ISOJ 2020: Day 3, Panel

Online violence against women journalists: How to combat this global scourge

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Chair: Elisa Lees Muñoz, *executive-director*, IWMF
- o   Ferial Haffajee, *associate editor*, Daily Maverick (South Africa)
- o   Gisela Pérez de Acha, *reporter at the investigative reporting program*, UC Berkeley
- o   Julie Posetti , *global director of research*, ICFJ
- o   Ela Stapley , *digital security advisor and founder*, Siskin Labs (U.K.)

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Mallary Tenore Hello and welcome, everyone. I'm so glad that you're here with us today. I want to welcome you. And before we get started with our next panel, I just want to share a few notes and also give a special thanks to Google News Initiative and the Knight Foundation for sponsoring this year's ISOJ. So I do want to remind everyone that we do have simultaneous interpretations into Spanish, thanks to support from Univision Noticias. So if you're tuning in via Zoom, you can click on the interpretation globe icon in the bottom right hand corner of the screen, select the Spanish channel, and tune into the Spanish interpretation. And if at any point you have technical difficulties with Zoom, you can always tune in via YouTube, in Spanish and in English. And we will post the links to those YouTube channels in the chat for you so you can access them.

So we're now going to turn our attention to our next panel, which will focus on how to combat the global issue of online violence against women journalists. This is such an important and pressing topic that warrants attention and discussion, so I'm really glad that we're here today to discuss it. Leading today's panel will be Elisa Lees Muñoz, executive director of IWMF, the International Women's Media Foundation. And we are actually about to launch a massive open online course with IWMF titled "How to Report Safely: Strategies for Women Journalists and Their Allies." And this free course will be held May 3 through the 30 and will be organized by the Knight Center in partnership with IWMF and UNESCO, with financial support from the Swedish Postcode Foundation. So you can visit JournalismCourses.org for more details on how to register. So now, without further ado, I'd like to turn the conversation over to Elisa, who will moderate today's discussion, which will feature four expert journalists from around the world. Thank you so much, Elisa.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Hi, everyone, thank you so much for joining us. I'm Elisa Lees Muñoz, the executive director of the International Women's Media Foundation. I'm extremely happy to be here to talk about the problem of online violence against women journalists. From the perspective of the IWMF, we know that this is an issue that keeps women out of the news industry, that silences women, causes them to self censor, and to reconsider whether or not to approach stories altogether. We know that this issue is impacting women journalists around the world. It's really an attempt to silence women in public spaces, particularly women who are holding those in power to account. It's extremely important to find ways to work together, to find solutions, and to support women journalists, so that they can do their work more safely, and so that they're not hindered when they're trying to do their day-to-day work.

The IWMF has formed a coalition of more than 30 media development organizations and other press freedom groups who are all working together to find different approaches to

address this problem. I'm happy to say that we're developing a hub in collaboration with the International Center for Journalism to put together all in one place resources, solutions, support, where all of these organizations can contribute to help women journalists combat this issue. Today, we're going to be presenting a broad picture of the problem. We think it's important to provide some context. I think many of us are particularly aware of how this issue plays out on your screen, if you're experiencing it personally, and also how it impacts our society in general by this real attack on press freedom. We are purposely calling this problem online violence, and I hope that you all continue to do so because it is real violence. It can lead to physical violence. But even in the online space, it causes real harms to women journalists, certainly to press freedom, and to our democracy. Very pleased to have Julie Posetti, who's the global director of research at ICFJ, who will be presenting her soon to be report with UNESCO on this issue. Ela Stapley is a digital security expert who works with the IWMF to support women journalist. Gisela Pérez de Acha, who is a reporter who will be speaking from this perspective of a journalist, and how she prepares for this kind of onslaught when she's about to report on an issue. And Ferial Haffajee, who's the associate editor of the Daily Maverick in South Africa, who will talk about her experiences trying to and getting some support from the platform Twitter when she was attacked. It's highly unusual to get support from a platform, so we're really looking forward to hearing that. So without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to Julie. We're going to have a conversation, and we really look forward to your input as well. So please, Julie.

Julie Posetti Thanks very much, Elisa. And thank you everybody for participating in what will be a heavy-going conversation because there is limited light at the end of the tunnel, and hopefully Ferial will illuminate that for us. But just to say, I'm very glad to be here, partly because we are working at ICFJ with IWMF on the online violence response hub, which Elisa has just mentioned. But also I've been working for the past 18 months leading a global study into online violence against women journalists with UNESCO. It's commissioned by UNESCO. The UN is taking this very seriously. And we have actually, in the course of our work, chosen to define online violence as a combination of threats that range from misogynistic abuse, and threats of physical and sexual violence, through to economic impacts and economic threats, also digital security threats that are very serious, and not to mention psychological impacts as well. And we've chosen to deliberately frame this in the language that is used and has been progressively adapted over the past decades or so on domestic violence and the discussion of sexual violence more broadly. So to back up what Elisa says, this is absolutely violence, digital and physical violence that is correlated. I'll get you to share my presentation, if you don't mind, whoever's behind the control desk there.

So we actually had a report published based on a survey of around 900 journalists around the world on online violence. And it comes about nine years, I think, from memory, after one that UNESCO produced with IWMF, so there's lots of synergies here. So this report, which we published in December, will be followed up by another, which will be published, in fact, at the end of this week, which delves more deeply into these issues. And that will be published for World Press Freedom Day. But I'm going to share with you what I can, which is already in the public domain, which is some of the data from this first study that was published, as I said, in December. So if you wouldn't mind just sliding forward there. Thanks very much. So you can see we have a really diverse demographic picture, and this is one of the key themes of our study. It emphasizes that this is indeed a global scourge, but the way in which it manifests differs around the world. So the impacts are often more extreme in the context of the Global South. They lead to more offline violence, for example. They can also involve more prolific forms of attack, and there's no case that

demonstrates this more clearly than that of Maria Ressa, who's just been named the winner of this year's World Press Freedom Prize. She is an American-Filipino journalist who has had the most extraordinary experience of a range of attacks that have been state led and platform facilitated. So not only though are the differentiations in the way that this problem manifests between the Global South and the developed north, but there are also real dimensions that we need to focus on at the intersection of other forms of discrimination. So where misogyny intersects with religious bigotry, sectarianism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia in particular. This is an issue that our report is focusing on and eventually will be a book-length report. If I can get you to go to the next slide, please.

