

## Perceptions of Male and Female Newspaper Journalists in Thailand

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### ABSTRACT

The basic theme of the essay is gender and power in the field of journalism in Thai newspapers. It is not controversial to assert that journalism, historically speaking, evolved as a male-dominated field. The struggle of women journalists to achieve equality in the newsroom begs the question of whether editors were practicing a virulent form of male supremacy. It also raises the question of what the Public perceives to constitute “good” journalism has become gender-biased over time. 200 views from female journalists, 200 from male journalists, and 100 from editors suggested that Thai female journalists have assimilated into the journalistic workforce and that they need no longer be regarded as a separate group. However, 400 public opinion surveys suggested prestige and power have been associated with conceptions of masculinity. These conceptions, in turn, are associated with the beliefs that underpin the field – i.e. the image of journalism as a male-dominated field.

### Keywords

Female Journalist, Women journalist, discrimination, Thai journalist, public perception

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### Introduction

Women journalists present a paradox. Their presence as professional writers and presenters of news is now commonplace, yet they continue to be marked as 'other', and 'different' from their male colleagues. In print news, official rhetoric proclaims that a journalist's gender is irrelevant. However, a number of studies have shown otherwise.

Weaver, who conducted two major studies on journalists in the USA, in 1986 and 1996, edited a book titled *The Global Journalist: News People Around the World* (1998). This book presents the results of studies conducted in 21 different countries. The major results of the comparisons across countries and nations in his book suggest that the typical journalist in the world is a college graduate and is 35 years old, and that women represent 30% of the journalistic corps. In terms of working conditions, Weaver argues that the 21 countries represented in his book differ widely in professional autonomy, political pressures, material resources and traditions of journalism (Weaver 1998, pp. 460-461).

In Robinson's study of Canadian women journalists, she found a high degree of professionalism among media practitioners and stated that "they are highly educated and deeply conscious of their social responsibility and they set high performance standards for the Canadian media as well as for themselves" (Robinson 1998, pp. 370).

Kirat (2004) did a study on women journalists in UAE and found that UAE suffers from an under-representation of women in the industry. The profession seems to be misunderstood, and negatively viewed and portrayed by parents, relatives and people in general. Women are not accepted to work in media industry and they still suffer from discriminatory news organization policies. Their main findings suggest that there is some discrimination between male and female mass communicators regarding training, job advancement, responsibilities and foreign assignments (Kirat 2004, pp.54-78).

In Thailand, Phancharoen (1995) who studied the Expectation and Job Satisfaction of Female Journalists in Daily Newspapers suggested that sex is often an issue when referring

to news persons, especially in relation to sport and crime reporting. Personal safety and responsibility to family are the main reasons for discrimination.

Pipitkul (1996) performed a study on Provincial Journalists, and expressed the view of one female journalist's experience working in the southern part of Thailand that 'sex' sometimes has to be taken into account when assigning jobs. When working in a war-zone-like situation, female journalists were so scared that they could not continue working. The same finding has been stated again in Pipitkul's study of Women and Media in Thailand during 1977-1992.

This study is interested in finding the situation of female journalists in Thailand after the last study more than ten years ago. Is "sex" still an issue in this profession? In addition, a number of studies on women journalists roles in Thailand commonly ask public opinion "How good they are?" or ask female journalists to rate their job satisfaction or state their roles. None asks how they see themselves comparing to their peers. This study, thus, put extra questions "How do female journalists view themselves compared to their male peers, how their bosses see them comparing to male counterparts, and if the public trust female journalists and why?"

### **Research Questions**

This study is set out to examine five main questions:

Q1: What are the socio-demographic and educational backgrounds of women journalists in Thailand?

Q2: What are the working conditions of the women journalists in Thailand regarding managers (head, sub-head, editor, sub-editor, senior editor, managing editor) and peers?

Q3: How do women journalists in Thailand perceive the journalism profession?

Q4: How do their managers and peers perceive women journalists?

Q5: How do audiences perceive women journalists?

### **Methodology**

This study was carried out by surveys of women journalists, their managers and their peers from 18 daily newspapers in Bangkok. Opinions of Bangkok general public readers on women journalists were also collected. The research intended to cover comprehensively women journalists working full-time for daily newspapers in Bangkok. However, there are no statistics of

the women journalist workforce in Bangkok, and thus this data were collected from 200 women journalists, 200 men journalists, 100 heads and editors and 400 samples of the general population in Bangkok. 5 sessions of Focus groups of selected news organization then took place on certain issues from survey results.

## Findings

### Backgrounds and Work

#### *Age*

Table 1 reveals that Thai journalists tend to be middle-aged, with most (31.81%) falling between the ages of 25 to 30. The second largest age group (27.79%) is 36 to 40 years old, and one-fourth (22.64%) are between 31 to 35 and are under-represented both in the under 25 and over 40 age groups.

