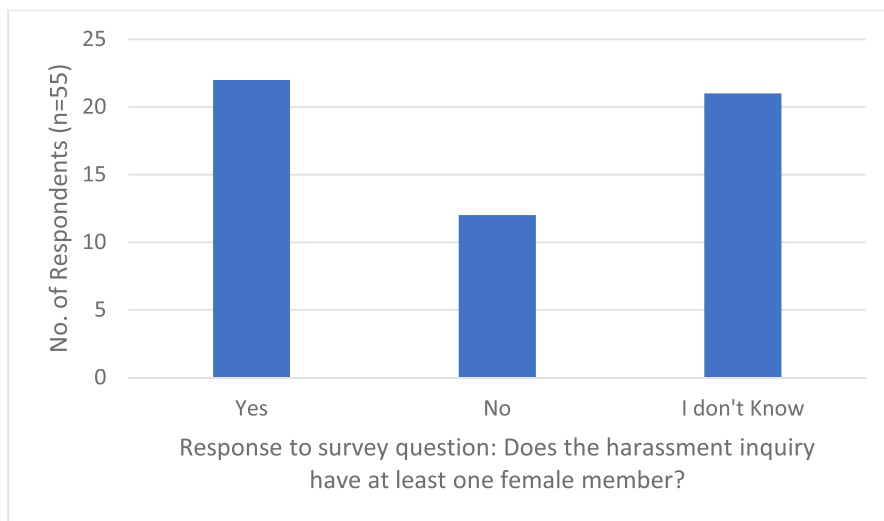
Gender Representation on Inquiry Committees

The inclusion of women in harassment inquiry committees is an important safeguard required under the anti-harassment law. It is

aimed at ensuring fair representation and greater sensitivity in the handling of complaints related to workplace harassment. When the survey respondents are asked about it only 22 of them respondent that the committees set up in their organisations include at least one female member. A much bigger majority either reports no woman is a part of these committees (12 respondents) or they did not know if the committees have women in them (see Figure 36 below). This situation, too, points to a large-scale violation of the anti-harassment law which unambiguously states that women must be included in these committees and that everyone in the organisation must be informed about the committee and its composition through an internal communication.

Just like the findings in the previous sections in this chapter, The absence of women in inquiry committees or the lack of knowledge about women's presence in them highlight the importance of strengthening both compliance with legal requirements and transparency regarding the composition and functioning of institutional mechanisms designed to address workplace harassment.

*Figure 36: Response to survey question: Does the harassment inquiry have at least one female member?*

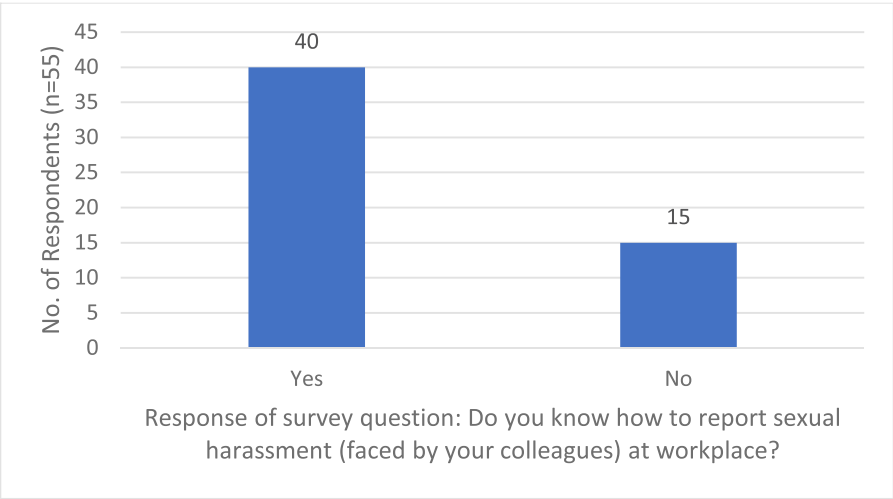


8.4 Knowledge of Complaint Mechanisms

Effective reporting mechanisms are a critical component of workplace safety frameworks established under the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010. Ensuring that all employees are informed about complaint procedures, reporting channels, and institutional protections provided by the act can help strengthen accountability and contribute to safer newsroom environments. The survey findings indicate that the respondents have a relatively high level of awareness regarding procedures and mechanisms to report harassment at workplace. A total of 40 respondents report that they know how to report such harassment while only 15 of them say that they do not know how to do so (see Figure 37 below).

