

Online Safety

OF DIVERSE JOURNALISTS



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Australia-first report reveals normalisation of online abuse Towards diverse journalists and media workers

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New research has found many journalists and media workers from diverse and minority backgrounds experience online abuse and harassment yet believe it to be 'part of the job'.

The research project, led by Griffith University and Macquarie University, was commissioned by not-for-profit organisation Media Diversity Australia (MDA) supported by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), Meta (Facebook), Google News Initiative, the e-Safety Commissioner and Twitter. The research is a key step toward identifying, understanding, and addressing online abuse and harassment of diverse journalists and media workers.

Findings reveal discrimination and abuse increased towards journalists and media workers who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and/or queer or transgender, and/or culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD), and/or living with a disability.

"Anecdotally we knew that journalists of diverse intersectional backgrounds faced amplified online abuse. This report unfortunately validates the many experiences journalists have shared with us over the years and provides insights into the scale of the problem which we hope serves as catalyst for change."

Mariam Veiszadeh, CEO of Media Diversity Australia.

"It was hearing the experiences of journalists and media workers that made me realise how important this research was. If this was occurring in any other workplace there would be signs up on the walls and zero tolerance statements. Health workers do not tolerate abuse from the public, why should it be ok to abuse journalists in their workplace?"

Faith Valencia-Forrester Griffith University

"This report demonstrates the hostility of the media industry for those who are not able bodied, white and/or cis-gender and/or heterosexual and that the gate-keepers and harassers are the fairly predictable culprits as participants highlighted come from a similar demographic-white men"

Professor Bronwyn Carlson Macquarie University

The normalisation of online abuse and harassment was primarily attributed to young media workers who felt an expectation to accept the ill-treatment as a normal part of the job. There was also a sentiment that addressing the issue could impact their career progression.

"I am cautious revealing my struggles because I don't want people to think I can't handle my job." – CALD journalist with disability

"The stress that you get as a young person of colour writing about these things, I think it's qualitatively different to the kind of stress and abuse that a young white journalist receives in Australia." – CALD journalist and commentator



"I see a huge uptake in racist comments in any story that involves any diversity." – CALD journalist and producer

The research also highlighted the troubling trend of discrimination within the newsroom. One respondent recalled being discriminated against by an executive producer advising:



"She was just essentially saying, like, look, as an Aboriginal person, we just don't know if you are best placed to tell the stories. We just don't know if we can trust your ability to be objective, and you know, the optics of it and how emotional it may be for you." – Aboriginal journalist

Many respondents indicated they found most comfort and support from friends, family and other diverse co-workers rather than formal support networks within the organisation, which were often also unknown to the journalists and media workers involved.

One journalist with a disability, who also belongs to a CALD community, said young journalists at a large mainstream newspaper organisation were struggling daily, with high staff turnover and significant pressure to increase social media engagement. She explains:

"Hand on heart, they've all got mental health issues because there's no mental health support in newsrooms. Absolutely not. You get 3 free phone calls a year. But there's thoughts within the newsroom that your phone calls are being recorded, like, so it would be held against you. So that's why no one ever does it. I had a colleague of mine that ended up quitting. Well, she went on stress leave and ended up with severe PTSD because of working at the [large regional newspaper in Queensland]. So there's just no mental health support in the newsroom.... I'd be so flat from work and then you come home and you would look at your stories that you'd posted on Facebook getting negative comments. It was just this whole revolving circle. And I that's what led to me being like I've had enough. I can't do this."



Journalist with a disability, who also belongs to a CALD community

Online abuse has significant implications for the individual, the media sector, and society at large. Five key implications were identified from the research:

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| 1) normalisation of online abuse | 4) leaving the industry |
| 2) mental health and emotional pressure | 5) offline implications. |
| 3) silencing, self-censorship and isolation | |

The report details 15 key recommendations including systems and resources for employers, online platforms, regulators and policymakers to work with diverse journalists and media workers to improve conditions for workers in the industry.