Table 1 Age of Thai Journalists (in percentages).

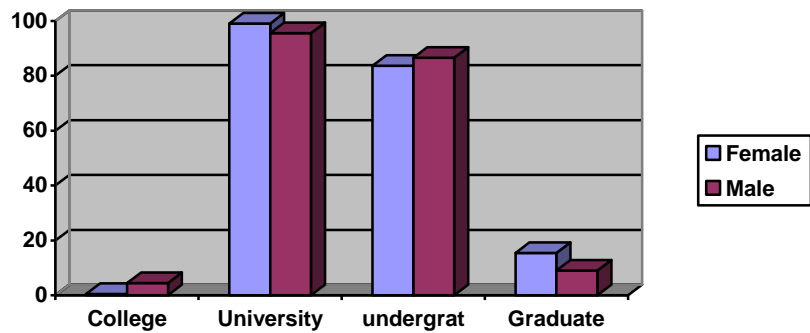
Age	Female (n194)	Male (n155)	Total (349)
<25	8.76	7.1	8.02
25-30	34.02	29	31.80
31-35	19.59	26.5	22.64
36-40	31.44	23.5	27.79
>40	6.18	14.2	9.74
total	100	100	100

#### *Education*

In general, the educational levels of the Thai female journalists are high. Figure 1 reveals that nearly 100% of our sample claim to have studied at the university level and 15.4 % also claim post-graduate degrees. Only 1 female journalist was reported to have only a further education diploma (below university standard).

For male journalists, the educational level is also high, with 95.5% reporting as university graduates, of whom 9% also hold post-graduate degrees.

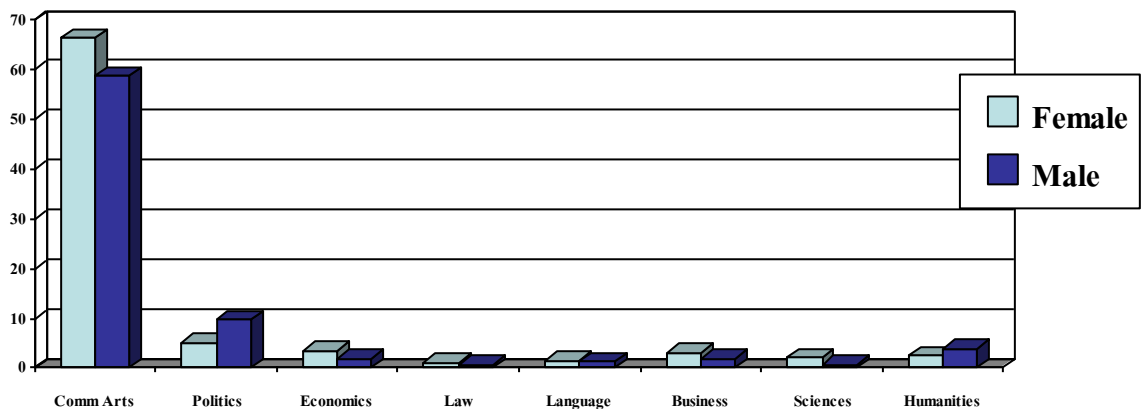
Figure 1 Education Level of Thai Journalists (in percentages).



The survey found that the majority of Thai female journalists (66.2%) graduated from the Journalism, Communications or related field, while 33.3% of the female sample hold a degree in other areas of study including Politics and Economics.

As for male journalists, the pattern was similar. That is around 58.7% of male journalists hold a degree in Communications-related areas, while 39.4% of them majored in other fields of study. In summary, a degree in Communications or related study areas is needed for a career in media.

Figure 2 Major Field of Education of Thai Journalists (in percentages).



### *Work Experiences in Journalism*

Most Thai journalists (61.42), according to Table 2, have work experience in media under 10 years. 31.8% of female journalists report their work experience as journalist under 5 years, while the largest group of male journalists (36.1%) have 5 to 10 years work experience. It is interesting to note that female journalists tend to resign their job after 20

years of work. Data from an interview found that nearly 35% of female journalists have been once asked to leave the job by their families.