These results suggest that people working in Pakistani digital news outlets are generally aware of reporting mechanisms. This, however, should not be a reason for complacency since the number of respondents who do not know how to use these mechanisms is not negligible, representing roughly 27 percent of the total survey sample.

Figure 37: Response of survey question: Do you know how to report sexual harassment (faced by your colleagues) at workplace?

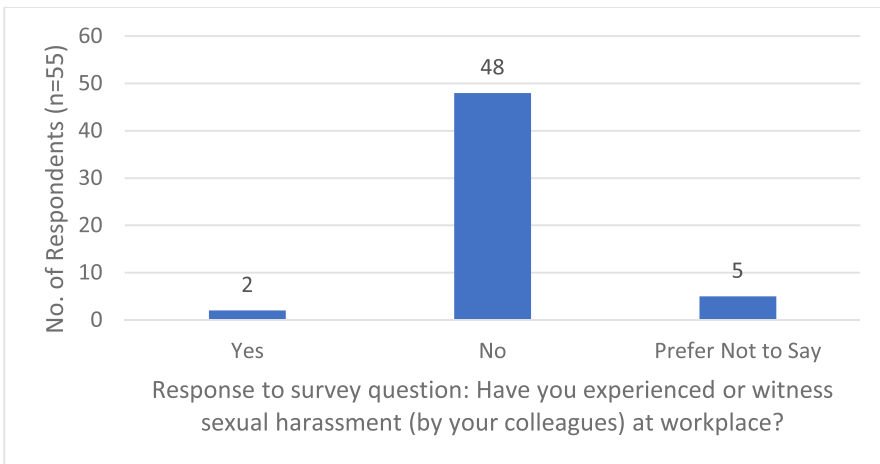


## 8.5 Experiences of Workplace Harassment

When asked if they have experienced or witnessed sexual harassment within their workplace, a majority of the survey respondents (48 out of 55) respond in the negative. Only two respondents report having experienced or observed workplace harassment. Another five, on the other hand, have preferred not to talk about it (see Figure 38 below). This last number shows that workplace harassment remains such a sensitive issue that sometimes its victims are also unwilling to talk about it. This sensitivity has its origin in the fact that the accusers of harassment often fear retaliation from the accused who, invariably, are their male superiors. The victims, therefore, either fear losing their jobs or are worried about being stigmatised permanently at the workplace as whiners and manipulators – or both. In other cases, the victims may not have confidence in grievance redress mechanisms to hear and address their complaints.

These problems highlight the importance of maintaining strong institutional safeguards and effective and accessible reporting mechanisms within digital news organisations as a means to protect their women employees from harassment

*Figure 38: Response to survey question: Have you experienced or witness sexual harassment (by your colleagues) at workplace?*



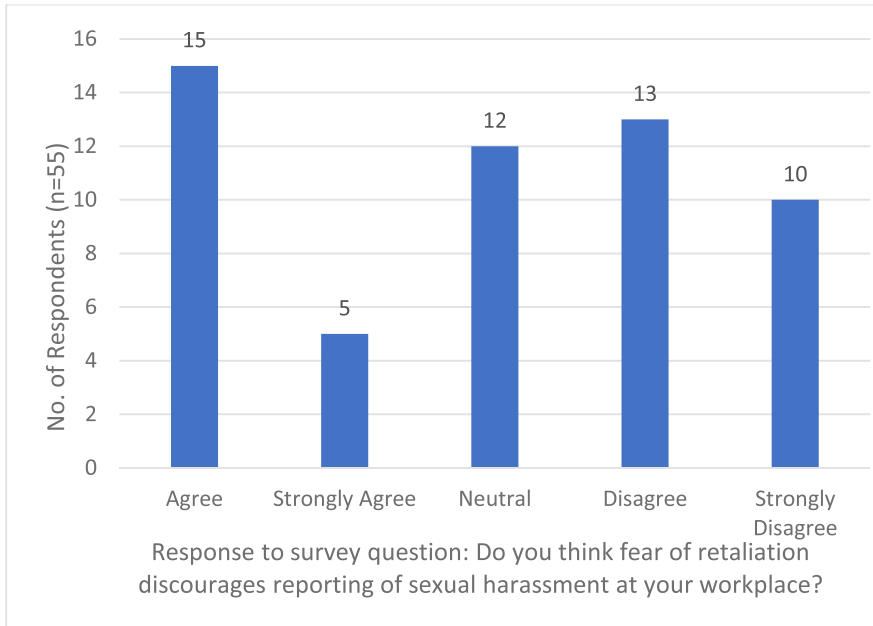
## 8.6 Perceived Barriers to Reporting Harassment