So in our survey, which, as I said, was around 900 journalists strong and about 80 odd percent of those, as you saw from the last slide, were women journalists. Seventy-three percent identified themselves as people who had experienced, or women who had experienced, online violence in the course of their work, which is very important to note. Because as Elisa has said, this is all about shutting women up, silencing women journalists, and chilling their reporting, so we need to emphasize that. I'll get you to go to the next slide if you don't mind. Thanks. So emphasizing what other surveys, the one that IWMF with UNESCO, included, we see a range of different kinds of threats, top among them being hateful language. And we use "hateful" here because a lot of this language could be defined as hate speech. It's not just strong criticism of journalism. We're talking racial vilification, misogynistic abuse. And as you can see there, threats of physical and sexual violence. Digital security threats, such as surveillance, and I'll let Ela talk a bit more about that later. Along with a proliferation of private messages, often soliciting for sex and really designed to have an impact on women in their most private spaces in the course of their personal lives. If you could skip to the next slide for me. Thanks.

And this is, I think, a really important set of findings around the perpetrators of online violence. So we identify the platforms, Facebook prime among them, as the main facilitators of online violence against women journalists. But the main instigators, those who fuel these attacks, are frequently political leaders. And around 37% of the people identified as the main perpetrators, or the top perpetrators, were political actors that included presidents, prime ministers, elected parliamentarians of other sorts, and administrative officials. And this is a trend which is really important to note. It has increased in line with what we refer to as the tilt towards populism, which could also be referred to as a tilt towards the far right and fascism in many settings. And so that's something to really note. If you can go to the next slide for me, please, and you will have to give me a clue as to when I need to wind up because I'm multitasking in the extreme here. So as I mentioned, Facebook is perceived to be the least safe, or very unsafe, among the top used platforms of the women who participated in this survey. It's almost double the threat level that they identified in reference to Twitter, although Twitter was almost as heavily used as Facebook from the women around the world. If you can go to the next slide. I've got a two minute call.

And just to underline what Elisa said. There's impacts that we need to take stock of, and they do range from serious psychological effects. So in the report that comes out towards the end of this week for World Press Freedom Day, we interviewed over 170 people around the world, most of them were women journalists. And they identified on top of this survey result, which is 26%, indicating mental health impacts. The interviewees also underlined this, and they did so in a really visceral way. So many of the women I personally interviewed broke down in tears after apologizing for what they were wanting to express because they felt that they've been unable to represent this. Many of them also suffered from forms of psychological injury, including PTSD. And right through to the

impacts around withdrawing. Withdrawing from bylines, withdrawing from on-camera or on-air roles, and seeking to actually minimize their exposure by staying quiet through self-censorship, in the case of a significant number, 30% among the survey respondents with reference to social media. But I'll end by saying that almost 95% of the women we interviewed for our big study that's about to come out, in at least in its initial discussion paper form, decided to put their names to their words because they agreed that it was fundamentally important to speak out and to call out what they were experiencing to ensure that we continue to recognize that. Which is not to say that staying quiet and withdrawing, to recover or to protect yourself is an invalid option, but I think that is a really important figure from this new work that that I'll leave you with. Thanks very much.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Thank you, Julie. I think it's so important to see those numbers, to see the scope of this problem, and to see the impact is tremendously helpful. We did want to jump off from from seeing just how huge this problem to talking about solutions. And so I would love, Ela, if you would talk about your work, and how you try to support journalists directly and the work that you're helping us to lead with the coalition? Thank you.

Ela Stapley Hi, I'm Ela. Nice to meet you. Nice to be here. I work with the International Women's Media Foundation as one of the consultants working on digital safety issues, and I am the lead consultant leading up on that online harassment initiative. Could we have the first slide, please? OK, thank you so much. So a study carried out by the International Women's Media Foundation found quite shocking in that nearly one-third of female journalists had considered leaving the profession as a result of online attacks and threats. And 52% of respondents reported an experience of an online attack within the past year from when the survey was carried out. And so what we have here is, is a global problem. And what we're looking for really is, is global solutions. And unfortunately, there isn't an easy answer to this. And as Julie explained very well, the scope and the different types of online harassment really do vary in the types of online violence that journalists, women journalists, are experiencing.

My work involves several things, and one of them is individual assistance work for journalists. And over the past four years, I would say I have seen a growth in online violence when it comes to women journalists reporting attacks against them. And what we notice is that geographically these attacks are different, too. So just focusing very quickly on the United States, for example, especially during the Trump administration, I definitely saw an uptick in journalists reporting online violence. And that was quite often accompanied by what they felt was real threats against their lives. And this was because of the uptick in what is called doxxing, so this is when somebody's address or other personal contact details are circulated online with the threat to cause them some kind of harm. If we're moving over into Southeast Asia, what I'm seeing there with individual cases that I've been working on, is online violence is often accompanied with hacking and the stealing of personal photos, which are then used to blackmail women journalists. And these pictures are quite often released online, which has had, in some of the cases I've dealt with, serious consequences in terms of journalists fearing for their life and having to move. And then what I've also seen is an uptick in online harassment and violence cases linked to surveillance. So what we do see is that these incremental attacks against journalists when it comes to surveillance, when it comes to blackmail, when it comes to physical attacks, quite often previous these journalists have experienced some form of online violence. Whether they report that or not to their newsroom varies. Quite often, what we're seeing is that women journalists are experiencing and going through these attacks for quite a while before feeling that they can report them. Could I have the next slide, please?

