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இலங்கை பத்திரிகை ஸ்தாபனம்
Sri Lanka Press Institute



New Delhi Office
Cluster Office for Bangladesh,
Bhutan, India, Maldives,
Nepal and Sri Lanka

Model Guideline for **SAFETY OF WOMEN JOURNALISTS** in Sri Lanka

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Background to the Development of the Guideline

There is a rapid increase in the number of cases related to offline and online attacks against women journalists and female media professionals which have had a dogmatic impact on their safety. These attacks range from harassment, stigmatization, sexist hate speech, stereotyping, trolling, surveillance, acts of intimidation, physical assault, rape and even murder. While being victimized externally given their work as journalists,

they also encounter gender-based violence within their internal space of employment. Women journalists commonly face threats in their own workplaces or news rooms which should be conducive work environments. This has created a physically and mentally stressful atmosphere for women journalists to implement their tasks. The following are some key recommendations to media houses to create a conducive working environment for women journalists.



Preamble

This is a model guideline for Media Organizations to implement processes and procedures to protect women journalists in their organizations. The guideline focuses on diverse aspects of safety of women journalists. By following these guidelines it is expected that the organization provides a safer environment for mitigating and minimizing risks that may have been overlooked with the current challenges in the media industry. It should be mentioned that this guideline does not guarantee a total eradication of all risks that a woman journalist would be challenged with but provides a positive direction to address the challenges.

Although this guideline predominantly focuses on women journalists, most recommendations made are gender neutral and are applicable to all journalists.

These guidelines were developed in consultation with representatives from the Management, Editorial, journalists and Human Resource Management professionals from the print and electronic media.

Recommended Implementers:

It is recommended if a media organization is to pursue the implementation of a guideline of this nature, it may be best if it is done jointly by the Head of Newsroom and Head of Human Resource Department to ensure there is relevant resource availability and complementing expertise in tackling the challenges of journalists.

Corporate Safety Committee

- Establish a corporate safety committee which reviews ongoing risks on a regular basis.
- The role of this committee is to identify risks in all areas of operations (e.g.: financial, logistics, human resource, operations, etc.) of the organization which should also include a special focus on women specific risks.
- The committee should include the relevant heads of key divisions and headed by the enterprise risk management officer or in the absence, a designated professional with this responsibility.
- Establish an emergency communication plan/ tree to ensure communication of key information in emergencies, reaches in all levels of the organization.



Support Mechanisms

- Develop a pocket guide of an emergency contact list and key bodies which could be carried by the journalists and updated on a regular basis.
- Ensure in-house or a dedicated mechanism of providing legal advice and assistance in carrying out routine work.
- Make available a detailed manual providing safety tips and guidelines which should be provided to each journalist. This manual should include risks faced by women journalists and actions to mitigate them. This manual should be reviewed on a regular basis and updated.
- The organization should ensure there is a grievance procedure and whistleblower policy to address complaints on various issues faced within the organization. All information is to be treated as confidential due to its sensitive nature and ensure that no unfair repercussions are experienced by those who activate these procedures.
- Conduct an annual survey to understand the risks faced by journalists when carrying out their jobs and thereby prepare and update risk mitigation strategies.



Training

- Orientation programmes for new staff to include gender sensitization sessions.
- Provide annual safety training for journalists on relevant laws and regulations, physical safety, online/digital safety, risk assessment, first-aid, etc. that support and ensure their protection in exercising their duty.
- Conduct annual gender sensitization trainings/sessions/discussions among different levels of the organization (senior management, middle management, newsrooms, support teams, etc.)



Physical Safety

- Mobility planning for female journalists is part of the preparation stage of every mission. If a story requires travel to a new environment, research the location, language, culture, and customs in advance to make informed decisions about how to conduct the work.
- Risk assessment has to be made compulsory before deploying on high risks contexts (For example: an armed conflict situation, pandemic situations such as Covid-19, acts of violence and protests)
- Ensure valid identification cards representing the journalists' names, designations and the organizations they belong to are carried with them at all times.
- Authorized safety officer of the organization/ newsroom to advise journalists on assignment on safe accommodation, transport and routes to be taken in covering the assignment.
- Transportation and logistic policies to include special focus for women journalists' safety while travelling during assignments and late hours of work.