When asked to identify the barrier that discourage them from reporting harassment, a sizeable number of the respondents (20) either agree or strongly agree that it is fear of retaliation. The fact that 12 respondents neither agree nor disagree with this proposition, again, alludes to the sensitivity of the issue (see Figure 39 below). Certainly, not everyone is willing to hazard a comment on it.

Though another 23 respondents do not believe this fear to a major barrier, these findings highlight that the confidence in reporting mechanisms and the belief in being heard fairly and equitably is still not uniformly distributed across all newsrooms and for all the employees in the same newsroom. Concerns about professional repercussions, reputational risks, or workplace relationships could be some of the major reasons for this lack of confidence.

In any case, widespread fears about retaliation demonstrate the importance of strengthening confidential reporting systems, formal, clear and effective institutional safeguards against retaliation, as outlined in the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010. Ensuring that employees trust reporting mechanisms and feel protected from adverse consequences is a critically important factor in creating safe and gender-sensitive newsroom environments.

Figure 39: Response to survey question: Do you think fear of retaliation discourages reporting of sexual harassment at your workplace?



## 8.6 Insights from Key Informant Interviews on Workplace Harassment and Reporting Mechanisms

The participants in key informant interviews observe that awareness of workplace harassment issues has increased in recent years, particularly following the enactment of the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010. Following the introduction of this law, they say, many news media organisations have devised formal anti-harassment policies and established inquiry committees. They, however, question effectiveness of these mechanisms, explaining that this effectiveness often depends upon how strongly the organisational management supports their presence and independent functioning. While anti-harassment policies and inquiry committees may exist formally, the interviewees note, employees are either not always fully aware of their presence and mandate, or they lack confidence in their impartiality or the ability to deliver justice.



Many interviewees also highlight the challenges associated with reporting harassment at workplace. The employees may hesitate to report harassment due to concerns about defamation lawsuits, reputational risks and/or lack of confidence in institutional processes. Some interviewees suggest that in organisations where management or senior leadership holds significant influence over internal committees, employees may perceive anti-harassment mechanisms as lacking independence.

The interviewees also highlight variations in institutional responses. They report working in newsrooms where complaints are addressed promptly and organisational leadership adopts a zero-tolerance approach towards incidents of harassment. The presence of women in leadership position is also cited as a contributing factor to increased sensitivity towards workplace harassment. At the same point, they also point out that harassment complaints do not get addressed promptly and effectively in organisations which have a weak leadership commitment on the issue.

The interviewees give credit to public and social media debates on gender equity, gender sensitivity trainings, and gender equity initiatives by media development organisations for increased awareness of workplace harassment within the journalism community. As a result, they say, journalists today are more informed about harassment reporting mechanisms and more willing to challenge inappropriate behaviour than in older times.

Overall, the insights offered by the interviewees reinforce the survey findings: that the widespread adoption of formal policies and reporting mechanisms represents an important institutional development within Pakistani digital newsrooms, their effectiveness depends on awareness among employees, transparency and impartiality of the processes and procedures and organisational commitment to internal accountability.