So what are we doing? Here at the International Women's Media Foundation, we have been working over the past year and a half with a core group of experts, and that includes digital safety experts like myself, journalists who have been going through online violence, and also other experts, such as designers and people who work in education to create an array of courses. So we partnered with Free Press Unlimited to create two courses, so the first one is called Know Your Troll's. This is really explaining to journalists who online abuses are, who are behind them, the tactics that they use, and then providing these journalists with some strategies to better protect themselves. This course really came about as speaking to journalists, we realized women journalists quite often were seeing that they were being attacked online, but through the noise, struggled to identify who could be attacking them. So quite often what they thought was just a lot of people attacking them online was actually a coordinated attempt to drive them offline. The second course we looked at and created was one called Keep It Private, and this course is really about educating journalists about personal data and how best to protect your data online. So journalists over the past 10 years, with the growth of social media, have really been encouraged to kind of post their life online, share this information, and now that data is really, in some ways, coming back to haunt them because that data is online and is now being used against journalists to target them. So the course here was really about understanding different types of data. What data is best kept private. Who can do what with your data, and then giving some strategies for removing data offline. So we created these two courses during a five day work sprint, which we held in Mexico City with local journalists and local experts, and we created these two courses in Spanish and English at the same time. And then we further contextualized these courses. We localized them in French for West Africa and also in Arabic for the Middle East, North Africa, and the MENA region. So we worked on those courses, and we created them with help from local journalists on the ground.

And we also created a MOOC. If we could have the next slide, please. This was an initiative that we did in line with the Knight Center, where we worked with four experts from different regions of the world who had different experiences of online violence. We worked together to create this course, which really walked women journalists through kind of understanding what online harassment and violence is, and then provided both digital safety, and also kind of practical data tips for protecting their information online. And finally, the next slide, please. Elisa has already mentioned the coalition against online violence. We're being very, very enthusiastic to work with over 30 different types of organizations to come together to find international solutions to this issue. And we believe that working together, we are stronger rather than kind of working individually to tackle this issue. And just finally, we have also been doing a lot of training. If I could have the next slide, please. We trained 591 journalists over the last 12 months, both through individual assistance support and through workshops with journalists networks and also with newsrooms. So with that, I'll hand it back over to Elisa. Thank you so much.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Thank you so much, Ela. I think from Ela's presentation, you can see that we are taking a very direct approach and helping journalists very practically to go through these solutions. And what does make it difficult is that you do have to have almost an individual relationship with each and every one of the people that you're trying to support in order to help them through these attacks. And as we always say, we want to help a journalist before, during, and after these attacks, and those approaches are very different. So we're going to go on and just hear more specifically about how an individual journalist can address these. And I want to be very clear to state that we think and believe and are trying to support newsrooms to help their journalists. We also want to help

freelance journalist, but we don't want to put the onus on the individual journalists, although there are many things that individual journalists can and should be doing to protect themselves online. And we hope that they are. But from the perspective of a journalist, Gisela will tell us about how she approached a specific story with regard to the kinds of measures that she took ahead of reporting, knowing that what she was reporting on was probably going to receive a lot of negative attention. So, Gisela, I'll hand it over to you, and also please talk about your work at Berkeley that you're doing on this subject. Thanks.

Gisela Pérez de Acha Of course. Thank you very much. I'm happy to be here, and that is a perfect preface, actually, to what I want to talk about. I was recently reporting. I work at the investigative reporting program in the Human Rights Center at UC Berkeley. I do a lot of what we call digital forensics, open source investigations. And I was working for a little less than a year on a story about domestic extremism, interviewing people who were accused of murdering policemen based on their extreme and radicalized ideologies. So I want to talk about what I did and what my team did, even though I completely agree with, Elisa. This should be something collective as well. We shouldn't leave it only to the journalists in hand.

So I'm going to go ahead and share my screen. And OK, so I'm going to make it very straightforward how to prepare yourself for publication. This is a little bit of a protocol that I personally followed and my team followed before publishing this big story on an extremist person and the Boogaloo Boys. As you know, we were really nervous because neo-Nazis and Boogaloo Boys, and that sort of Internet sphere tends to be really mean to journalists in general, and even more a woman of color like myself. I'm born and raised in Mexico City. So when we talk about cyber security, Berkeley journalists in the Human Rights Center, we usually start talking about risk assessment first. Unfortunately, I'm not going to be able to touch a lot on that. But let me just tell you that as journalists, we're always on that line. We have very limited time. It is way better to prevent fires and work on this throughout rather than trying to do it five minutes before your deadline with all the fact checking and all the pressure of publishing. Believe me, you want to do it before. You want to do it throughout your investigation, and just have a really strong digital hygiene so that you can go ahead and publish without further fears. This is more or less what we call the threat model. I hate that word. It's just a risk assessment like COVID. It's very different from story to story, and it is very different from person to person. Just think about COVID right. Like it's not the same if you're living with your grandparents who are 90 years old, then if you're living by yourself and you're 25. It's not the same if you're already vaccinated. If you're not vaccinated. If you have one vaccine. If you have two vaccines. So these are the questions that I usually ask myself before publication just to know where my weak spots are and how to address them again. I won't have time to go through it, but I do want to emphasize that it's very important to learn these skills and learn how to think in terms of threat modeling.

All this to say, and this is a slide that I stole from my good friend and colleague Steve Trush. Shout out to Steve Trush. Follow him on Twitter. He's an amazing cybersecurity expert. We want to be badass investigator cats and not paranoid tin foil hat wearing cats that think everything and everyone is constantly surveilling and harassing us. That's what the threat model is for.

OK, so five things you should be doing right now. Don't wait for publication. Don't wait before your deadline. Risky stuff with an easy fix. That would be really bad if bad people got access to. First of all, your Facebook privacy settings. Believe me, as an open source

researcher, it's uncanny the amount of information that I can find about, quote unquote, bad guys on the Internet. Our privacy settings as journalists should be as locked down as possible. Please don't dox your partner, your parents, and your friends, and your dog. We need to have really locked down accounts and not give away information as easily to our potential adversaries.

Two, this is something that I still tell my students all the time, and for me is a golden rule. Don't use your personal phone number for reporting. All these techniques, the goal is to separate your online life from your offline life precisely because of the doxxing dangers that Ela has talked about. If you're in the U.S., I recommend Google Voice. If you're not in the U.S., you know, SIM cards in Mexico, for example, are really easy to buy and are anonymous, although a recent law is trying to change that. So I really, really, really recommend you don't want to call your mom from the same phone that you're calling your extremist sources in my case. So for me, Google Voice has been a really easy way out and a really good way to address this issue.