<i>Experience</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Both Sexes</i>
>5 years	31.8	27.1	29.71
5-10	28.2	36.1	31.71
11-15	28.2	19.4	24.29
16-20	10.3	13.5	11.71
21-25	0.5	1.9	1.14
26-30	0.5	0.6	0.57
>30	0.5	1.3	0.86

61.42%

Table

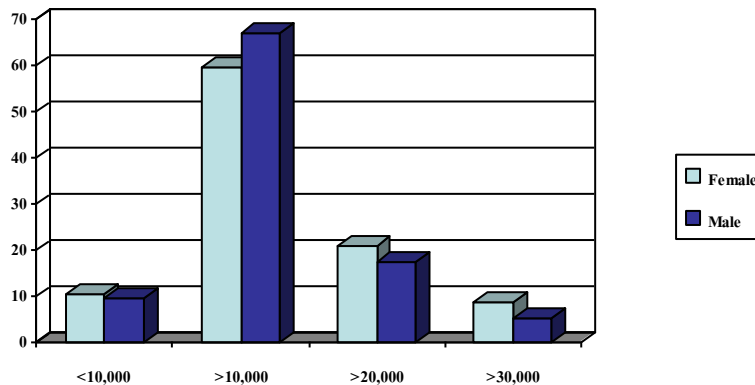
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Work Experiences of Female and Male Journalists (in percentages)

**Working Conditions**

The most important indicator of working conditions is salary. Our survey indicates that the median income of Thai journalists is between 10,000 to 20,000 baht per month (approx. 350 to 650 US\$). Only 10.3% earn less than 10,000 baht per month as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Salary per Month in Thai Baht of Thai Journalists (in percentages).



Nevertheless, when cross tabulating between the numbers of years worked and salary, the survey found that salary does not reflect the level of experience. Table 3 shows that 1 journalist who had less than 5 years experience earns 20,000-30,000 baht per month. On the contrary, 1 journalist who has worked for more than 30 years still earns less than 10,000 baht per month.

Table 3 Cross Tabulation between Number of Working Years and Salary

Years/Salary	<10,000	10,000-20,000	20,001-30,000	>30,000
<5	9	32	1	0
5-10	3	43	9	0
11-15	1	18	8	3
16-20	1	9	7	4
21-25	0	1	1	1
26-30	0	1	0	0
>30	1	0	1	0
n=154				

From focus groups, this pattern arises from many reasons, including graduation degree, special ability (special abilities on computing such as web writer), types of newspaper (English/Thai language), and previous experience. However, the salary does not reflect the journalist's economic status. The survey asked only salary that does not include other benefits such as petrol allowance and telephone bill allowance.

### ***Technology***

There has been widespread acceptance of technological change in the newsroom. The survey found that 100% of journalists believed that new technology had improved the quality of their work and saved time.

### ***Discrimination in the workplace***

All journalists (male and female) reported they had encountered some kind of overt or covert discrimination. The areas of discrimination are age and sex discrimination. Information

from interview found that some female journalists were regarded as too old or too young for positions of responsibility in news organizations. Data from an interview also found that verbal harassment are high among gay bosses. Table 4 shows that the most common type of harassment is: Rejection from source due to the sex of journalist (67.7%) and unfair blame from managers due to the sex of journalist (65.1%). Physical Harassment in workplace (1.2%) and Sexually-implicit Verbal Harassment in workplace (25.1) are the least likely to happen.

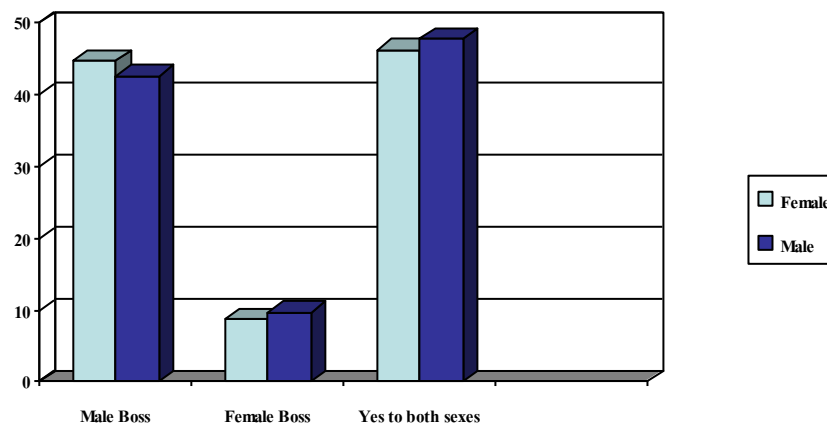
Table 4 Discrimination in the workplace (in percentages)

	Often	Sometimes	Never
Verbal Harassment in workplace	5.6	32.3	57.9
Sexually-implicit Verbal Harassment in workplace	3.6	21.5	70.8
Physical Harassment in workplace	0.5	8.7	86.7
Reject from source due to sex of journalist	13.3	54.4	27.7
Unfair blame from managers due to sex of journalist	9.2	55.9	31.3

### *Promotion*

One of many indicators that can point to covert discrimination is an opportunity to get promotion in workplace. The survey found that the majority of high rank positions in media organizations are male. 44.6% of female journalists reported that they have a male superior while 42.6 male journalists said likewise. On the contrary, only 8.7% female journalists and 9.7% of male journalists reported to have a female superior. However, when asked whether they have experienced having a superior from both sexes, around 47% replied yes.