## Chapter 9: Privacy and Surveillance

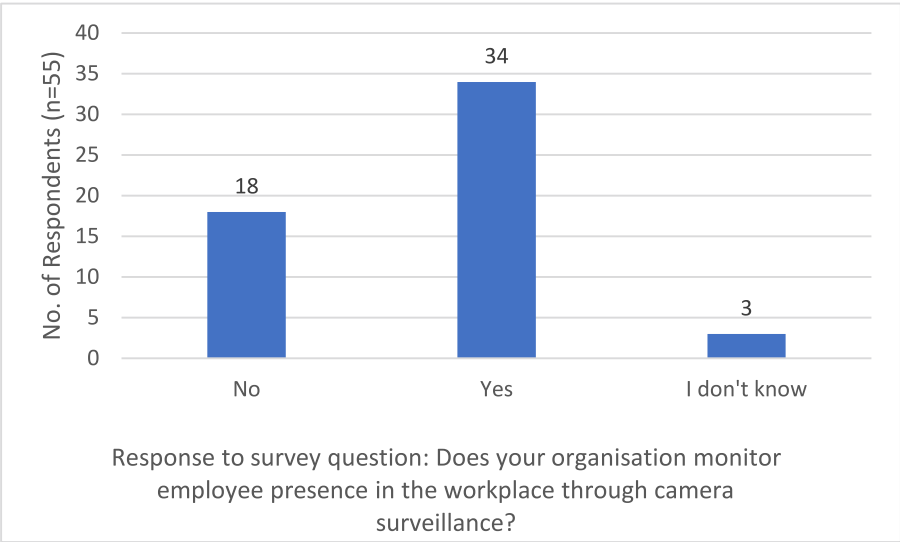
Workplace monitoring practices, including the use of surveillance technologies, can influence the workplace experiences of women employees, including their engagements and interactions with their colleagues and organisational structures. While monitoring and surveillance mechanisms may have been introduced for security reasons or for operational oversight, they are known to affect female employees' perceptions of privacy, trust, and comfort and workplace.

This chapter examines the presence of surveillance systems within digital news organisations and explores how such monitoring practices are perceived by their employees. The questions it is particularly concerned with are whether workplaces use security cameras to monitor their employees or and whether such monitoring effects the employees' sense of comfort and privacy.

### 9.1 Workplace Surveillance Practices

Many the survey respondents (34 out of 55) report that their workplaces use cameras to monitor their presence. In contrast, only 18 respondents say that their organisations do not use cameras for surveillance. Another three respondents say that they do not know whether such monitoring systems were in place within their organisations (see Figure 40 below).

Figure 40: Response to survey question: Does your organisation monitor employee presence in the workplace through camera surveillance?



## 9.2 Employee Comfort and Perceptions of Surveillance

The widespread presence of security cameras within newsrooms raises serious questions regarding privacy and autonomy at workplace and the need for a balance between security and employees' need for space. When the survey respondents are also asked if the existence of camera makes them uncomfortable within their workplace, 18 percent of them -- all women -- report in the affirmative. Though the rest of the respondents responded to the question in the negative, the fact that all those on the other side of the divide are women clearly suggest the presence of gender-based norms and practices within Pakistani newsrooms, as well as within the Pakistani society at large, that make women more conscious about being watched. If nothing else, news organisations must take their female staff into confidence before installing any security and surveillance apparatus at workplaces.

### 9.3 Insights from Key Informant Interviews on Privacy and Surveillance

The key informant interviews do not offer much to contribute to a discussion on workplace surveillance. Only one of them directly addresses this issue, saying that security and surveillance apparatus are generally meant for security purposes rather than for monitoring the employees, and, therefore, does not create any discomfort among employees.

## Chapter 10: Recommendations

The following recommendations for digital news organisations aim to strengthen gender-responsive policies, improve institutional accountability, and promote more inclusive newsroom environments:

- Increase the presence of women in senior editorial and managerial positions to strengthen inclusive newsroom cultures and improve gender-sensitive decision-making processes.
- Establish internal targets for women’s participation in leadership roles and ensure their inclusion in editorial meetings, policy discussions, and strategic planning processes.
- Develop leadership and mentorship programs for early and mid-career women journalists so that they can progress into senior editorial and management positions.
- Adopt transparent recruitment processes by publicly advertising editorial and reporting vacancies rather than relying on informal networks or referrals.
- Establish clear and transparent criteria for recruitment, performance evaluation, and promotion decisions to ensure gender-equitable access to professional opportunities.
- Conduct periodic internal reviews or gender audits to assess the presence and representation of women across departments and organisational hierarchies.
- Ensure that reporting assignments are allocated based on professional expertise and interest rather than gender-based assumptions about “appropriate” beats.