Number three, don't have a sad password. I always tell my students that please don't use your birthdate for every single password in the world. I usually go to howsecureismypassword.net. And if you input your password there, it will tell you how long would it take for a computer to get into your email and social media. And, you know, especially like right now at UC Berkeley, we had a breach, for example. And it's really common to have breaches, especially on the services that we think are just not very relevant. Like, I don't know, like fitness apps or whatever. And these tend to have lower levels of security than Google, or Facebook, or Twitter, even though they're not completely and absolutely safe. So definitely, please, please, please don't have sad passwords. This is like one thing that I cannot emphasize enough. A solution is getting a password manager. I recommend LastPass or 1Password. There's a lot of free services out there. But please also do a little bit of research before you embark upon a password manager because you're pretty much trusting just the key to your entire online and offline life to your password manager.

Gisela Pérez de Acha In addition to this, please, please, please, please, please, and I beg you, and this is also something that I always tell my students as well, enable multifactor authentication. Multifactor authentication is just a fancy word for when you log in the service that you're using, maybe your social media or whatever, it sends you a text, a push into a notification app, a call. And that way, if someone happens to get access to your password, you would get an alert on your phone or a UB key in my case, just a little piece of hardware that I keep on my keychain so that you can have an extra layer of protection. This is something that I rigorously did before publishing just to prevent any access to my personal and intimate data even. And think about iCloud, think about Gmail, think about Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, all of this.

Get a VPN. I always tell my students that a VPN is like condoms. You know, just use them. Just use them. It's out of the issue, you know, especially with strange people, especially if you're on a public free Wi-Fi at the airport trying to put in all your bank information because you have to do a last minute transfer. Just use a VPN. Just use a VPN. VPN is short for a virtual private network. And what it does is that it's actually creates literally private network, separate from your account, separate from the infrastructure, the public Internet infrastructure that you're using at the time. One example, a very quick example, I research a lot of malitias. If I go right now to Californiastatemilitia.com, whoever is the admin person of Californiastatemilitia.com can know my device type, my operating system, my browser, my screen resolution, all the other sites that I've visited and other sites that I've logged

into. Browserleaks.com, if you want to try it out right now, is a really good resource that can allow you to see for yourself what a webpage administrator sees when you're investigating them. You don't want to give yourself away. That's why VPNs and using https also really helps. These are two VPN brands that I really trust. You don't want to have a free VPN. I really recommend that if you want to invest in your safety, and if there's any newsroom leaders listening right now, please invest in your newsroom by buying your reporters' VPN licenses so they don't have to pay it themselves.

Finally, I had, before publication, a little over 150,000 tweets. This is a really, really, really hard thing because as you know, a lot of old tweets have been taken out of context and have been used as tools for harassment and silencing. So one of the things that I focus the most this time around was to delete some of my old tweets. I didn't want to delete all of them, based on the advice of my colleague Steve Tresh, because if I deleted all of them, it could also mean that people would catch on to it and try to look for archives and whatnot. A service that I really like is semiphemeral.com. You can pick the tweets that you don't want to delete. For example, the tweets that I don't know they're funny, or the tweets that are related to school, or the tweets that are related to the work that I do are all my publications. But definitely I have deleted all my tweets because I started on Twitter in 2010. All these things can be taken out of context. Semiphemeral is just one of the services, but I do really recommend using it and trying to figure out what it is.

Finally, I can't stress the importance of fact checking as a tool to prevent harassment. Fact check like your life depends on it because it might, especially in my beat,talking about Boogaloo Boys or extremists, mostly men, extremist men. You don't want to get the gun type wrong. You don't want to get, you know, a small number wrong because that will unleash the trolls. Of course, human mistakes are always possible, especially in journalism and especially in a newsroom setting on deadline, but fact checking is also a tool to prevent harassment. So I really encourage you all to start thinking about fact checking like that and to all become stronger in these exercises.

Finally, I think I have 30 seconds left. One of the most important things to me has been the solidarity networks that have come together after I get rape or death threats online, which has unfortunately happened a lot, especially in a place like Mexico, where violence is just very rampant. What has saved my life and has saved literally the lives of many other young women who have been horribly harassed and have been stuck in the middle of a hurricane, having suicidal thoughts is not uncommon, and what saves us and what saves these young women is the network of solidarity that we weave together to be able to push. So, yeah, with that, I'll finish my presentation. Thank you very much.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Thanks so much, Gisela. That was a lot of extremely valuable information. I hope that we will be able to post that on the hub at some point. Having these tips that are easy to do and quick are super helpful. But as you can see, there are a lot of them. And so people really do need to invest in their own security, and I appreciate your saying that. One of the things that stands out from your presentation, too, is this issue of talking to your families about what they're posting. I've heard a lot of journalists talk about that. And I know it's a difficult conversation, but it's one that must be had. So maybe we can talk about that a little bit more during the discussion. But for now, I'm going to turn over to Ferial Haffajee to hear about an unusually good experience that she has had reporting to Twitter. And Ferial, I know that you have had an incredible amount of harassment thrown at you for quite a while. And I personally sometimes just give up on the platforms. We have so many conversations with them. They come to us and ask us what they can do? What are journalists experiencing? And we tell them, and we've been telling them for

years, almost always to no avail. So I really look forward to hearing your experience with Twitter, so please take it away.

Ferial Haffajee Thank you. And what absolutely marvelous ideas that I've learned from tonight. I was doing an interview for CNN yesterday.m and I realize that it's been five years since I first found very early deepfakes of myself. And then since then, it's a fairly standard week for me to be called a "bitch," or "racist," or "ugly," or "stupid," or a "terrible journalist." So much so that it's entirely internalized and normalized for me until I remember that it's absolutely abnormal, like on panels like this one. But just what I've noticed and I wanted to share with you is that it's getting a little bit better. So last week I managed to get two trolls taken off the platform. I know that's a minuscule number, but perhaps it suggests that a change is happening. And I did so by citing the Twitter hate policy back to them. And like you said, Elisa, this is a very, very big change. I was a very big believer that if you report, something will be done. Until, of course, a guy threatened to shoot me on Twitter. I reported it, and the Twitter back office came back to me and said it's entirely aligned with the freedom of speech standards. And that was OK language and behavior on Twitter. I kind of gave up after that. But I tried last week, and I noticed that it was changing.