Digital Safety

- Establish a monitoring and complaints handling mechanism to tackle online threats faced by journalists who have online presence. Identified threats should be reported to the relevant authorities such as CERT, cyber crimes division and legal actions filed in order to evade repetitiveness of similar threats.
- An updated and current firewall system to be in place to protect all in and outgoing traffic from the organization.
- Ensure every user is assigned unique usernames and passwords as per universal standards and changed on a monthly or as needed basis ideally through a centralized access control system.
- Every digital device to have internet security and virus protection.
- Encryption technologies to be implemented on storage of data in all digital devices.
- Provide guidelines/ develop policies on social media usage and engagement.
- Install legal genuine software to ensure regular security updates and patches are applied in relevant digital devices.
- Establish corporate email accounts for work purposes.

Psychological Safety

- Staff care mechanism either of an individual or a service to be provided through HR as a psychological and emotional support to those who have been victims of traumatic situations.
- The human resources department and heads of newsrooms to have women journalists focus group discussions to understand challenges faced in their day-to-day work.

APPENDIX I

(1). Constitutional safeguards

The Constitution of Sri Lanka provides legal provisions that ensure the rights of all Sri Lankan citizens regardless of their gender. The Constitution ensures protection against all forms of inhuman or degrading treatment and punishment, freedom of expression, access to information, and protection from all forms of discrimination. The current link to the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is;

<https://www.parliament.lk/files/pdf/constitution.pdf>

Right to Information

Right to Information (RTI) has been enumerated in Article 14A of the Constitution since 2016. The RTI Act came into operation in 2017 and it sets out the procedure and mechanisms to follow in obtaining information from public authorities.

Link to Right to Information Act:

https://www.rti.gov.lk/images/resources/RTI_Act_Sri_Lanka_E.pdf

(2). Penal law and other laws relating to rape and sexual violence

The Penal Code of Sri Lanka prohibits rape and sexual violence against women. This includes provisions relating to rape, grave sexual abuse and sexual harassment. The Evidence Ordinance and the Code of Criminal Procedure lays down the procedure and rules of evidence for prosecuting an offence of rape. The offence of Rape is defined under Section 363 of the Penal Code and applies to all victims of rape.

If a woman faces cyber sexual harassment or violence, the Penal Code consists of certain provisions that she can rely on. These include Section 345, 372 and 483.

The link to access the Penal Code can be found below:

<https://www.lawnet.gov.lk/penal-code-consolidated-2/>

There are also other laws that a victim can rely on especially in instances of cyber sexual violence. These include the Obscene Publications Ordinance, Computer Crimes Act and the Payment Devices Frauds Act.

Obscene Publications Ordinance - <http://www.mediareform.lk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/164-Obscene-Publications-Ordinance-No.04-of-1927.pdf>

Computer Crimes Act - <https://www.srilankalaw.lk/?id=239&lang=en>

Payment Devices Frauds Act - <https://www.lawnet.gov.lk/payment-devices-frauds-2/#:~:text=AN%20ACT%20TO%20PREVENT%20THE,INVESTIGATION%2C%20PROSECUTION%20AND%20PUNISHMENT%20OF>

(3). Some important aspects of Labor Law

The Labour Law of Sri Lanka covers the working hours of employees, minimum wage of employees, their entitlement for Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) and the Employees' Trust Fund (ETF)

Some of the provisions of Labour Law can be accessed using the links below:

Shop and Office Employees Act - <https://www.srilankalaw.lk/Volume-VII/shop-and-office-employees-regulation-of-employment-and-remuneration-act.html>

Factories Ordinance - https://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/1684/1_factories_ordinance_i.pdf

Minimum Wage of Workers Act - https://www.srilankalaw.lk/YearWisePdf/2016/03-2016_E.pdf

Maternity Benefits Ordinance - http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex4.detail?p_lang=en&p_isn=27182

International Labour Organization's Maternity Protection Convention - https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB%20:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C103

Termination of Employment of Workmen (Special Provisions) Act - http://labourdept.gov.lk/images/PDF_upload/chapter01/6_termination_of_employment_of_workmen.pdf

(4). Other authorities

Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka


The functions of the Human Rights Commission are to promote and monitor protection of fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution and ensure compliance by the Sri Lankan State of international human rights standards. The Commission has a broad mandate as well as powers, inter alia, to investigate into any complaints of fundamental rights violations or imminent fundamental rights violations and grant suitable redress, including compensation, and of unfettered access to inspect and monitor any place where a person is deprived of liberty.

Link to Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka Act -

<https://www.hrcsl.lk/about/hrcsl-act/>

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