Figure 4 Sex of Bosses (in percentages)





Opinion Survey on perception of female journalists from female, male journalists, managers and the public

*Female Journalists' Views of Themselves*

As the 2010 survey were conducted on two conditions – first, the set of data is selective, to survey female journalists who were not in high status in workplaces, and secondly, at the time of data collection (survey - April and May 2010 and 5-focus group – January-March 2011), there was a high level of mobility across news organizations due to political and business crisis. Thus, their opinions regarding the quality of their working conditions were probably tempered by their status and instability in news organizations.

A very large proportion of journalists (98%) in the 2010 survey expressed their satisfaction with journalism as career choice, with only a minority offering negative views, which ranged from complaints over pay rates to more general worries about the commercial trust of their news organizations. When asked about an impact of politics and commercials on job security, they voiced their concerns but stated their intention to remain with their current news organizations. There was also a strong determination to stay in the profession. The reasons run from the important role of journalists to give information to others, the role to publicize public problems, the influence on the public, being the first in knowing of the event, and knowing the whole truth.

The following are statements from female journalists: (scale, 5 - highly satisfied, 1 - highly dissatisfied) in relation to job satisfaction;

- I am proud to be journalist (4.47)
- I enjoy my assignments (4.40)
- My boss trusts my ability to work (4.21)
- My profession is respected by public (4.10)
- My family is happy with what I am doing (4.05)
- My news sources think my ability to work is as equal as my male counterparts (3.88)
- I think I have security at work (3.32)
- I think I receive fair pay in relation to the amount of work (3.25)
- I think my salary reflects my ability (3.23)
- I am ok to move to another job in news organization (3.01)

### *Male Journalists views of Female Colleagues*

When male journalists were asked to give their opinion on their female peers, the results were mixed. On the plus side, female journalists were stated as having good technique to get into news sources, create a rather good working atmosphere, into details, and have fewer problems than male journalists. On contrary, female journalists are viewed as always gossipy, using emotion more than reason, take unnecessary risks in some working conditions such as mobs, night shift, and rural areas.

### *Superior's Views of Female Journalists Comparing with Male Counterparts*

The survey of Managers of female journalists found that in general, the "sex" issue does not come into their mind. They think that a journalist's abilities to work vary from person to person, regardless of his/her sex.

- I never judge job applicants by sex (4.31)
- I think female journalists are as good as male journalists (3.94)
- I think female journalists pay attention to details more than male journalists (3.14)
- In general, there is no problem in being a female journalist (3.03)

However, open-ended questions revealed information to the contrary. Managers reported that they assigned males, or selected male applicants if the job involved mobs, adventurous place such as deep jungle, overnight job, or in other provinces. The study also found that managers view female journalists as "vulnerable (easy to change to better pay job), emotional (when involved in relationship/family situation), and sometime not cost effective (have to stay in a single room when assigned to provincial area)

### *Public Views*

When asked the public to scale journalists alone, the survey found that public view journalists as individuals, varying from person to person. The term "female" journalists was not taken into account. However, when asked, "how do they compare female journalists with male

ones?”, the result are different. Public opinion seems to negatively portray female journalists. The female journalists are seen as ‘emotional, sensational, self-concerned, undetermined, egotistical’. Therefore, they are not suitable for reporting ‘hard’ news. When asked to rate on the credibility of articles/ news written by female journalists, the result is “not credible”, and vice versa if the same articles are written by men.

### *Conclusion*

This study has attempted to draw a profile of female journalists in Thailand in terms of educational background, age, professionalism, working conditions, job satisfaction. It also tries to compare data of female journalists with those of male journalists. By doing so, the question of sexual inequality could be addressed. The study has also attempted to testify the notion that “sex” is still an issue challenging the media profession.

The findings suggest Thai female journalists are happy with their news organization. Female journalists in this study indicated a high level of job satisfaction, although they showed some dissatisfaction concerning pay rates to more general worries about the commercial trust of their news organizations. Job satisfaction includes attitudes to their jobs, job stability, use of talents, peers and their ability to serve the public.

Most of the female journalists have faced some kinds of discrimination such as verbal harassment, prejudice from news sources. However, they reported that sexually-implicit harassment is not common.

The findings also reveal that Thai female journalists had become assimilated into the journalistic workforce, in terms of salary, education, working conditions, and that they need no longer be regarded as a separate group. Nevertheless, a proportion of female and male journalists in executive position is one to five. Focus group findings indicates that each journalist define “inequality” differently. Some male journalists stated to be treated unequal (working harder).

However, 400 public opinion surveys suggested prestige and power have been associated with conceptions of masculinity. These conceptions, in turn, are associated with the beliefs that underpin the field – i.e. the image of journalism as a male-dominated field.

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