I realized, too, that some programing changes had begun to happen so that notifications are much more rigorous than they were before, and you have the ability to create a safe zone around yourself. And personally, that's made my experience on Twitter much better. Many of my colleagues have been pushed off the platform because it became too unbearable, too appalling, the organized trolling armies and the general everyday form of this harassment. But I did not want to be driven off because that would feel to me like they had been victorious in their actions. Although obviously I must admit to you that the past five years have really seen me change my beats, and they've see me change my habits of what I report on and what I won't. But perhaps I'll use some of our colleagues very good ideas to go back out to places where I stopped going to.

So I quickly, quickly want to look at what are the lessons I've learned from the somewhat better experience. I think that the digital army of the good has really made itself felt. And although you might feel and be select, the platforms are simply not hearing. I think the research, the alliances, the activism and the speaking out about the experiences of women journalists is beginning to be heard somewhere. In addition, Julie Posetti's great research has become a tool of global advocacy, and I'm so glad to hear that there's another detailed, quantitative piece of research coming out quite soon. And then what's been vital for me is the solidarity from the north to the south. Because often those of us who sit in the south can't access the true power in Silicon Valley. We are inevitably going to knock up against people in a sweatshop who are badly paid and who can't be activists on our behalf and take through those complaints to anywhere that would make them matter. I think they are listening because of this global solidarity, which women like you have begun to construct. And what I've learned from that is the value of these global alliances, and I think this coalition, which is starting is going to be excellent. So Elisa, not a very big, good news story. But I certainly have noticed that my experience is becoming a little more manageable, and there's a bit more power put back into my hands. Happy to take any questions.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Thank you so much, Ferial. That is truly an interesting outcome, and I love your digital army of the good. I think that that's exactly what we're trying to create. I love it, and I will use it and mention that it came from you because it's a great way to describe what we're trying to do, because you have to combat the negative army of the bad, which is alive, and well, and fully armed. And there are a lot of them. And we have to

realize that that takes a concerted effort by all of us to address. So thank you for that, and I do hope that what you experienced recently will continue to happen. And thank you to all of the organizations that have contributed to making that change happen.

So I think what we're going to do now is open it up for a brief discussion. But I do want to make sure that we leave plenty of time to address some of the questions that are coming from the audience. So rather than addressing the questions individually, I think we can make them part of this conversation. I know that so many journalists are freelancers, but I do think it's important to hone down a little bit more on this question about taking the onus off of the journalist who's being attacked. So I wonder if any of you can speak to some positive examples of support that you have seen happen in newsrooms, whether it was your own experience or something that you heard about so that newsrooms can have an idea about what they can do. Because a lot of them simply don't have the expertize. It's not always a lack of will. A lot of it is lack of resources and lack of expertize. So what can newsrooms do better? What has worked?

Julie Posetti Shall I start since I was the first to speak? So I just want to come back to the story of Rappler in the Philippines and Maria Ressa, who really was one of the first internationally known journalists to raise the alarm on this issue as it really escalated in 2016. And what they have done, I think, is truly a model. Because not only are they under the most sort of prolific attacks, and one of the pieces of research that we've done and that we'll feature in this next report, that which ICFJ published in March for International Women's Day, was a big data case study that looked at torrents of abuse. We looked at about half a million Facebook and Twitter posts that had been directed at Maria Ressa, and they demonstrated the scale of threats. But what was underpinning that, apart from the data, was knowledge that this was a news organization and a series of women leaders of a news organization who saw this scourge for what it was at the beginning, as a tool for silencing and as an expression of orchestrated disinformation linked with online violence campaigns. And our research found that around 41% of the women surveyed in that UNESCO and ISFJ survey identified orchestrated disinformation connected attacks as relevant. I know Ferial, whose story I've told before and who I know well, has experienced similar. But what they did at Rappler, was to turn storytelling to the task of dealing with this crisis. So investigative reporting, using the tools of big data analysis, similar to the work that Gisela's team do, but this is traditional for-profit news organization. And they did that in parallel with escalating threat modeling to an extent that saw them increase the digital and physical security, that saw them roll out a holistic approach that included psychological counseling. They also, and this is a differentiation from many news organizations, adopted a policy of advocacy that included really strident but evidence-based critique of the platforms, which are, as I have said, the main vectors for this online violence. Twitter's recent advances, which Maria will acknowledge herself notwithstanding. So I think looking at that model is really a holistic approach that incorporates not just defensive strategies in the form of digital psychological security, but also editorial strategies that involve some of the points that Gisela made, which is to look at the red flag stories, and to come up with a plan in advance, and to protect the people who are often young women, frankly, on the social media tools, for example, not just those who are doing the frontline reporting.

The Daily Maverick has its own approach, which I think is worth looking at, which we have reported on before, which includes a burly man in charge of that news organization as the editor in chief. A guy who I'll call out, Branko Brkic, because he has been mentioned by multiple interviewees for this study, as somebody who brought a culture of leadership. He is not a digital expert, but he brought a culture of leadership that said this is real. This is

important, and I will go the lengths to actually move my journalists around the country to protect them while advocating for their safety. So I think I'll stop there. But those two organizations, which are not two that we heard about until very recently, globally, are the sort to look for.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Does anybody else want to speak to what newsrooms can do?

Gisela Pérez de Acha So I really like this approach because I really think that it shouldn't be up to us journalists. It's stressful enough to be working on your stories on deadline, dealing with multiple editors, the emotional toll that it takes on you to report on anything, but especially controversial or dangerous issues. But one of the things that we at Berkeley Journalism and the Human Rights Center always try to emphasize is just the importance, for example, of teaching, teaching this in schools. Like that's one of the questions that I have. Why aren't journalism schools teaching this as part of their curriculum? This is where future professional journalists are formed, and tools are going to change. I can tell you right now, VPN, and throw this, and throw that. But what really, really matters is learning how to think in terms of risk assessment. It's not the same if I'm covering a local school board meeting, than if I'm covering people who are accused of murder because of their extremist ideas. So this is one thing also that I believe newsrooms should incorporate more into their practices. Just talking more about these issues and even changing policy. It should be part of the ethical code. It should be part of the ethical code.