- Encourage women journalists to pursue reporting in traditionally male-dominated areas such as politics, crime, investigative journalism, and conflict reporting.
- Provide safety training, logistical support, and field reporting resources to women to facilitate their equal participation in reporting assignments.
- Ensure full compliance with the Protection Against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, 2010, including the establishment of functional and independent inquiry committees.
- Display anti-harassment policies prominently within office premises and ensure that all employees are informed about reporting procedures and available institutional protections.
- Establish confidential and independent reporting mechanisms for employees to raise concerns regarding harassment or workplace misconduct.
- Conduct regular awareness sessions and gender-sensitivity trainings to promote gender-sensitive and inclusive workplace cultures.
- Improve workplace infrastructure by ensuring adequate and separate sanitation facilities, safe working environments, and supportive workplace spaces for female employees.

- Introduce and strengthen gender-sensitive workplace policies such as childcare support mechanisms, designated spaces for nursing mothers, and flexible work arrangements for employees with caregiving responsibilities.
- Develop transparent and gender-neutral salary frameworks that clearly define pay scales for different roles and levels within the organisation.
- Ensure that compensation decisions are based on objective criteria such as experience, role, and performance rather than on informal negotiations or discretionary and discriminatory practices.
- Conduct periodic internal pay reviews to identify and address gender disparities in remuneration.
- Integrate training on gender-sensitive reporting, ethical journalism practices, and workplace equity into all professional development initiatives.
- Support industry-wide initiatives aimed at promoting gender equity, including the development of gender-sensitive guidelines for newsrooms and monitoring frameworks for the implementation of these guidelines.
- Encourage press clubs, unions, associations and media development organisations to facilitate research and knowledge exchange on gender representation in news media.

- Address broader structural challenges affecting the digital news media sector, including job insecurity, inconsistent salary payments, and financial instability within news media organisations through media viability efforts.
- Strengthen institutional stability within the news media industry to create conditions in which gender equity policies and gender-sensitive workplace reforms can be effectively implemented.



## Chapter 11: Conclusion

This study reveals that women are increasingly present in digital newsrooms across a variety of professional roles, suggest significant progress in expanding women's participation in the news media sector over the past two decades. This increased presence alone, however, does not necessarily translate into women's equal presence across all levels of newsroom hierarchies. One of the most consistent patterns identified here is that women are unevenly distributed across professional roles. While they are quite visible in reporting and editorial positions, their presence remains limited in other areas such as technical and IT-related roles and senior editorial leadership. Even within editorial departments, they are mostly found in feature writing, desk-based editorial work and socially oriented beats rather than in high-profile reporting domains such as politics and crime etc.

The study also shows that working conditions for women journalists in these newsrooms are better today than they were before. Yet, the findings of this study also show that this improvement is neither uniform across all the surveyed newsrooms nor it is available to all the employees all the time. While many organisations still have major gaps when it comes to ensuring equal gender representation in leadership roles, gender-sensitive working conditions, equitable institutional policies, equal pay for the same work and non-discrimination in professional opportunities, in other instances, we also find that several organisations might have implemented these policies and taken these measures only on paper without ensuring their effective and equitable implementation.

Not so surprisingly, however, the study shows that the presence of women and gender-sensitive working conditions both improve in organisations where women themselves are adequately present in leadership positions. This means that gender gap in leadership must be bridged because it has serious implications not only for career

advancement but also for institutional priorities and workplace cultures and policies.

Another important theme emerging from the study is the broader structural context within which journalism operates in Pakistan. Financial instability of news organisations is resulting in retrenchments, delayed salary payments and job insecurity among journalists, but what is more important from the perspective of this study is the fact that economic and financial pressures affect newsroom priorities and limit institutional attention to gender-sensitivity and workplace equity reforms. Addressing gender inequality within journalism therefore requires not only policy reforms but also broader efforts to strengthen the financial sustainability and institutional stability of the news media industry in Pakistan.

The findings of the study also underscore the importance of strengthening institutional frameworks that promote gender equity within news organisations. Increasing women's presence in leadership roles, improving transparency in recruitment and promotion practices, strengthening harassment prevention mechanisms, and developing gender-sensitive workplace environment can certainly contribute to more inclusive newsroom environments. At the same time, industry-wide collaboration among news media organisations, press clubs, unions, policymakers, and media development partners is also essential for ensuring and sustaining inclusivity and gender equity.





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