

Understanding safety violations of journalists beyond their manifestation: assessing the consequence of risk to journalism as a form of civil diminishment

Authors:

Dr. Sara Torsner

Research Associate to the UNESCO Chair on Media Freedom, Journalism Safety and the Issue of Impunity, hosted by the Centre for Freedom of the Media at the University of Sheffield; E-mail: s.k.torsner@sheffield.ac.uk

This is a work in progress, prepared to function in the context of the UNESCO WPFC Academic Conference 2020 on the Safety of Journalists.

Please do not circulate or quote from this abstract without the author's permission.

Abstract

Attacks on journalists' safety are commonly assessed as occurrences of different types of violations targeting the individual rights-bearing journalist. Recording the nature – or manifestation - of such violations is also the focus of many organisations concerned with monitoring attacks on journalists. Creating such a record of safety violations is undoubtedly crucial to understanding and addressing the problem.

However, this paper argues that we need to more fully appreciate the meaning and significance of safety violations against journalists in terms of their wider societal implications. It is therefore proposed here that safety violations should be examined not only in terms of their consequences for the individual journalist, but importantly in relation to their wider societal consequences. This requires not only understanding *that* and *what* safety violations occur, but the full complexity of *why* they occur (causes) as well as understanding what is at stake for society when journalists are attacked (consequences).

To achieve this, a conceptual framework is needed that can contextualise manifestations of safety violations in relation to the societal circumstances within which they occur. This requires a new way of understanding a) how we record information on safety violations, and, b) how we understand their societal significance.

This poster reaches this conclusion by revealing the empirical and conceptual gaps associated with conventional ways of recording instances of safety violations and establishes a conceptual framework for interpreting (Giddens, 2009) these attacks in terms of the way they bring about the civil diminishment of associative and communicative civil life and constrain democratic self-determination (Alexander, 2006 and Calhoun, 2011).

As such, the paper proposes to conceptualise the consequence risk to journalism as a form of civil diminishment for the purpose of understanding safety violations against journalists beyond their manifestation.