In terms of tools, because I know that there's also questions in the audience about what else could editors and newsroom leaderships do. Take this quick and dirty guide. Give your journalists, you know, a couple of hours a month if you want. Make it more of a newsroom practice. Let's hold hands and walk through multifactor authentication together, for example. It's not rocket science. It's super easy to do. It's super, super easy to do. Just go to Google and put "how do we enable multifactor authentication on Facebook," and have the entire newsroom do it at the same time. Or, have a really clear practice that your Facebook and Instagram should be locked down.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Yes, I couldn't agree more, and I think that newsrooms also need to be aware that there is this digital army of good and these resources exist. So I think it's important not to expect newsrooms to do something that they don't have the resources to do, but when we know that these resources are out there for newsrooms, then they really must use them. And so I encourage you watching this panel, let your newsrooms know that these services and resources exist and they happen virtually. So it doesn't matter where you are in the world, we can do this kind of training, and Ela has done numerous of these kinds of trainings as well.

One question that I think is really important too. It does have to do with this same newsroom question. It's if you are a journalist, you're attacked, what do you do? What do you say to your editor? And I think this goes to the question that IWMF is trying to address, which is that most security people and most leaders in newsrooms are men, and that does have an impact on the response. And so, Ferial, if you want to talk a little bit about what to do when you're a target? And then, Ela, if you would talk a little bit about this need to have diversity in the higher levels of the news media, but also in terms of those who are talking about and training about security and threat assessment? How can you create a threat assessment if you've never experienced that kind of threat yourself?

Ferial Haffajee Sure. So I suppose that my first experience is that it's so deeply shaming that your instinct is to keep quiet about it. And I found great liberation at some point in

speaking up, and then finding out the tools, and then beginning to share those. And I suppose it is about consciousness building among editors, all the editors, to enable them to help their journalists. In countries like mine, where newsrooms are inevitably tiny without all the security systems which may be there to support you, it's vital that they use this information sharing through the editors. And I found that extremely helpful. So I suppose speaking out first, and realizing that you're not alone, and refusing to be shamed by it, which is not always easy. I told you one of the things I wanted to speak about was watching a journalist who had been threatened with rape and mercilessly harassed trying to cover those Capetown fires last week, and just watching as she was a shadow of the reporter she had once been. And I suppose it is for those of us who are older and been in the industry for longer is to extend a hand of solidarity, because really, to be honest, I felt like my editors were entirely lost about how to handle it. Obviously they supported her. They refused to rise to the demand that she be fired, but they seemed lost about how to counsel her through that.

Ela Stapley Yeah, I think one of the big issues that newsrooms have is they are focused on physical security, normally these are men, ex military mostly, and they have an I.T. team. So this I.T. team is responsible for the infrastructure of the newsroom and making sure the website works, but they don't have anybody who will sit with a young female reporter and assist her with these thousands of rape threats that she's getting on her social media. So there is a big gap in newsrooms for that assistance. It is needed, but change also needs to come from the top. So journalists can make these changes themselves, but if they're not coming from editors or from hire management, and that also involves human resources, H.R. departments, and having best practice and policy around online violence and reporting mechanisms. There needs to be a culture of inclusivity in the newsrooms and making sure people, women and others, feel comfortable reporting and also talking about it. So building support networks, kind of building in the checking in with journalists on a regular basis to see how they are doing when it comes to dealing with this issue of online violence. Because in most newsrooms, from my experience working internationally, it basically is just seen as part of the job. I do think that is changing in certain countries. But on the general whole, I'm sadly not overly optimistic about it. And that is because, you know, there aren't so many women in higher management levels, and it is an issue that affects women more. And also, if we do have people who are trainers, most often they are men as well. And all the security support that is offered is as well. So, you know, having more diversity in the newsroom would definitely help with that because people would be more understanding of what is happening to journalists.

Elisa Lees Muñoz And really the recognition that this is an intersectional issue and that many times the reason that the journalist is being targeted is because of who they are, but they're also being targeted because of what they're reporting on. And somebody is asking, and I know this differs around the world, and so I wonder if from your varied perspectives, if you could talk a little bit about the beats that usually engender this kind of attack? And maybe where around the world, where one beat might have a different impact than another? Maybe we'll start with Gisela?

Gisela Pérez de Acha Thinks, you know, I've always seen online gendered violence as a sort of like social sanction for people who don't follow the gender roles. So in this case, let's think if you're a woman, there are certain topics that you're allowed to talk about. Babies, decoration, kitchen, fashion. Right. But what I see the most, especially in Mexico, is that when you come out of that gender role and start talking about public life, about politics, about games, like video games, then that's when the harassment and trolling starts as a sort of social sanction. That's my read on it.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Julie, do you want to speak to this a little bit?

Julie Posetti We've got some data as well to back up exactly what Gisela just said. So in the survey we did, which again was around 900 journalists, 80% of whom were women, we found that among the women respondents that gender was predominant as the round, the beat, that attracted the most online violence. And gender encompassed not just gender equality issues, but reporting on transphobia, reporting on issues like abortion rights, for example, reporting on femicide and domestic violence. All of these together represented the top threat when it came to reporting, if you like, as a trigger for online violence. The next biggest risk area that, of course, very important reporting theme was politics and elections. And we had 43% of respondents saying that that delivered the greatest number of online violence attacks. That was followed at around 30% by social policy and human rights issues. You're seeing a trend here. So you speak for the voiceless. You represent communities that are minorities or disadvantaged, and you get these sorts of outcomes. If you challenge political power, you get these sort of outcomes. Really important to note, too, that 16% identified investigative reporting, which is the next layer down from those earlier statistics, investigative reporting and covering disinformation as the most trigger-like story rounds. And that also was reflected in the interviewees, the 170-odd longform interviews we did. And along with disinformation, we are now defining that as encompassing reporting on far-right extremist networks, which often leveraged disinformation and reporting on conspiracy networks. And when you see that all bundled together in a pandemic, even between when we did this survey in September to November last year, we can see that really elevating in the minds of the women we've interviewed as a really significant threat. And if you think about Gisela's point that we were relegated in news organizations for so many decades, in fact, a couple of centuries as the news staff who reported on fashion, and interior design, and child rearing, and childbirth, and health maybe, or education, if we got really bold. And now here we are reporting on these issues, and those are the ones that they're attempting to shut down the most.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Ela, did you want to follow up on that?

Ela Stapley Yeah, I mean with the increasing amount of online violence, it is getting more difficult to predict as well. So, yes, if you cover certain topics like race, gender, politics, yes, you are likely to get online violence and harassment. However, I've had a case of a journalist who had written about some extreme sport and had accidentally revealed a secret place that nobody knew about, apart from a select group of people, and the harassment that she got online for revealing that by mistake. So, yes, she was obviously not expecting that. So what we do see from looking at the types of online abuses is that these people are quite often very passionate about a topic. And I use the word passionate, though, not in a positive way. They are often fans, for example. So a music editor in the United States gave a Taylor Swift album a three out of five. And she was doxxed, and there were threats to burn down her house. So, you know, who would have thought two years ago that a music journalist would be being doxxed for writing an album review? So what we are seeing is that there are more people, I would say, kind of harassing people online just because they don't like what they have written. And, yes, I do think politics, race, gender. Absolutely. But also I think these days you could be writing about anything and annoy someone.

Julie Posetti Especially if you are a woman.

Elisa Lees Muñoz And I think more recently, obviously, a whole group of journalists who had probably never experienced this kind of harassment were science reporters and people writing about the environment. But Ferial, I wanted to ask you, because we have been talking to a lot of journalists about this, did you see a shift in what was happening online to you or to your colleagues because of the pandemic? Was there more harassment? Did it take on a different tone, or what did you experience, if anything, as a result of the pandemic?

Ferial Haffajee Most decidedly, I think it was more the health and science journalist who really experienced, because of heightened anxiety, if they were putting out information that a certain group of epidemiologists or anti vaccines didn't write, the harassment was through the roof bad in the pandemic. So yes, of course. And because those beats are still very much women-owned, obviously, to have that gendered impact as well. But I just want to go to a question that someone asks, which is when does online violence jump to in real life violence? And for me, that's a real fear, is that you can almost feel the online violence gives permission when you're out in the field. Like it's open season. And I experienced this at a commission of inquiry into corruption with lots of us who suddenly it made your work in the field more dangerous and difficult. And I'm wondering if that's the experience of others as well, Elisa?

Elisa Lees Muñoz Yeah, could you all comment on this issue of this feeling when do you really have to worry? Or should you always worry? When do you move out of your house, that kind of thing? Because a lot of journalists just don't take it seriously. And so your thoughts on that?

Ela Stapley I can take that one. I think one of the things that we see that caused most concern is if your personal details are being circulated online, such as your address, your phone number, or your current location. This is very true for journalists who are live broadcasting. So if you are reporting live from somewhere, maybe your Facebook living it, or streaming it, and there are threats circulating to go down and attack you, then obviously there is a greater threat. What we also see is people who are using their real names, so they're not hiding behind an alias or a fake account. They're using their real names. They are quite openly attacking you and not concerned about the consequences. Repeat attackers is another one. So if you've got the same person who is repeatedly attacking you online, and you know that person's name, they live in your area, the risk then increases. And it can be very difficult for journalists to distinguish, kind of pick out, which of these threats are real ones that they need to take seriously. And in many cases, I hear this from journalists all the time, just the very fact that they're getting so much online violence and threats against them just makes their life so incredibly difficult because it doesn't matter if there is a physical attack. They live in permanent fear of physical attack, even though statistically maybe that physical attack is quite small. The actual thought of it, you know, just occupies so much of their time and causes them great concern. So in effect, the result that people want when they do harassment online is this permanent fear that these journalists are just constantly living.

Julie Posetti Can I add some data? Because we found exactly what Ela has just outlined through the survey, but also through the interviews. So we found that 20% of the women we surveyed said that they experienced offline attacks that they believed had been seeded online. So offline violence, physical attacks or abuse or harassment. And that included what Ferial described, which is being physically present as a journalist and as a class we're demonized to start with, in an environment attracts harassment and abuse of a physical kind. But women also, not just those who are unfortunately exposed through

digital security lapses, but also women who are recognizable. So TV presenters, voices that are recognized as well, make you more vulnerable to offline attacks. And as the question alluded to, we've seen a trend, and we've documented this in our research so far, but also in what's forthcoming, of the online environment, enabling this environment, if you like, for physical attacks and legal harassment. It's not just physical violence. It's also legal harassment that is empowered by the kind of false consensus of abuse that we see in cases around the world. And one final point to emphasize, the offline risks are significant, not just in the Global South, in countries that we in journalism safety and press freedom have traditionally identified as high-risk places for women to practice journalism like Mexico, like South Africa, but also for women in the north. So some of the American journalists we interviewed who were living in fear, as Ela outlined, not just living in fear, because this might skip offline, but because people were coming to their place of work, sitting outside their homes, waiting for them, and waiting to harass them, if not inflict physical harm. So as much as I agree with what Elisa said at the beginning, and we must underline this, psychological injury is real. What happens online is real. But the physical manifestations take it to another level, and this kind of increases the psychological threat as well. So it's really frightening. As much as progress is being made, it's something that we have to stay vigilant about.

Elisa Lees Muñoz And I just want to make sure to say that somebody asked about this, about the kinds of support that organizations are able to offer. So I just want to let everybody know that the IWMF has emergency support that is available for requesting digital security support, but also if you need to leave your home, if you've been doxxed, those kinds of things as well. So please reach out if you are being targeted, and you need support. We do have a fund, an emergency fund, to support that. Gisela, did you want to say something?

Gisela Pérez de Acha Yeah, I agree with what everyone said, and I guess my only caveat would be that, yes, it's something that we should all prepare for and be wary of. If your digital hygiene is really good, there will always be less chances of you getting any physical harm. And just think about it like flossing your teeth, you know, or like brushing your teeth every night. Like, it's just things that we have to incorporate into our everyday lives, especially as journalists, especially as women of color, especially as dissidents in authoritarian or non-democratic countries. But also the other side of it is I just also really hope that for people, women, nonbinary people, women of color who are seeing this, don't shut up. You know, like it is scary, but it doesn't mean that you have to stop doing your job with. There are things. We are agents. Just as we are agents of our bodies, we are agents for our digital data and for our security. And there's things we can do because it's really, really important that we keep doing our work and to keep pushing forward.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Absolutely. And speaking of digital hygiene, I know that there are some companies that we have used with that at IWMF. And I think that this is another thing that newsrooms can do is actually pay companies to get your personal information offline. Also, please reach out to the IWMF if you're in a situation where you feel like you need that service. And frankly, I think that those services should be offered to journalists free of charge, so making a plug for that. But there are companies that help you clean up your personal information online. Ela, I don't know if you want to mention a few that you trust? But we'll also certainly have some resources on the hub that we can look into.

Ela Stapley Yeah, I mean, mostly these companies that clean up online data are based in the U.S., and that is because the U.S. seems to have very bad data privacy laws, which means people's personal information is just all over the Internet. And they can do very little

about it. So if you are a U.S. journalist, based in the U.S., I would just recommend, please, signing up to one of these services that will delete your information from these public databases and data aggregate sites. So that's websites which collect public data, and people can buy that data or access it for free, and that includes your home address, your phone number, your names of partners, or whoever lives in that house with you. And it goes back years, and also includes email addresses. So you can manually get that information removed, but that will take you a very long time. And also, these databases keep repopulating with information. So you'd have to just keep constantly having to take them down. So if you are a U.S. journalist, I just really do recommend signing up for one of these data removal sites. They will remove your data from the majority of sites. It just gives you peace of mind. And mostly I think the cheapest service is about the price of a subscription service for a streaming service a month. So, you know, if you're paying like X amount for a streaming service a month, it's just an added cost. It's not that much more.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Yeah, to Gisela and Ferial, I'd like to start closing out this conversation by asking each of you why you do it? You know, we've heard about all of the horrible things that you experience, what keeps you going, and if you want to share a couple of practices that you might do for resiliency? But really, you know, why do you stay in the game when you're dealing with this constant spewing of hate at you?

Gisela Pérez de Acha Well, I can start. I, and excuse my language, but I love pissing off, you know, powerful men. There's very few pleasures in life. And just trolling comes with the job. But a part of me is like, well, OK, at least a bunch of men are really angry, you know? So I mean, jokes aside, I am absolutely in love with journalism. It is the passion of my life. It's the love of my life. And I'm not going to stop just because a bunch of men who haven't worked on their feelings are angry. And I say a bunch of men, because we know that it's mostly men who engage in this harassment. Yes, I know, there are also men who got harassed.

Julie Posetti Not all men, Gisela.

Gisela Pérez de Acha Hashtage "not all men." Yes, I know. But it's unproportionately women, and nonbinary, and queer people who are victims. So there's also certainly something that has to do with masculinity. And I want to leave a better place for the next generations to come. And my fight in the struggle starts here.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Thank you. Ferial, please, tell us why you keep at it?

Ferial Haffajee Elisa, I guess, for me is that journalism is so closely tied to freedom. Because of our history, there's almost nothing else I want to do. And I just followed all the advice at the beginning of this trend of don't feed the trolls, get off, get off Twitter, logout. I just found it like, "No why should I? I'm not the aggressor here." And then to become a soldier has been much preferable to me and more aligned to who I am. And really to thank the people like you who do this work. It's so very vital. I just want to answer clear one question about what laws and rights you can apply online that work in the offline? Well, clear. I'm from South Africa, and we are so behind the curve of even beginning to get our criminal justice systems to tackle online harassment. Many journalists have tried to lay charges. The police don't even have smartphones. So this is really for me, it's the next big fight we need to have. Thanks, Elisa.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Thank you. Just one quick last word from Julie and Ela because we need to wrap up, but please.

Julie Posetti Sure. I'll pick up on what Ferial said. Legislative response, legal and law enforcement responses, are really important. And I recognize that in different parts of the world, a woman could never expect or not in a reasonable time frame to be able to trust police with her stories of online violence. But that said, one of the reasons the UN is investing in this is because the UN General Assembly has mandated that what rights we have as journalists, and specifically women journalists, offline must be upheld online. And that will require legislative responses, and it will require reform at the legal and judicial level. More on that coming in the big study that we will publish in June. But some of the data from that work will be released on Friday when we publish this next report with ICFJ and UNESCO. So stay tuned for that.

Elisa Lees Muñoz We look forward to that. Ela, quickly. I'm afraid.

Ela Stapley Just know that you're not alone in terms of the legal issue. I mean, it's not just something that's happening in your area of the world. Globally there's very little legislation to support women journalists going through this. Changes is needed.

Elisa Lees Muñoz Yeah. Thank you all so very much for this really interesting conversation. I hope that journalists out there watching found it helpful. Stay in touch. There is support out there for you. You're not alone. I think we are all now part of this digital army of the good and happy to be part of it. So, so wonderful to see you all. Thanks so much and take care. Bye bye.

Mallary Tenore Great, thank you so much to each of you for all of your insights, and the research, and the resources that you shared. It's such an important conversation at this moment in time, so we really appreciate you being here with us today. And I hope the journalists who tuned into this panel came away with new ideas, and I also hope that their allies and newsroom leaders were able to take part and take note of all the resources that were shared here today.

As a reminder, we were recording this panel, and so it will be available on our YouTube page immediately after the fact. So you'll be able to access it there as an ongoing resource. And if today's panel discussion resonated with you and you want to learn more strategies for staying safe in the field, we hope you'll join us for a new massive open online course titled How to Report Safely: Strategies for Women Journalists and Their Allies. This course is organized by the Knight Center in partnership with the International Women's Media Foundation and UNESCO with financial support from the Swedish Postcode Foundation. And registration is free and open now at journalismcourses.org.

So we have a break now before our next session, which will focus on immersive journalism, with a look at how photogrammetry, VR, and AR are adding new dimensions to storytelling. So it should be a really interesting panel, and it will start at 4:00 p.m. Central Standard Time. Between now and then, we encourage you to tune into our Wonder room, where you can have private or group conversations with other ISOJ'ers and speakers, and we'll be dropping a link to the Wonder room in the chat. So you're welcome to go right there after this session ends. With that, we hope that you'll converse and network with other ISOJ'ers and then join us back here at 4:00 p.m. Central Standard Time for our next and last panel of the day. Thank you, everyone.